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# Feeling Yellow, Performing White: Exploring the Racialized Gendered Experiences of Chinese Faculty Members in Canadian Higher Education from an Affective Intersectional Lens

Chenzi F. Zhao

Supervisor: Goli Rezai-Rashti, *The University of Western Ontario*

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## Abstract

What is it like to live and work as a faculty member in Canadian higher education institutions while Chinese? This qualitative case study answers this question through in-depth interviews with 26 academics of Chinese descent who have worked in universities and colleges across Canada, analyzing their experiences and insights from a critical intersectional, affective lens.

The study found that Chinese academics confront structural constraints as they navigate neoliberal, colonial, patriarchal Canadian institutions. Their embodied, linguistic, and socio-racio-cultural differences are used to discredit their professional legitimacy and exclude them from career advancement and leadership opportunities. Their professional lives are deeply influenced by historically constructed Asian stereotypes, including the “model minority”, the “perpetual foreigner”, and the “yellow peril,” which situate them in a liminal space where they must undertake extra affective and intellectual labour to perform whiteness. This in-between position causes alienation, ostracization, and inter- and intra-group aggression, while rendering their contributions and struggles invisible. Chinese women face exacerbated discrimination, bullying, disrespect, exploitation, and structural devaluation of their care labour and service work in academia. Consequently, Chinese faculty members experience intensified stress and precarity, unbelonging, and emotional burdens. Yet despite marginalization and constraints, they maintain strong emotional attachment and commitment to their academic careers through various affective reorientation strategies including emotional self-regulation, denial and reframing, and individual resilience and entrepreneurialism.

These findings reveal how racism and gender regimes are intertwined in Chinese academics’ experiences in Western institutions. The study further explores the ways in which neoliberalism and whiteness together shape the affective structures of Chinese faculty members. These affective structures, necessary for their survival in hostile institutional spaces, simultaneously reinforce white dominance and the status quo.

The goal of this inquiry is to interrogate the social and structural through the lived, embodied, and emotional. It aims to provide counternarratives to neoliberal institutional claims of equality and neutrality, and the belief that Chinese individuals are academically successful and free from discrimination. The study also aspires to advance understanding of racialization through Asianization, inspire solidarity in collective anti-racist, decolonial endeavours, and inform policies and practices that transform academia and society towards equity.

**Key words:** Chinese faculty members, Canadian Higher Education, Critical Institutional Study, Affect, Intersectional, Race, Gender, Canada, Asian, AsianCrit

## Summary for Lay Audience

What is it like to be a Chinese professor in Canada? Despite the general perception that Chinese individuals are overrepresented in higher education, and Canada's reputation for diversity and inclusion, academics of Chinese background face significant challenges that are often invisible. This study interviewed 26 Chinese faculty members working at universities and colleges across Canada to understand how their experiences and emotions are influenced by factors such as race, gender, language, and culture.

The study found that Chinese faculty members encounter discrimination that questions their abilities and legitimacy. They are frequently seen through harmful stereotypes, either as the “model minority” naturally good at academics, the “perpetual foreigner” too alien to truly belong in Canada, or “yellow peril” that threatens whiteness. These stereotypes create impossible situations: they are expected to overperform and meet Western institutional standards, but are simultaneously treated as outsiders who do not deserve leadership roles or career advancement. For Chinese women who face both racial and gender disadvantages, the situation is even worse. They experience bullying and disrespect from colleagues and students, with their work and contributions exploited and undervalued by their institutions.

Chinese faculty members described constantly having to work extra hard to prove themselves and fit in through self-monitoring, self-censoring, and suppressing parts of their cultural identity. Such intellectual and emotional labour is exhausting and isolating. Many participants reported high stress, lacking the sense of belonging, even feeling suffocated and stuck. Yet they tend to persevere in their academic careers, developing coping strategies to survive in unwelcoming environments. However, these strategies add to their emotional burdens and reproduce the inequities they face.

By examining the specific forms of exclusion Chinese academics confront and their unique position in complex racial and cultural dynamics, this research advances understanding of how racism operates through myths that hide white dominance and prevent solidarity among marginalized groups. It reveals the gap between Canadian universities' claims about diversity and fairness and the lived reality of their faculty, and demonstrates that institutions and society as a whole need to move beyond surface-level diversity initiatives to truly decolonize and create equitable environments.

## Dedication

To Zhao Ping, who has been there for me from the very beginning of me, for her unwavering faith and support. For being the educator and learner she is, and carrying the weight of generational trauma so I get to be free and fresh.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Institutions of higher education in Canada are diverse in terms of students, faculty, and staff composition, reflecting the growing diversity of Canadian society. Although the limited existing literature provides insights about racialized faculty members in higher education institutions (HEIs) (see Cranston & Bennett, 2024; Henry et al., 2012, 2017a, 2017b; Henry & Tator, 2009, 2012; Ibrahim et al., 2022), little is known about how Chinese faculty members navigate Canadian academia. Few existing empirical studies account for the distinctive racialization of Chinese academics through an intersectional lens, and even fewer address the affective aspects of such experiences. This research examined what it is like to be a Chinese faculty member in Canadian HEIs. As Canada continues to attract immigrants, students, and scholars from around the globe, understanding the lived realities and affective experiences of Chinese academics is necessary for combating racism and fostering an inclusive and equitable environment in the education system and broader society.

This qualitative case study sought to fill the existing gaps by examining ways intersecting social positionalities and power structures shape the professional, personal, as well as the daily, and emotional worlds of Chinese faculty members in Canadian HEIs. Rooted in the feminist critical tradition, it employed a theoretical framework informed by intersectionality (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw, 1991) and affect theory (Ahmed, 2010, 2014; Cvetkovich, 2012; Berlant 2011). It offers important insights about how racialization marks individual bodies and lives, and how the status quo reproduces itself through affective governance. These insights can guide future research, activism, policy, and equity practices within and beyond academia, and contribute to the emerging body of literature that examines Western higher education as a social institution through critical qualitative analysis.

### Research Objectives and Questions

This research examined the lived and affective experiences (Ahmed 2014; Clough,

2008) of Chinese faculty members in Canadian higher education, providing counternarratives to prevailing neoliberal institutional discussions on equity and diversity. The study also problematized common stereotypical beliefs that Chinese individuals are academically successful, an assumption that invisibilizes their struggles as racialized faculty in academia (Cui, 2019; Walton & Truong, 2023; Yip et al., 2021) and thus limiting critical attention to Chinese faculty's experiences. Chinese faculty's counternarratives about how individual and social bodies encounter each other are both personal and structural, in that personal experiences are mobilized as a vantage point to examine the multiple power dynamics at play in social-institutional contexts. Imbued with emotional and embodied intensities, these stories attest to how social institutional powers are exercised on the material, corporal, mental, and relational dimensions of individual lives. This study sought to provide nuanced understandings of Chineseness in Canadian academia, and contribute to the broader project of anti-racism and decolonization of higher education.

The question "How do Chinese faculty members experience and navigate racialization in Canadian higher education institutions?" guided this research. To answer this question, the research explored the following sub-questions: (1) How do intersecting structures of race and gender impact the lived and affective experiences of Chinese faculty members working in Canadian higher education institutions? (2) What challenges do Chinese faculty members confront in their professional roles, and how do they respond to, and feel about, these challenges? (3) What affective structures emerge among Chinese faculty members, and how do these structures maintain their attachment to, or detach them from, Canadian academia?

### **Context**

Canada has boasted its cultural and demographic diversity, priding itself as the world's first country to establish multiculturalism as an official policy in 1971 (Fleras, 2019; Government of Canada, 2019; Trudeau, 2021). Additionally, there are bills of rights and laws

that seek to promote and/or preserve multiculturalism. For example, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) enhances multiculturalism through protection from discrimination based on one's identity and specifically mentions disability, race, gender, nationality, ethnic origin, sex, religion, and age among others. Canada's Employment Equity Act (1986), which many Universities in Canada draw on its principles, emphasize employment equity, promotes equitable employment opportunities for women, Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, and visible minorities<sup>1</sup>. Some of the measures the Employment Equity Act recommends are that federally funded institutions put measures in place to promote workplace equity in all forms, including hiring and remuneration. In the context of universities, the Canada Research Chairs program asked universities to create and implement plans to increase faculty from racialized and marginalized groups in the research chairship ecosystem at their institutions (Tamtik & Guenter, 2019). Consequently, a number of universities in Canada committed, through policies and reports, to promote equity, diversity and inclusion in their policies and practices (see Henry et al., 2017a; Kipang and Zuberi, 2018; Tamtik and Guenter, 2019). The murder of George Floyd in 2020 and discovery of unmarked graves and burial sites of Indigenous children associated with the Indian residential school system in Canada compelled more institutions to commit to equity, diversity, inclusion and decolonization (EDID) with close to 89% of universities including EDID in their strategic plans and 91% creating EDID taskforces (Universities Canada, 2023).

Decades after the laws and policies have been put in place, and universities committed to bring about changes in their policies and strategic plans, there appears to be marginal

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<sup>1</sup> The term "visible minorities" was initially introduced by the Canadian government through the federal Employment Equity Act in the 1980s to denote those who are socially constructed as non-white. Critical scholars have problematized this term, citing issues of ambiguity, homogenization, and essentialization (see James, 2011, 2022). The Canada Research Chairs updated their policy documents in 2022 to adopt the term "racialized individuals" instead. Yet "visible minorities" has persisted as the official term in government documents, organizational policies, and some academic discourses. In this research, "visible minorities" is used only when citing sources that adopt this term, which consist mainly of official texts, reports, censuses data, and earlier research papers, notably by Statistics Canada, Universities Canada, and the Canadian Association of University Teachers. Likewise, this study uses "women," and "female" is only used in direct quotes.

progress in achieving EDI goals. In an open letter to university presidents, Canada Research Chairs (2016) Program's Steering Committee expressed concerns about "the very slow progress being made" to include marginalized groups in Research Chair nominees and urgently called for improvement. Canadian government (2019) acknowledged systemic racism and injustice within the country, and launched an anti-racism strategy aiming to combat racial discrimination and facilitate equal social, political, cultural, and economic participation. The strategy plans to enact change, focusing on public education and awareness and addressing hate and hate crimes. At the provincial level and more recently, Ontario was the first to implement the Anti-Racism Act in 2017, aiming to eliminate systemic racism and advance racial equity through provincial anti-racism strategy, directorate, and assessment (Government of Ontario, 2017). Government of Nova Scotia (2022) passed the Dismantling Racism and Hate Act, committing to developing anti-racism strategies by local governments and other public bodies, especially colleges and universities. In the same year, Government of British Columbia (n.d.) released their Anti-Racism Data Act, set to establish a provincial anti-racism data committee to increase transparency and accountability.

An increasing number of HEIs in Canada recognize the existence of systemic racism and racial inequities in their contexts. However, implementing measures to address racism and the impacts of continued colonialism remains slow and inconsistent (Buckner et al, 2022; Henry et al., 2017a; Henry & Tator, 2009; Ibrahim et al., 2022; Johnson & Howsam, 2020; Kipang & Zuberi, 2018; Tamtik & Guenter, 2019). Racialized and Indigenous faculty continue to be underrepresented and underpaid in Canadian higher education. They often do a lot of emotional labour in addition to their regular workload, yet their work is undervalued. As a result, many are stressed and dissatisfied with their working conditions (Battiste et al, 2021; Canadian Association of University Teachers, 2018; Cranston & Bennett, 2024; Henry et al., 2017b; Ibrahim et al., 2022; Pidgeon, 2016). Because of the limited structural and

systemic changes, even when there seem to be policies, at least on paper, to address racism, some scholars have argued that the existing EDI policies are largely tokenistic and serve to save face for the universities but not necessarily address deeply ingrained systemic racism in higher education (Ahmed 2012, 2007a, 2006a; Lei & Guo, 2022; Rezai-Rashti et al., 2021).

Evidence has shown a persistent underrepresentation of racialized faculty in Canadian HEIs (Henry et al., 2012, 2017b; Johnson & Howsam, 2020; Statistics Canada, 2020). According to the Canadian Association of University Teachers (2018), racialized and Indigenous peoples comprised 21.1% of university teachers and 14.4% of college instructors. Most of these faculty members were of Asian descent. While the percentages are not clear, the representation of faculty from Indigenous, Black, and Latinx communities was much lower. The report also indicated that racialized individuals accounted for 36% of post-secondary students and 31% of doctorate holders. The discrepancy becomes even more pronounced by 2019, as “visible minorities” constituted 39% of PhD students, 50% of postdoctoral fellows, but only 19.4% of professors, instructors, or researchers in universities and 13.6% in colleges (Statistics Canada, 2020). This represents a significant decrease and a gap compared to the educational achievements of racialized individuals. Detailed sampling and analyses further identify Chinese (4.2%), South Asian (3.3%), Arab (2.8%), and Black (1.6%) as the main ethnic groups among racialized faculty members in Canada, who concentrate in fields such as medicine, business, engineering, and STEM, while remaining marginalized in the arts and humanities (Henry et al., 2017a).

The number of racialized faculty not only fails to align with the rapidly changing demographics in Canada but also falls short of meeting the demands of an increasingly diverse and internationalized student body. In 2021, racialized peoples constituted 26.5% of the entire Canadian population (Hou et al., 2023). Racialized workers, especially South Asian, Chinese, and Black Canadians have higher labour participation (Statistics Canada,

2025, 2023a), although this does not necessarily suggest high income. From 2015 to 2021, “visible minorities” consistently made up over 60% of undergraduate and about 30% of doctoral students (Statistics Canada, 2023b, 2023c). The actual student body in Canadian HE is even more ethnically diverse, taking into account the continuous influx of international students who are racialized minorities. By the end of 2022, more than half of the 807,750 international students in Canada are from two Asian countries, India (40%) and China (12%) (Canada Bureau for International Education, 2023). This poses important questions regarding the persistent system of whiteness in the Canadian academic structure and an urgent call for greater diversity among faculty members to cater to the needs of diverse students and ensure education quality (Cross & Carman, 2022; Llamas et al., 2021; Stout et al., 2018).

Disparities in representation are also evident when it comes to women and gender diverse faculty members (Canadian Association of University Teachers, 2018; Henry et al., 2017a; Statistics Canada, 2020). Women faculty tend to be in lower ranking precarious academic positions and remain underrepresented in STEM fields (Statistics Canada, 2023c, 2023e). Women faculty also earn significantly lower salaries compared to men in the same academic ranks (Canadian Association of University Teachers, 2018). Racialized women university faculty face the highest unemployment rates, which are twice as high as those for non-racialized women (Canadian Association of University Teachers, 2018). Notably, there is a paucity of statistics and academic discourse concerning 2SLGBTQIA+ academics in Canadian HE. The lack of data on gender diverse faculty shows how some other identities are rendered invisible and this has implications on the experiences of those faculty.

Higher education landscape has changed tremendously under the influence of neoliberalism which prioritizes limited government intervention, free market economy, and privatization (Brown, 2015; Harvey, 2005). Neoliberal policies have led to reduced public funding of education and an emphasis on balanced budgets, a focus on knowledge as a

commodity to be bought and sold instead of a public good, and increased competition among institutions (Connell, 2019; Henry et al., 2017a; Lawrence & Rezai-Rashti, 2021; Giroux, 2014; Poole et al, 2021; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). Although commonly considered as centres of intellectual pursuit and public good, academic institutions have instead focused on efficiency, accountability, and revenue generation, vying for funding and resources, and attempting to attract students as “customers” in a competitive global educational marketplace (Connell, 2019; Giroux, 2014; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Olssen & Peters, 2005). In Canadian HE, widespread neoliberal principles have limited the support for anti-oppressive efforts and research, creating contradicting institutional practices that are differently oriented toward profit and equity (Henry et al., 2017a; Lawrence & Rezai-Rashti, 2021).

Driven by the capitalist logic of measurement, competition, and profit, the globalized neoliberal HE system have perpetuated colonialism and social segregation, instated a Eurocentric knowledge hegemony, legitimized the myth of meritocracy, and curbed academic freedom (Bergland, 2018; Dei, 2019; Giroux, 2014; Lawless & Chen, 2017; Littler, 2013; Osei-Kofi, 2012). The corporatization and privatization of HE has profound implications for faculty members by altering their roles and working conditions. The result has been increasing competitiveness and push toward individual entrepreneurship (Connell, 2019; Giroux, 2014). Faculty members are more and more expected to be productive in publishing, securing fundings, commercializing their research, and contribute to their institution’s financial gain. This means they have to divert their attention away from research, teaching, and relationship building with students toward activities that are more aligned with market demands (Giroux, 2014; Olssen & Peters, 2005; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997).

Neoliberal policies often cause the casualization of the academic workforce, with the proliferation of part-time lower-paid faculty positions, resulting in job insecurity, substandard working conditions, limited access to resources and benefits, and challenges in maintaining

academic commitments (Childress, 2020; Loher & Strasser, 2019). “As universities turn towards more corporate management models, they increasingly use and exploit cheap faculty labour. ... Students fare no better in sharing the status of a subaltern class beholden to neoliberal policies and values” (Giroux, 2014, p. 20). Institutional reliance on contract faculty has negative implications on the lives and experiences of students. It also impacts faculty members because of the precarious nature of their work. Many racialized and marginalized faculty find themselves trapped and playing into the prevailing neoliberal ideals in order to “survive” in these institutions (Henry et al., 2017a; James, 2012; Osei-Kofi, 2012). Those who may have been doing equity focused work become demoralized because of budget cuts as well as the reality that this work “doesn’t really matter” that much when it comes to merit and promotion. Worse still, this increasing drive to a marketized model of education in universities compromises the overall sustainability of the programs, which if cut would mean the faculty are out of their contract jobs (see Childress, 2020). All these foreshadow the gloomy future of doctoral students and early career scholars, whose education and hard work are unlikely to lead to an academic career, but more probably exploitative contingent employments that do not warrant professional advancement or a sense of self-actualization (Hamer & Lang, 2015; Littler, 2013; Wright-Mair & Museus, 2023).

### **Rationale**

Racism, sexism, classism, colonialism, neoliberalism, and social inequity continue to exist in Canadian HE. This severely challenge the existence and welfare of racialized, Indigenous, gender diverse, lower social-economic background faculty members (Cranston & Bennett, 2024; Henry et al., 2017a; Littler, 2013). Numerous studies have discussed issues of racial equity and inclusion in education, but my exploration into this topic unveiled a gap in academic attention afforded to racialized faculty members. Existing literature about racial equity in Western academia typically employed terms such as “racialized” or “person of

colour” in a broad sense, and oftentimes misses an intersectional approach (see for example, studies in the Canadian context, Henry et al., 2009, 2012, 2017; Henry & Tator, 2009; Johnson & Howsam, 2020). While there are scholarly works focusing on Black and Indigenous faculty (for instance, Battiste et al., 2021; Ibrahim et al., 2022; Pidgeon, 2016), scant research has examined the experiences of Chinese or Asian academics in Canada. This study adds to existing literature by examining the specific experiences of faculty of Chinese descent in Canadian academy. Racism against Chinese people in Canada and North America persists. The historical oppression of Asians is well documented in government legislated actions including the exclusionary immigration laws targeting Chinese people in Canada and the anti-Chinese and violent actions against Chinese people in North America in the 1880s. In the early 2000s, the SARS outbreak revealed deep-seated anti-Chinese racism and in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic brought to the fore anti-Asian racism and xenophobia (Lee, 2007; Lei & Guo, 2022; Li & Nicholson, 2021; Stanley, 2011). In academia, the Canadian government introduced generalized policies restricting funding particularly in STEM fields in 2024 called the Sensitive Technology Research and Affiliations of Concern (STRAC) Policy. Under the policy, what is considered “sensitive technology research” is scrutinized and funding is restricted especially if it involves collaborations with Chinese institutions, a practice many academics say targets academics of Chinese heritage (Zha & Li, 2024).

Considering these historical and contemporary occurrences, it is valuable to examine the lived, embodied, and emotional experiences of Chinese faculty members in Canadian post-secondary institutions. The perspectives of Chinese faculty members, situated in higher education as a place for knowledge production and social transformation, serve as a vantage point for elucidating socio-institutional structures and mechanisms (Collins, 1986; Smith, 1999). And vice versa, understanding these dynamics is crucial for comprehending the effects of neoliberalism, neo-racism, and neocolonialism on HE. To shed light on the structures and

mechanisms in Canadian academia today, this study explored the experiences of Chinese faculty in Canadian HEIs from a feminist lens. This calls for an approach grounded in intersectionality, critical race theory, and affect, as racism and various forms of exclusion are discursively experienced by individuals on physical, emotional, and cognitive levels (Ahmed, 2012; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Delgado, 1995; Gregg & Seigworth, 2010). Drawing on these frameworks allows for understanding ways Chinese faculty experience Canadian academic institutions and various forces shape their institutional lives and senses of self. It is hoped that the findings will contribute toward meaningful teaching, research, and policy practices. It will also inform hiring, mentoring, promotion and retention policies of higher education institutions, as well as benefit student and staff experiences, more so from those racialized and marginalized (Cross & Carman, 2022; Llamas et al., 2021; Stout et al., 2018).

### **Researcher Positionality**

I am a Chinese international doctoral student at a Canadian university, a feminist researcher passionate about critical institutional studies. A member of the queer community, I use both she and they pronouns, as I find it empowering to embrace my identity as a woman, and important to acknowledge that gender is a social construct. I was born and raised in mainland China. My mother's side of the family is Manchurian, and my father is Han Chinese. However, I did not identify much as Asian, nor did I feel my nationality relevant when I was in China. Enjoying the globalization of Beijing and the mobility to travel the world, I thought geopolitical borders shall not define who I am. It was until I came to study in Canada, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, that I started to learn about Asian hate, yellow fever, and how it is like to live a racialized, precarious, international student life.

I realized assumptions many people hold about Chinese international students, that they come from affluent backgrounds and use their economic capital to access international education to secure or increase their privilege. This does not match who I am. As a first-

generation graduate student and child of a low socioeconomic-status family, I was driven to pursue graduate studies abroad by a feminist snap (Ahmed, 2012, 2017). It was a way to protest and rebel against patriarchy and authoritarianism, and to gain tools to dismantle dominance, and reimagine equitable ways of existing and world building. I was drawn to Canada because of its image of diversity and progressiveness. The various challenges I had to navigate here, materially and mentally, have allowed me to reflect further on race, gender, class, in/exclusion, (un)belonging, feeling marginalized, and marginalized feelings.

My motivation to undertake this research is political, intellectual, and personal. A willful feminist killjoy (Ahmed, 2017), I am inclined to scrutinize the happy neoliberal, meritocratic, patriarchal narratives. I aspire to challenge simplistic perceptions of Asian international students by bringing forth the nuances embedded within my own experiences and identities, and along the same line, hope to create complex counternarratives by delving into the personal, emotional, and embodied experiences of Chinese faculty members within the current socio-political-educational landscape. As much as the scarcity of Chinese faculty's voices in existing academic literature propels me to bridging this gap, this research also holds personal significance due to its direct relevance and relatability to myself. In doing this research, it allowed me to gain deeper insights into the professional possibilities of working in academia in Canadian and North American contexts. This project was therefore driven by both my personal and professional/academic interests.

## **Conceptual Framework**

### ***CRT, AsianCrit, and Intersectionality***

This study utilized Critical Race Theory (CRT), AsianCrit, and intersectionality as key analytical lenses to look at race, racialization, and institutional and structural racism. Critical race theorists emphasize that race is a social construct that is relational and discursive. As a social construct, race is deeply embedded in societal systems and is used to hierarchize and

confine people into groups, which are then used to determine how resources, opportunities, and privileges are assigned or distributed in society (Bell, 1995; Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2023; Freeman, 1978; Hall, 2021). Race is discursively constructed by classification, stereotyping, and arbitrarily attaching biological, intellectual, cultural characteristics to these groups (Hall, 2021; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Omi and Winant (2015) described the socio-historical process of racial formation as racialization, and argued that social, economic, historical, and political forces shape how racial categories and hierarchies are formed and transformed. The social meanings of race and racialized identities are fluid, and can be created, re-created changed, lived, and at times destroyed, in response to the shifts in societal power relations (Delgado & Stefancic, 2023; Omi & Winant, 2015).

Critical Race Theory exposes how notions of neutrality and meritocracy uphold white privilege and racial discrimination, criticizing the universalization of whiteness and opposing racism, colonialism, and the colourblind liberal approach to social justice (Crenshaw, 2019; Delgado, 1995). By using the dichotomy of self and other to associate superiority and inferiority with various groups, the exercise of power is what gives racial categories their existence and meanings, influencing institutions and societal norms (Delgado, 1995; Hall, 2021; Omi & Winant, 2015). Race, though not *real* in any essentialized sense, remains socially and politically relevant today (Omi & Winant, 2015; Winant, 1994). Race holds social significance in our contemporary global society, where the interlaced powers of “capitalism, imperialism, colonialism, and patriarchy inform how, when, and where race takes meaning and mediate its interlocking relationship with gender, sexuality, class, colour, citizenship/immigrant status, and nationality” (Taylor et al., 2007, p. 155).

Racialization has real consequences on material, social, personal, corporal, and mental levels. Racial categories and racialization are normalized and institutionalized, and practiced in interactions among individuals and organizations (Delgado, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic,

2023; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Winant (1994) points out that “race both shapes the individual psyche and ‘colours’ relationships among individuals on the one hand, and furnishes an irreducible component of collective identities and social structures on the other” (p. 59). The institutionalization and naturalization of racialization produce systemic racism that is structural and everyday (Delgado, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2023).

In the United States and Canada, Whites are the dominant group and peoples of Color are the minoritized group; therefore, racism here is White racial and cultural prejudice and discrimination, supported by institutional power and authority, used to the advantage of Whites and the disadvantage of peoples of Color. Racism encompasses economic, political, social, and institutional actions and beliefs that systematize and perpetuate an unequal distribution of privileges, resources, and power between Whites and peoples of Color. (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017, pp. 123-124)

The persistence of white superiority in North America attest to that whiteness is deeply rooted in social institutions and is normalized through institutional policies, cultures, and practices that subject racialized people as lesser and deviant. Therefore, CRT emphasizes the importance of learning about the social structure through the experiences of the marginalized.

Asian Critical Theory (AsianCrit), derived from CRT and its extensions such as LatCrit, centres the experiential knowledge of Asian communities in North America for more nuanced analyses of their distinct histories and experiences of racialization (Chang, 1993; Iftikar & Museus, 2018; Museus & Iftikar, 2014). It draws on CRT and Asian history and lived realities to highlight systemic racism against Asian peoples. Museus and Iftikar were instrumental in advancing the use of AsianCrit in education to examine the racial oppression of Asian Americans and their resistance. They proposed seven tenets for AsianCrit: (a) *Asianization* challenges how White supremacy constructs Asian American identities by racializing them as perpetual foreigners, model minorities, and yellow peril to uphold dominant power structures; (b) *Transnational contexts* emphasize the global impacts of imperialism, colonialism and neoliberalism on shaping Asian identities and experiences; (c) *Reconstructive history* addresses the erasure of Asian Americans in historical narratives and calls for centring on their voices; (d) *Strategic (anti)essentialism* challenges monolithic representations while

affirming agency in redefining racial identities and building political coalitions; (e) *Intersectionality* examines how overlapping systems of oppression shape lived realities; (f) *Story, theory, and praxis* values experiential knowledge to inform theory and action; and (g) *Commitment to social justice* affirms AsianCrit's goal to dismantle all forms of structural oppression and advance equity via anti-oppressive work (Iftikar & Museus, 2018).

Socially constructed identities such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexualization, class, age, and ability are simultaneously and constantly at work in shaping the experiences of social subjects and inseparably entrenched in the social fabric of modernity (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Misawa, 2010; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Black feminists have critiqued the absence of Black women's voices in mainstream consciousness and white feminism, called for critical awareness of their complex marginalization. Feminist legal scholar and leading figure in CRT Kimberlé Crenshaw, who poignantly conceptualized the particular ways in which legal system excluded African American women because of their race, gender, and class, was the first to term this phenomenon as intersectionality and popularized it as a heuristic tool to interrogate the convergence and layering of social powers (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Cho et al., 2013). New waves of feminism started to attend to the interlacing effects of various forms of oppression on the basis of one's multiple social positionalities and identities.

Collins (2001) explicates intersectionality as referring to "particular forms of intersecting oppressions, for example, intersections of race and gender, or of sexuality and nation. Intersectional paradigms remind us that oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type, and that oppressions work together in producing injustice" (p. 18). It is critical to note that intersectionality is not just a list of the discrete identity categories an individual may have or naming the disparate axes on which social categorization happens. Feminist thinkers have underlined that the various ways of categorization, although disparate and constructed on divergent ontologies, are interlocked structures that collectively and

discursively shape and organize the lives of individuals (Collins & Bilge, 2001, 2016; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Moreover, various social categories are informed by macro social relations and construct one another. Collins and Bilge (2016) exemplified that the classification of gender, race, sexuality, and ability are informed by colonialism, patriarchy, and class exploitation, articulating that “within intersectional frameworks, there is no pure racism or sexism. Rather, power relations of racism and sexism gain meaning in relation to one another” (pp. 26-27).

Intersectionality is, in essence, a tool to interrogate power and challenge dominance, to “[attend] to how intersecting power relations shape identities, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural representations and ideologies in ways that are contextualized and historicized” (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 203). Crenshaw (1991) specifically used the language “structural intersectionality” to accentuate the “multilayered and routinized forms of domination” (p. 1245). In Crenshaw’s (2015) own words, “intersectionality is an analytic sensibility, a way of thinking about identity and its relationship to power. ... the term brought to light the invisibility of many constituents within groups that claim them as members, but often fail to represent them” (para. 6). Cho et al. (2013) lamented the myriad of studies that claim to build on intersectionality but reduce it to “the infinite combinations and implications of overlapping identities” and “distorted understandings of identity politics”:

Intersectionality is inextricably linked to an analysis of power, yet one challenge to intersectionality is its alleged emphasis on categories of identity versus structures of inequality. While this theme has surfaced in a variety of texts, particularly those that might be framed as projects that seek intersectionality’s rescue, in this issue we emphasize an understanding of intersectionality that is not exclusively or even primarily preoccupied with categories, identities, and subjectivities. Rather, the intersectional analysis foregrounded here emphasizes political and structural inequalities. (p. 797)

They reiterate that intersectional analysis has to centre on power and how subordination works, instead of what identities and subjectivities are there (Cho et al. 2013). This requires intersectional scholarship to concentrate on the inter-constructive power relations that endow meaning and value to categories, identities, and members on the structural level, to retain its critical relevance to understanding the significance of social exclusion.

Although racially marginalized people may have common grounds due to their oppression, their actual individual experiences can be vastly different on the basis of which racial group they are perceived to belong to and other social identities that divergently privilege or disadvantage them in different contexts. Therefore, the attempt to understand the experiences of racialized people by examining only racialization without attending to the intertwined effects of other social positions including gender, class, sexuality, and (dis)ability will be futile and distort the distinct experiences of each individual. Informed by feminist theories, CRT, and AsianCrit, this study employed intersectionality as a lens through which to examine the unique experiences of each individual in relation to one's membership to multiple social groups and critically analyze how social powers work, merge, layer up, and interact among one another in various settings. As Audre Lorde (1983) reflects on her identities as a Black woman, lesbian, and feminist:

I have learned that sexism and heterosexism both arise from the same source as racism. [...] I simply do not believe that one aspect of myself can possibly profit from the oppression of any other part of my identity. [...] I cannot afford the luxury of fighting one form of oppression only. (p. 9)

For a critical understanding of the complex forces that influence Chinese faculty members' interactions with Western academic institutions, an intersectional framework is essential when analyzing their lived and emotional experiences. These experiences are shaped by different factors including gender, class, cultural capital, immigration status, and professional status, among others. A combination of these factors can result in privileges and marginalization for Chinese faculty members. The framework of intersectionality allowed for a more nuanced understanding of ways study participants' positionalities are interconnected while challenging assumptions that Asian faculty's experiences are the same. Using intersectionality allowed me to tease out distinct narrative experiences that might be overlooked when we focus on unitary dimensions, pointing to the intersection of different forms of dominance and discrimination.

Intersectionality scrutinizes the social, political, and structural by attending to the experiential knowledges of the marginalized. It places emphases on systemic and institutional power while making a firm political and analytical commitment to social justice. In the context of this research, racism and patriarchy are considered the main interlocking, mutually constructive structures of our social reality. Racialization is gendered, and gender is racialized (hooks 1994a, 2004). Through the naturalization of hierarchy and exploitation of devalued labour, racism, patriarchy, and neoliberal capitalism co-produce and reinforce one another and perpetuate domination (Fraser, 2018 Matambanadzo, 2022). An intersectional approach proves particularly pertinent given the intricate interplay of social powers influencing the experiences of Chinese faculty members, rooted in racism, colonialism, patriarchy, institutional whiteness, and neoliberalism. By closely examining intimate interactions with these structures, intersectionality contributes to a critical understanding of the systemic barriers and advantages faced by Chinese faculty in Canadian HE, thereby informing more effective strategies for promoting equity within academic institutions and beyond.

### *Affect*

Feminist epistemology promotes knowledges grounded in the material world and embodied, emotional, and experiential knowing, which are conventionally coded as irrational, feminine and inferior (Collins, 1986; Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1992; 2004; Hartsock, 1983a; Smith, 1974; 1999). In this study, I moved affect to the centre of my interrogation as it speaks to feminist critical epistemology that emphasizes materiality, relationality, and justice. Affect is an emerging interdisciplinary concept about the intensity of encounters, which are often visceral, emotional, and corporal, traveling from body to body, engendering potential for movement and change (Clough, 2008; Gregg & Seigworth, 2010; Massumi, 1995, 2002; Sedgwick, 2003). Affect theory explores power by situating bodies in social, cultural, and political conditions and relations (Schaefer, 2019), and attempts to overcome dualities of

mind/body, reason/emotion, and culture/nature by juxtaposing the abstract and the material in an interactive, continuous network, contemplating how the bodily potential to affect and be affected enters a relational network. It thus seeks alternative imaginaries of identity, living, being, belonging, and society overall (Clough, 2008; Gregg & Seigworth, 2010).

Affect theory is rooted in the philosophical thinkings of Spinoza, Deleuze, and Guattari, and revived in the mid-1990s as Eve Sedgwick and Brian Massumi critically engaged with affect in the realm of art and humanities, especially fields of queer theory, cultural studies, art and literature, and philosophy (Clough, 2008; Gregg & Seigworth, 2010; Schaefer 2019). Clough (2008) termed the resurgence of interest in affect “the affective turn” that marked a departure from the linguistic turn, a response to the “limitations of poststructuralism and deconstruction” by returning scholarly attention to matter and its potentials (p. 206). Since affect theorists work in various fields and divergent theoretical and intellectual traditions, there are considerable inter- and intra- disciplinary disagreements about how to define and engage with affect. Gregg and Seigworth (2010) articulated that “there is no single, generalizable theory of affect: not yet, and (thankfully) there never will be” (p. 3).

A main controversy regarding affect theory is “whether to conceive of affect as innate or socially constructed, how to formulate its relationship with cognition, emotion, and feeling” (Gibbs, 2010, p. 188). Massumi (2002) considered affect a primary and intuitive “force-field” (p. 73), an autonomic bodily response that is pre-subjective, pre-linguistic, pre-cognitive, therefore cannot be captured by language; whereas emotion is the subjective, conscious interpretation of affective experiences (Massumi, 1995). Affect and emotion “follow different logics and pertain to different orders” (Massumi, 2002, p. 27). Emotion is shaped by cultural and social factors, involving the attribution of meaning to affective experiences that makes affect intelligible within a given socio-cultural context (Massumi, 2002). Bodies are vessels of capacities and potential for movements, and bodily intensities have the unique potential to

connect with collective, social, and cultural forces (Massumi, 1995, 2002). Therefore, affect studies should examine ideas and objects, thoughts and events, sensations and realities, the abstract and the tangible in tandem with each other, situated in the ongoing process of social production rather than a static understanding of social construction.

Sedgwick (1990, 2003) interpreted affect as manifested in the process of bodily reactions, patterned and coded by social scripts, yet not confined to predefined emotional categories (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010). Affect is complex and fluid, an ongoing spectrum of experiences that are both personal and socially constructed (Sedgwick, 1990, 2003).

Sedgwick, delving into the ways language mold our perceptions and experiences of affect and emotion, maintains that language plays a significant role in affect serving as a cognitive tool that gives meanings. Affect, in this sense, is the “felt emotional textures structuring our embodied experience” (Schaefer 2019, p. 1) and reflects social and political relations. Affect studies thus need to attend to the intersections among power, affect, and language, which shall be recognized as one of the “bodies” in the affective network, together with object, text, image, thought, and emotion, which interact with one another (Sedgwick, 1990, 2003).

Feminist engagements with affect and its social meanings tend to understand affect as a concept encompassing sensory experiences, corporal feelings, emotion, and cognition, sometimes without using the specific language of affect. Ahmed (2014) argued that emotion cannot be separated from bodily sensations and cognition, as these human experiences that emerge as we encounter other bodies involve a process of reading and reacting mediated by history that give meanings to objects.

While you can separate an affective response from an emotion that is attributed as such [...], this does not mean that in practice, or in everyday life, they are separate. In fact, they are contiguous; they slide into each other; they stick, and cohere, even when they are separated. (Ahmed, 2010, p. 231)

Cvetkovich (2012) also proposed using affect in a generic sense, “as a category that encompasses affect, emotion, and feeling, and that includes impulses, desires, and feelings

that get historically constructed in a range of ways” (p. 4). The studies of the personal as political, the intimate as social, of emotion, cognition, body, and the material world have been an ongoing project in feminist and critical research. For instance, Hochschild’s (2012) book, *The managed heart: Commercialization of human feeling*, first published in 1983, conceptualized emotional and affective labour as women’s work and the commodification of feelings in capitalist market from a Marxist feminist standpoint. Berlant (2011) probed into the complex relationship between desire, attachment, and the pursuit of the good life even when this pursuit becomes a source of suffering. Scholars including Thien (2005) and Wright (2010) argue that the divide of affect and emotion will solidify the conceptual separation between the mind and the body, the public and the private, the personal and the social. This study aligns with the feminist approach to affect that is more attuned to analyze power (Schaefer, 2019) and understands affect as socially, culturally and politically mediated.

Informed by Ahmed (2010, 2014), Berlant (2011), and Cvetkovich (2012), this research aimed to show how and what kinds of feelings produce, and are produced by, institutions and the society. Affect was taken as a generic notion merging somatic and sensory feelings, emotions and mental states, cognition and judgement, and attachments, such as desire, and hope, used interchangeably with the fuzzy term “feelings” (Ahmed, 2010, 2014; Berlant 2010, Cvetkovich, 2012). Affect is seen as a historical sediment, a product of socialization, and the very material that fabricates our daily experiences and broader societal conditions. How we feel is mediated by, hence reflects the process of, history and socio-cultural reproduction. It constitutes a potent lens through which I explored the mechanisms of social reproduction, institutions, and power relations by attending to Chinses faculty members’ individual and collective realities and feelings in their daily encounter with Canadian HEIs.

### ***Affect, Racialization, and Institution***

Affect is social and political. Ahmed (2010, 2014) theorized the sociality of emotion in

that it is the product of relations and encounters. Affect emerges when we come to contact with objects, material or abstract, and is shaped by how the object is socially and historically coded (Ahmed, 2014). Affective experiences must be situated in sociality and relationality:

I do not assume there is something called affect that stands apart or has autonomy, as if it corresponds to an object in the world, or even that there is something called affect that can be shared as an object of study. Instead, I would begin with the messiness of the experiential, the unfolding of bodies into worlds, and the drama of contingency, how we are touched by what we are near. (Ahmed, 2010, p. 30)

We learn about our positions in society and our surroundings through the encounters we have with other bodies, be it persons, objects, institutions, policies, or texts. The encounters delineate the boundaries between us, others, and the world, give us an acute sense of self, and simultaneously relativizes us to other bodies in our proximity, based on our reading of the body along socio-historical lines of meaning and value (Ahmed, 2014). The history of human perceptions of emotion is political, establishing a hierarchy of ontology and epistemology. On the one hand, emotion is widely regarded as feminine and inferior to rationality, and attributed to certain bodies (Ahmed, 2014; Smith, 1999). Women, racialized people, and lower socio-economic groups are consistently viewed more emotional, corporal, sexualized, and assigned more emotional and bodily labour (Ahmed, 2014, Blickstein, 2019). On the other hand, certain emotions are considered more appropriate, righteous, or better than others in specific social contexts (Ahmed, 2014; Hochschild, 2012).

Affect moves. Our bodies are oriented and animated as we gravitate towards, or move away from, the objects of our feelings, through affects of love, hope, desire, comfort, and happiness, or through hate, fear, pain, disgust, and shame (Ahmed, 2014, 2007b; Berlant, 2010). Affect travels from body to body, and is often contagious (Ahmed, 2014; Massumi, 2002). We can pick up certain feelings, moods, and vibes from others, a collective, and the environment (Ahmed, 2014; Dernikos et al., 2020). Collective feelings accumulate, circulate, and infuse social spaces, creating conformity or tension between the individual and the social (Ahmed, 2014; Cvetkovich, 2012). Affect captures the fundamental ability for bodies to

move and be moved. Ahmed (2014) gave the example of a child feeling fear and running away in the sight of a bear, which is depicted in cultural narratives as dangerous. The visceral response of fear and turning away from a bear, is a moment of animation shaped by histories.

Affect sticks. By means of socialization, conformity, and attachment, affect entrenches certain social norms and imaginaries, and stick us to these objects, sometimes even to our own subordination and harm (Ahmed, 2014; Berlant 2010). Social institutions such as the nation, family, education, heterosexuality, and whiteness accumulate positive affective values through repetition, often by the circulation of texts that name, arouse, affirm, and consolidate positive feelings, which stick us to these established social institutions (Ahmed, 2014, 2017; Berlant 2010; Sedgwick, 1990, 2003). Since the process of correlating meanings to objects by citation is often concealed and normalized, we tend to consider certain objects as the cause of our feelings and overlook how meanings get stuck to objects and how the affective reactions towards these objects began at the first place (Ahmed, 2014). Affect, in this sense, shapes the world and dictates our attitude toward objects and others, produces shared ideals, constructs collectivity, and perpetuates the reproduction of social institutions (Ahmed, 2014).

Racialization is affective. Race is historically deployed as a tool of imperial and colonial subjugation by attaching imagined affective characteristics (such as primordial, emotional, instinctual) and negative affects (such as hatred, fear, disgust) to racialized peoples (Blickstein, 2019). As the language of race, the “floating signifier” (Hall, 2021), became the organizing grammar of the society and is constantly being cited and circulated, this language performs racialization and contributes to the reproduction and reinforcement of racial categories (Butler, 1999). Further, racialized experiences are affectively charged (Ahmed, 2007b; Muñoz, 2006). “Emotion is central to how race is felt, discussed and produced in the US. Race is embodied in emotions ...” (Slocum, 2009, p. 19). The internalization of racial identities, or “racial learning” (Ramos-Zayas, 2011), are also generative of corporal and

emotional intensities, requiring affective labour from racialized individuals.

The dominant and the subordinated thus enter a racialization intersubjectivity, immediately reading and viscerally reacting to each other's bodies, affecting while being affected by the other. This is captured in Lorde's (1984) childhood encounter where she sensed horror and disgust from a white woman on the subway, which she recounted vividly many years later in her essay "Eye to eye: Black women, hatred, and anger." Fanon (2008) also encountered a white child on the train who laid eyes on him and could not help but to cry, "Maman, look, a Negro; I'm scared!" (p. 91). Ahmed (2007b) points out that "Fanon's example shows the body before it is racialized, or made black by becoming the object of the hostile white gaze" (p. 153). For the white beholder, the terror enticed by their encounters with black bodies is rooted in the social-historical coding and reading of Blackness as the fearful inferior other. And for Black people, the hostile white gaze impart negative affects on their bodies and interrupt and limit their bodily potential to move in the white world constructed by colonialism and racism (Ahmed, 2007b; Ngai, 2005; Muñoz, 2006).

It would not be far fetching to juxtapose categories such as race, gender, sexuality, nationality, class, ability, and begin to consider how affect is essential in the socio-historical construction of these labels and how affective intensity is involved in the encounters where these labels become relevant. The white scare can be reasonably compared with homophobia, transphobia, and xenophobia, and the white gaze with the male gaze in many respects (Muñoz, 2006). Following this line of critical studies of racialization and social institution through affect (Ahmed, 2012, 2014, 2017; Berlant 2010; Cvetkovich, 2012), I consider various forms of marginalization as sensational and emotional, and probed into how racialization and marginalization feel like for Chinese faculty members in Canadian HE.

### ***The Affective Dimension of Chineseness***

The term "Chinese" can be read as a racialized category, ethnicity, and nationality, reflecting

its evolving semantic flexibility amid continuous transnational migration and cultural exchange. Recognizing that “Chinese” is a historically, politically, and culturally formed racialized category in Canada (Stanley, 2011), the research avoids implying any biological essence by employing the term. In this study, Chinese faculty members in Canadian (HE) refers to individuals of Chinese descent employed in academic positions in Canadian HE, encompassing Chinese Canadians, Chinese nationals, the Chinese diaspora, and their descendants. Put simply, this study involved university and college teachers identifying as Chinese. This broad group represents diverse cultures, languages, traditions, and religions, as migrants adapt to new environments while maintaining connections to their Chinese heritage, while colonialism and globalization inevitably shape the subjectivities of Chinese communities and individuals around the globe.

Chineseness is relational and political in the Canadian society, taking shape in encounters and entanglements with white settlers and other racialized and indigenous peoples, and solidifying through distinct subjugation in contrast to other racialized groups (Kim, 1999; Stanley, 2011). Throughout this history of encounter and relativization, the term “Chinese” has accumulated complex and contradictory connotations. On one hand, Chinese individuals are often stereotyped as hardworking model minorities, academic over-achievers excelling in STEM subjects; on the other hand, historical residues persist, attaching negative affects such as yellow peril, that is evil and greedy to Chinese and Asian bodies (Kawai, 2005; Suzuki, 2002; Zhang, 2010). The positive affects are wielded to exemplify success achieved through individual efforts and thus support neoliberal colourblindness (Kim, 1999; Zhang, 2010), while the negative affects portray Chinese as the “foreigner of foreigners,” deemed too alien to assimilate, culturally and physically diverting far from the American social norms, hence a threat to the white nation (Kawai, 2005; Kim, 1999; Suzuki, 2002; Tuan, 1998, Zhang, 2010).

Asian American scholars, such as Okihiro (1994) have conceptualized the model minority-yellow peril dialectic works to maintain white supremacy:

It seems to me that the yellow peril and the model minority are not poles, denoting opposite representations along a single line, but in fact form a circular relationship that moves in either direction. We might see them as engendered images: the yellow peril denoting a masculine threat of military and sexual conquest, and the model minority symbolizing a feminized position of passivity and malleability. Moving in one direction along the circle, the model minority mitigates the alleged danger of the yellow peril, whereas reversing direction, the model minority, if taken too far, can become the yellow peril. In either swing along the arc, white supremacy is maintained and justified through feminization in one direction and repression in the other. (p. 142)

In Euro-Western contexts, the racialization of East Asians, including Chinese, is gendered, embodied, and affectively charged. For East Asian men, stereotypes such as being emasculated, effeminate, and nerdy, and lacking charisma and social skills are commonly used. East Asian women on the other hand are stereotyped as submissive, obedient, exotic, mysterious, yet simultaneously seductive, deceitful, and harmful (Matthews & Nagata, 2014; Suzuki, 2002; Stanley, 2011; Zhang, 2010). These stereotypes, hypersexualizations and fetishizations are shaped by white patriarchal and racist imaginations of Asian people (Matthews & Nagata, 2014; Suzuki, 2002; Stanley, 2011; Zhang, 2010). The gendered, stereotyped, and white informed feminization of Chineseness impacts the professional experiences and lives of Chinese faculty members in the predominantly white Canadian higher education contexts (Garlick, 2020; Thornton, 2012).

In an examination of Chinese self-racialization in the context of East and Southeast Asia, Ang (2022) explained that self-racialization is crucial for governance and nation-building. The conceptualization of self-racialization positions Chinese identity as an affective category, leading to what Ahmed (2014) describes as the development of a political economy of nationalism, belonging, and patriotism. Thus, for Chinese people, Chineseness is imagined, performed, felt, and reified through affective circulation and perpetuation (Butler, 1999; Ahmed, 2014). According to Chen (2010), both the racialization and marginalization of Chinese as a foreign other and the self-racialization of the Chinese identity to instate national

cohesion and hierarchy are rooted in colonialism and racism. Chen (2010) advocated for employing “Asian as method” to resist the binary of “The West and the rest” (Hall, 2019), which normalizes and essentializes the West. Instead, he suggested multiplying the frame of reference in understanding culture and identity by tapping into the interculturality of divergent Asian societies and the intersectionality of the structures of domination to achieve a “de-colonization, de-imperialization, and de-cold war” paradigm.

Using CRT, AsianCrit, intersectionality and affect theory, I took into account the racialized affective dimensions of Chineseness into the conceptual framework. I focused on the affective experiences of Chinese faculty in Canadian higher education, and paid attention to the role of colonialism and capitalism in shaping their emotions and desires. This focus allowed for a critical examination of how Chinese faculty’s experiences are impacted by the historical and contemporary dynamics of geopolitical relations, and how they negotiate their identities within the predominantly Eurocentric Canadian academia. This study also examined how the Chinese identity intersects with other factors in shaping Chinese faculty members’ lives and the commonalities and differences in their experiences. Referencing their experiential knowledges and emotions, both individual and collective, the study investigated social dynamics such as racialization, gender, social class, wherever appropriate, analyzing intersectionality across micro and macro levels, and the nuanced co-ethnic interrelations between Chinese communities (Ang et al., 2022). I also reflected on my own lived and affective experiences as a Chinese person and my critical learning and thinking into the frame of reference, aiming for a culturally sensitive and contextualized analytical lens. Moreover, the study recognizes Chinese peoples’ agency and as active participants in Canadian society and institutions and that they are not merely victims under a West-East binary.

The title of this work, inspired by Muñoz’s (2000, 2006) noting of “feeling brown”, invokes “yellow” and “white” to name the structural conditions Chinese and otherwise

racialized academics must contend with and how racialization is felt and performed in a white-dominant institutional space. Institutional racism operationalizes the colonial logic, through norms, policies, and practices, that position whiteness as the default standard against which all others are measured and found lacking. While Chinese academics employ diverse strategies of negotiation and resistance in response to institutional whiteness, as demonstrated throughout the findings and analysis chapters, the structural imperative to negotiate white norms remains constant in their experiences. To feel yellow is to feel how it is to be perceived and positioned as the other, to have the shared experience of existing, feeling, and surviving in a world wrought by racialized (un)belonging, and to perform the affective labour processing the violence of racialized institutions.

This dissertation is organized as follows: Chapter 2 reviews relevant literature to contextualize this research in the broader academic examination of racialized faculty experiences, with particular attention to Asian and Chinese individuals in North American higher education. This literature review is grounded in an intersectional lens of race and gender. Chapter 3 then discuss the epistemic and methodological underpinnings of this study and how these inform both research practices and interpretation. Following this, I present research findings and analysis under three interconnected themes, with intersectional and affective analysis running as central threads throughout. Chapter 4 examines Chinese faculty members' encounters with Canadian HEIs by analyzing institutional whiteness and how Chinese racialization and stereotypes are reflected in their structural positioning and professional experiences. Building on this, Chapter 5 examines how Chinese academics move through the white institutional spaces and deal with professional challenges: contested legitimacy, interpersonal challenges, and difficulties navigating institutional expectations and social-cultural norms. This chapter also zooms into Chinese women academics' encounters with intersecting social powers of gender and racialization. Chapter 6 concentrates on the

affective dimensions of these experiences, examining how Chinese faculty member' feel about their institutional and professional lives in Canadian academia, the emotional labour required to maintain professional functioning, and the strategies they employ to preserve their perception of Canadian academia as desirable, such as denial, comparative framings, alongside narratives of resilience and self-improvement.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature review entailed a close reading of diverse sources of literature examining the experiences of racialized, Asian, and Chinese academics in Western institution, with sources including peer reviewed scholarly publications, book chapters, government reports including census data, as well as grey sources such as media commentaries. The literature revealed similarities between research findings from Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom, and mostly pointed to challenges such as the continued underrepresentation in faculty positions in the university, racial microaggressions, inhospitable work environments, devaluation and marginalization of racialized faculty's academic contributions, and lower career status of racialized faculty (see Bennett et al., 2020; Henry, 2015; Henry et al., 2012, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c; Stewart & Valian, 2018). The literature review also showed that these challenges have persisted for decades.

While research studies in North America and the U.K. have focused on the broader category of racialized faculty, often utilizing terms such as “faculty of colour” in the U.S. and “ethnic minority faculty” in the U.K., there remains a notable gap in research specifically focusing on Asian faculty (AF), and even scarcer attention is given to Chinese faculty, despite their relatively higher representation in academia. For instance, Asians and Pacific Islanders are often conflated in the United States, which obscures the distinctive experiences of various ethnic groups. The scant literature on Chinese and East Asian faculty shows that, very few studies focused on Canada, and even fewer take an intersectional approach. Therefore, this literature review features the most important themes in the body of research on racialized and Chinese faculty in Western HEIs.

### **Racialized Faculty Members**

Henry and Tator (2009) assert that “systemic racism is a normative aspect of Canadian ways of doing things, and deeply entrenched within university culture” (p. 61). Patel (2021)

characterize higher education in the United States as a network of racism, capitalism, patriarchy, Eurocentrism, and colonialism that works to maintain unequal power systems. Racialized and Indigenous scholars in Western academia frequently face race-based discriminations, from more overt expressions of racism and colonialism to more covert forms of everyday discrimination and microaggressions, to a general unwelcoming institutional environment (Henry et al., 2017a; Turner et al., 2008). These experiences lead to alienation and exhaustion among racialized academics and undermines their sense of belonging (Henry & Tator, 2009, 2012; Henry et al., 2017a; James, 2012; Mohamed & Beagan, 2019).

Although overt racism may be relatively uncommon on university campuses, Henry et al. (2017a) revealed that the cumulative effect of small daily interactions, such as lack of collegiality, negative feedback from students, and institutional inhospitality, including the devaluation of their contributions and lack of support, significantly impacts racialized and Indigenous faculty members. These challenges eventually cause disparities in tenure, promotion, and salary, and the perpetual need to assimilate and validate their scholarship and professional competence. Thus, self-doubt, loneliness, poor physical and mental well-being, job dissatisfaction, and thoughts of quitting academia are common among racialized academics (Henry & Tator, 2012; Henry et al., 2017a; James, 2022; Stanley, 2006a; Settles et al., 2019; Turner et al., 1999). The fact that Western higher education institutions have failed to recruit, retain, and develop racialized faculty or bring about significant change despite professed efforts to include marginalized groups can be explained by these factors taken together (Henry et al., 2017a; James, 2022; Turner et al., 2008).

### ***Underrepresentation***

Henry et al. (2012) proposed a framework for understanding how racialized people in higher education settings and that takes into account both cultural and numerical representation. The complex processes of “presentation and re-presentation through which

racialized meanings and identities are produced, consumed, and regulated” (Henry et al., 2012, p.3) are part of the cultural component. In other words, the numerical majority is also the dominant group that determines organizational culture, which in turn decides who are the majority. This implies that numerical and cultural representations are mutually constructive, and their combined significance goes beyond simple statistical figures to shape and reflect larger societal contexts of racialization and marginalization. It is therefore necessary to pay attention to the numbers of racialized faculty, although numbers only partially capture the issue. However, the absence of current disaggregated data on racialized faculty poses a significant challenge for researchers seeking to grasp the intricacies of racial dynamics within Western academia. In Canada, for example, governmental census often aggregates all racialized peoples under the umbrella term “visible minorities” (Henry et al., 2012). This homogenization erases the uniqueness of distinct groups and individuals, “sustain the myth of colour-blindness and the unjustifiable disregard for the intersectionality of identity characteristics” (James, 2022, p. 154), thus “denying the possibility of understanding the contours of the colour lines” (Henry, 2015, p. 605).

When Henry and colleagues (2012, 2017c) researched the representation of racialized faculty in Canadian universities, they found a significant lack of data. Henry et al (2012, 2017c) utilized different approaches to collect data from multiple sources including basic facial-name recognition in their research on underrepresentation of racialized people, particularly racialized women. The authors found that racialized women’s larger representation in the general population, labour force, student body, and as doctorate graduates contrasted sharply with their representation as faculty in higher education (Henry et al., 2017c). The findings also revealed a that racialized faculty were less likely to be concentrated in STEM fields, they were more likely to be in lower-ranking faculty positions, faced tenure and promotion barriers, were paid less than their white counterparts, and

experienced a variety of structural barriers and forms of discrimination (Henry et al., 2017a, 2017b, 2017c; Ramos & Li, 2017). In another longitudinal national study that looked at racialization and Indigeneity in Canadian universities, Henry et al. (2017b) further examined several aspects of numerical representation, income, professional status, everyday experiences, and interactions with co-workers and students. They found that “[r]acialized and Indigenous faculty and the disciplines or areas of their expertise are, on the whole, low in numbers and even lower in terms of power, prestige, and influence within the University” (Henry et al., 2017b, p. 300). In a recent book on Blackness in Canadian Higher Education by Ibrahim et al. (2022), the authors also noted that there is a persistent lack of Black faculty, especially those on the tenure track in Canadian higher education.

Existing research shows persistent systemic challenges to addressing equity and a decline of racial diversity among faculty members at Canadian universities over the past few decades (James & Chapman-Nyaho, 2017; Henry et al., 2017c). While many higher institutions have commitments to equity and diversity spelt out in reports and websites, racialized faculty remain underrepresented in Canadian universities (Henry et al., 2017c; James & Chapman-Nyaho, 2017).

Comparison over time has shown that the degree of underrepresentation of visible minorities among the professoriate has not improved, and has likely gotten worse. The earnings of visible minority professors are on the whole lower than those of their White counterparts despite controlling for variations in other factors. (Ramos & Li, 2017, p. 52) Henry et al. (2017c) also saw a pattern of underrepresentation and lower retention rates among racialized and Indigenous faculty in a comparative study focused on English-speaking Western countries, including Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. The authors found commonalities in all the countries, and that there were fewer racialized faculty members and even fewer racialized women faculty members in leadership positions. Findings from the study also showed that racialized and Indigenous faculty face hostile campus environments and discrimination from their organizations, colleagues, and students

(see Bennett et al., 2020; Henry, 2015; Stewart & Valian; 2018). The underrepresentation of racialized women faculty in STEM fields, tenured positions, full professorships, authoritative and leadership roles, and grant recipients is especially noteworthy and warrants examination (Carter-Sowell et al., 2019; Fox Tree & Vaid, 2022; Henry et al., 2017a).

In the American Midwest, Turner et al. (1999) also reported on the underrepresentation of Faculty of Colour. A further examination into Faculty of Colour's institutional experiences revealed "racial and ethnic bias as the most troubling challenge they faced in the academic workplace" and "isolation, lack of information about tenure and promotion, unsupportive work environments, gender bias, language barriers, lack of mentoring, and lack of support from superiors" (Turner et al., 1999, p. 41). The study found a tendency to attribute the low number of Faculty of Colour to the shortage of racialized doctorate recipients across all fields of study. This view was accepted by some scholars in the late 1980s and early 1990s, showing a lack of institutional acknowledgement and understanding of the specific challenges racialized faculty experience. Turner et al. (1999) specifically addressed the prevalent myth of Asian American success in academia that "the Asian American experience in academia is 'exemplary' and devoid of any racial/ethnic bias" (p. 27). The authors noted that although Asian Americans have higher representation in academia compared to other racialized groups, they are mostly in science and engineering and remain underrepresented in administrative and higher-ranking positions. Like other racialized faculty, Asian Americans experience both covert and overt racial discrimination and bias in their academic workplace.

A decade later, Turner et al. (2008) conducted a systematic literature review of over 250 publications on racialized faculty in the U.S. from 1988 to 2007. Despite an increasing awareness of the importance of a racially diverse faculty and increased academic attention on this topic in the early 2000s, the review identified continued underrepresentation of racialized faculty, particularly racialized women. Racism and sexism in social and academic

environments, a lack of recognition for the contributions of racialized faculty, inadequate mentorship opportunities, and disparities in salary and valuation for racialized and white academics contributed to the underrepresentation. Turner et al. (2008) recommended initiatives and collective actions on departmental, institutional, and national levels to address these challenges, including improving recruitment and promotion, promoting collaboration among racialized faculty, increasing funding opportunities, and expanding mentorship programs for the faculty members.

### ***Institutional Barriers***

It is crucial to consider the underrepresentation and nonrepresentation of racialized faculty in tandem with their daily experiences and situate their experiences in the institutional context that shapes these experiences. The scarcity of racialized and indigenous faculty members has far-reaching consequences, impacting their mental and emotional well-being, workplace interactions, and status within academia. Underrepresentation “is not only about failing to meet statistical targets. It underpins loneliness, isolation, and tokenism. Everyday racism thrives in an atmosphere of nonrepresentation.” (Henry & Kobayashi, 2017, p. 127). In extensive studies conducted by James (2012) and Henry and Tator (2012) on racialized faculty in Canadian universities, participants frequently recounted experiences of being the only non-white individual or the only racialized woman within their department or institution, and described the pressure and invisibility associated with it. Similarly, Mohamed and Beagan’s (2019) findings echoed this sense of alienation and exhaustion among participants expressing their status as the solitary racialized or Indigenous faculty member within their department, academic field, or even the entire country.

Mentorship is recognized as vital for the retention, professional advancement, sense of belonging, and emotional well-being of racialized faculty (Carter-Sowell et al., 2019; Diggs et al., 2009; Endo, 2020; Turner et al., 1999). However, finding mentors and navigating

mentorship relationships can be extremely difficult for racialized faculty in historically white institutions. Stanley (2016b) points out that racialized faculty, as the marginalized minority and “outsider in academia”, “usually receives little or no mentoring, inside information, or introductions to valuable connections and networks” (p. 14). They are also more likely to encounter negative mentoring experiences, particularly when their mentors belong to a different racial or gender group and lack a nuanced understanding of their racialized experiences (Davis et al., 2022). The situation is worsened by the lack of racialized faculty in senior positions and the lack of institutional support, which restricts access to role models and culturally sensitive mentorship. The effects of underrepresentation on racialized academics are reaffirmed by these findings.

The experiences of racialized faculty provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex racial dynamics ingrained in institutional structures. Feeling overworked and underappreciated is a recurring theme in their experiences. When compared to their white counterparts, racialized faculty are often given heavier workloads in teaching, mentoring, and academic service, held to higher and stricter standards, and expected to put in more effort and outperform their peers (Fox Tree & Vaid, 2022; Guillaume & Apodaca, 2022; Henry et al., 2017b, 2017c; Stanley, 2006a). They also take on more diversity work, such as teaching courses on race, mentoring racialized students, serving as representatives on committees, and educating students, faculty, and staff about racial inequity issues. Although many racialized faculty accept these service roles in the hopes of fostering community engagement, minority student development, and institutional change, their contributions often become tokenized and ineffective due to structural constraints (Guillaume & Apodaca, 2022; June, 2015), leading Padilla (1994) to conceptualize this as “cultural taxation.”

Wijesingha and Ramos (2017) and Wijesingha and Robson (2022) propose human capital (academic productivity and research outcomes reflected in publication) and cultural

taxation (teaching and service) as two competing factors that may have resulted in the lower rate of tenure and promotion for racialized faculty in Canada. Their studies showed that although racialized and women faculty outperform their white and male counterparts in publishing and attaining grants, they are not tenured nor promoted at the same rate. Women face a glass ceiling, i.e. invisible barriers that prevent them from advancing to leadership positions, as they publish less and get tenured/promoted less than men. The authors argue that human capital is a more significant factor than cultural taxation. However, Fox Tree and Vaid (2022) maintain that the publication process and citation practice disproportionately disadvantage racialized women. In other words, the additional workload caused by cultural taxation that detracts racialized academics from valuable research work is frequently overlooked in the assessment for tenure and promotion. Stanley (2006a) eloquently articulates this predicament:

On the one hand, they are recruited to diversify the faculty and further the university's diversity agenda (because of perceived or real expertise), and, on the other hand, they often engage in these activities only to be told that they are of little value in merit and personnel decisions. Participation in service activities remains a critical area to which many faculty of color fall prey, and it is often a component that costs them greatly when they are being evaluated for promotion or tenure. (p. 721)

Institutional barriers for racialized and women faculty often intersect with one another.

Factors such as underrepresentation, glass ceiling, productivity, and cultural taxation have to be understood as interdependent and co-constructed by institutional racism and sexism.

### ***Epistemic Exclusion***

The traditional academic structure, rooted in white Eurocentrism, has historically marginalized racialized individuals and women by invalidating their experiences and ways of knowing, and excluding them from institutional knowledge systems (Collins, 1986, 1989, 2000; Crenshaw, 1989; Gonzales, 2018; Smith, 1974, 1999). Institutional knowledge systems position whiteness as a standard against which racialized faculty are evaluated (Henry & Tator, 2012). Scholarly works that prioritize racial and gender equity, community

engagement, and innovative methodologies often face dismissal as they diverge from established disciplinary norms, making it difficult to obtain funding and publish in prestigious journals (Henry & Kobayashi, 2017; Settles et al., 2019, 2021, 2022; Stanley, 2007; Turner et al., 2009; Turner, 1999). Racialized faculty are disproportionately affected by this pattern of epistemic exclusion (Dotson, 2012, 2014), as they are more likely to engage in such research projects because of their dedication to social justice and their communities (Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Gonzales, 2018; Turner, 1999). Racialized people thus feel pressured to continuously demonstrate their worth in the classroom (Stanley, 2006a) and in research, which contributes to their frustration, demoralization and self-doubt (Henry et al., 2017a, Settles et al., 2021). The extra higher standards set for racialized faculty act as gatekeeping mechanism that impedes the professional growth and advancement of the faculty members as those standards are used also as tenure evaluation and promotion rubrics.

Settles and colleagues (2021, 2022), writing from the American context, explained that academia perpetuates epistemic exclusion among racialized and women faculty through both formal hierarchies that dictate the value of scholarship, and informal mechanisms that render racialized faculty invisible and illegitimate through everyday interpersonal interactions. Participants in their study reported that they were subjected to heightened scrutiny compared to their white peers, assessed against ambiguous and fluctuating criteria, and faced repercussions if they managed to excel and defy racial stereotypes (Settles et al., 2021). As a result, racialized faculty members are constantly forced to prove their academic abilities, defend the value of their research, and deal with exclusion on their own. This further leads to barriers to career advancement and retention, feelings of marginalization, and job dissatisfaction (Settles et al., 2021, 2022).

Racialized women faced even greater challenges of academic devaluation, mainly through informal processes, with more faculty in arts and humanities reporting formal

hierarchies and epistemic exclusion than in STEM (Settles et al., 2021). Fewer Asian faculty discussed experiences of epistemic exclusion compared to Latinx, Black, or Native American faculty (Settles et al., 2021). When considering nationality, a greater proportion of US-born racialized faculty reported confronting epistemic exclusion compared to those who are internationally born. Conversely, among Asian faculty, the trend was reversed. More internationally born Asian Faculty reported epistemic exclusion compared to their US-born counterparts (Settles et al., 2021). According to Astin et al. (1997), Asian American faculty members were least satisfied with the lack of academic independence and freedom to develop innovative ideas. The differences in reporting epistemic exclusion among Asian faculty members pose important questions whether they experience or perceive epistemic violence differently and how their senses of epistemic autonomy may have changed over time.

### ***Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Policies and Neoliberalism***

The limited success in recruiting, retaining, and advancing racialized faculty has prompted researchers to look for the root causes of the ineffectiveness of equality policies in Western HEIs (Henry et al., 2017a; James, 2022; Turner, 2003; Walcott, 2019). Henry and colleagues (2017b) interrogate these measures, wondering why, “[f]our decades of equity policies have failed to transform the academy significantly to make it more diverse and reflective of the broader society and student body” in Canada (p. 311). This resonates with Ahmed’s (2012) examination of the challenges faced by diversity workers in the U.K., who struggle without adequate institutional support, and Stewart and Valian’s (2018) findings in the U.S. who called for an inclusive racioethnically diverse academy. The existing human rights, employment equity, and diversity frameworks are ineffective to address racism or change institutional whiteness when HEIs lack actual commitment to equity (Ahmed, 2007a, 2012; Henry et al., 2017b). Ahmed (2006a, 2012) describes these equity policies as “non-performative,” which works by not doing the work they suggest, masking systemic issues and

maintaining the status quo to the advantage of the dominant group.

The prevalent “diversity” languages and policies in Western HEIs often replace more critical ideas such as antiracism and social justice (Ahmed, 2012). Diversity is frequently framed through a marketing lens to justify superficial feel-good politics, and becomes a form of capital managed by institutions. Marginalized individuals who are included by HEIs as resources of diversity “are treated as guests, temporary residents in someone else’s home” and only “welcomed on condition they return that hospitality by integrating into a common organizational culture, or by ‘being’ diverse, and allowing institutions to celebrate their diversity” (Ahmed, 2012, p.43). Diversity is thus tokenized, “often more about changing only the perception of whiteness than it is about changing the culture and organization of the institution” (Ahmed, 2012, p. 34). In the Canadian context, the diversity and multiculturalism rhetoric, adopted by governments and major social institutions, has been amalgamated with antiracism and equity and continues to foreclose structural transformation (Walcott, 2019).

Ahmed (2012) emphasizes that diversity is not only a way to market the institution but also transforms the university into a marketplace. Despite the rhetoric about the importance of diversity, there is a paradox where racialized individuals who contribute to diversity are praised as important resources but subjected more to management strategies. Even though diversity is portrayed as a source of diverse knowledge and perspectives, it often fails to be reflected in institutional structures and practices. She suggested that rather than making meaningful changes to institutional culture and structure, the diversity discourse focuses on institutional image management. The existence of diversity initiatives is often used as evidence that racism is not an issue at institutions. Through the happy language of diversity, institutional racism is obscured, and social inequalities and systemic racial discrimination sustained. Likewise, Walcott (2019) believes that “diversity as an idea has reached its logical end” due to its and must be replaced by “something more radical and sustaining” to undo

deep seated white supremacy and colonialism (p. 394).

Giroux (2014), Henry et al. (2017a), and James (2012, 2022) attribute the contradiction between the institutional commitment to diversify academia and the lack of notable progress to the influence of neoliberalism. James (2022) underscores that any social justice-oriented effort “must address how neoliberal ideology, sustained by whiteness and Canadian multiculturalism claims of cultural freedom and neutrality, conceals the insidious and inhibiting effects of structural racism” (pp. 154-155). Neoliberal ideology has profoundly shaped the sociopolitical logic, cultural imaginaries, and individual desires of our time, as well as the structure and practices of social institutions (Brown, 2015; James & Chapman-Nyaho, 2017). Under neoliberalism, HE is increasingly corporatized and commodified, guided by the mechanisms of audit culture, managerialism, and the pursuit of profit at the expense of equity (Giroux, 2014). The neoliberal ethos of meritocracy, colour-evasiveness, individualism, and competitiveness effectively masks and perpetuates the entrenched racism in higher education institutions, leaving racialized faculty tokenized and subjected to hostile institutional environment (James, 2012, 2022; James & Chapman-Nyaho, 2017). As James (2012) described, “[i]t is into this neoliberal context that racialized faculty members are expected to fit with little to no attempts made to accommodate, respect or encourage their presence and differences in interests, scholarships, ways of knowing and understanding the world” (p. 135). Rooted in neoliberalism and institutional whiteness, the EDI framework and practices are unlikely to bring about equitable structural changes.

### **Asian and Chinese Faculty Members**

Chinese academics in Canada face institutional whiteness and various forms of exclusion discussed above. However, different racialized groups experiences inclusion and marginalization differently, due to their specific forms of racialization that are historically and contextually constructed. To better comprehend the particular difficulties faced by people of

Chinese descent in Canadian society and academia, I start by contextualizing the experiences of Chinese communities in the historically racist, Asian-phobic Canadian context. Following this, I look at the situations and experiences of Chinese faculty members in Western higher education institutions face. Given the limited availability of literature focusing specifically on Chinese academics in Canada, I relied on a broader constellation of academic studies concerning Asian faculty in North America to bridge discuss the experiences presented here.

### *Situating Asians in North America*

The discrimination and exclusion faced by Chinese and East Asian peoples in North America have deep historical roots, epitomized by the “yellow peril” stereotype and violent anti-Chinese riots, such as the 1871 Los Angeles Chinese Massacre and the 1907 Vancouver anti-Asian riot (Lee, 2007; Stanley, 2011). Canada has a well-documented history of discriminatory legislation targeting Chinese and Asian immigrants, as evidenced by scholarly research and governmental records (see Government of Canada, n.d.; Guo & Guo, 2021). The 1885 Chinese Immigration Act marked the beginning of a series of laws aimed at restricting Chinese immigration by imposing head tax on Chinese individuals seeking entry to Canada. This laid foundation for the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1923, a piece of landmark legislation that forbade Chinese immigration until it was eventually repealed in 1947 (Government of Canada, n.d.; Lei & Guo, 2022; Guo & Wong, 2018). The historical injustices against East Asian communities in Canada also include the Japanese internment during the Second World War and the disenfranchisement of Canadians of Chinese, Japanese, and South Asian origins (Government of Canada, n.d.; Lei & Guo, 2022; Guo & Wong, 2018).

Although these unjust laws and policies against Asians were repealed, and Canadian government issued apologies for the trauma they inflicted, anti-Asian racism persisted in contemporary Canada. The history also exposes a specific and targeted form of marginalization that have enduring impacts on Chinese and East Asian individuals across

North America. In the face of discrimination and oppression, Chinese Canadians demonstrated activism and resilience and played an important role in combating systemic racism and advancing civil rights. A notable example was the Chinese student strike against school segregation in British Columbia in 1922, which not only represented a significant victory for the Chinese Canadian community but also contributed to the broader struggle for racial equality and social justice in Canada (Stanley, 2011).

The increase in Asian immigration to Canada in the late 20th and early 21st centuries has led to a resurgence of anti-Asian racism, often framed by historical tropes such as the “yellow peril” (Colomba & Pon, 2017). Anxieties about Asian presence became increasingly visible in higher education, where Asian Canadians are stereotyped as academically obsessed, excessively competitive, socially isolated, and culturally foreign. *Maclean's*, a prominent Canadian news magazine, made headlines in 2010 with an article titled “Too Asian?” that fueled racial resentment and reinforced racial binaries between Asian and White students (Coloma, 2013). These racially charged sentiments exposed Asian Canadians’ complicated status as a racialized minority that is seen as both successful and unwanted, a threat to national and institutional whiteness.

The Asian identity in North America is both ambiguous and invisible. East Asian communities find themselves situated outside the Black-white binary, yet entangled in a web of contradictory stereotypes, such as being portrayed as “model minorities”, academic high achievers, or nerds, alongside negative stereotypes of “yellow peril,” “coolie,” and “gook” (Kawai, 2005; Suzuki, 2002; Zhang, 2010). As Lee (2005) contends:

Racial constructions of Asians as the model minority in North America’s vertical mosaic, a perception fostered by White academics, helps to deny the reality that, like other non-White Canadians, Asian Canadians are also marginalized and victimized in all aspects of social economic, cultural, and political life.

The model minority myth, portraying Asians as quiet, hardworking, and high achieving, imposes pressure on them to remain subservient to authority, and persevere regardless of

the injustice they suffer (Hwang, 2021; Museus & Kiang, 2009). By reducing Asians to a single stereotype, the model minority myth denies their individuality and uniqueness (Yip et al., 2021; Hune, 2006) and pits Asian success against other minority groups. This undermines the solidarity among marginalized communities and perpetuates systemic racism (Kumashiro, 2006). Meanwhile, the “yellow peril” stereotype portrays East Asians a “threat to the Western world through growing political, economic, and military power in East Asia” (Nguyen et al., 2019, p. 566). This model minority-yellow peril duality is further mobilized in racial triangulation that positions Asians as perpetual foreigners in-between white and Black to reinforce the colour-evasiveness and meritocracy myth and maintain existing racial hierarchy (Kawai, 2005; Kim, 1999; Okihiro, 1994; Tuan, 1998). When people of Asian descent are seen as outperforming other racial minority groups, they are often labeled as the model minority. However, when they are viewed as surpassing the whites, they become yellow peril. Kawai, (2005) thus argues that “the construction of the model minority stereotype is tied to creating a less threatening face of the yellow peril” (p. 115).

Researchers have also noted the rise of neo-racism, which is characterized by cultural racism, nativism, and xenophobia, and has justified racial profiling and mistreatment of Chinese individuals through national security discourses in the United States since 2018 (Lee, 2020; Lewis, 2020). By emphasizing national origin, ethnicity, and cultural distinctions, neo-racism effectively criminalizes China and stigmatizes those who are thought to be associated with it (Balibar, 1992; Lee, 2020; Lewis, 2020). Crucially, neo-racism goes beyond specifically targeting people of Chinese heritage and affects the Asian community as a whole (Lee, 2020; Lewis, 2020). The recent rise of anti-Asian racism and Sinophobia during the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted the lives and general well-being of people of Chinese and East Asian heritage. This has revived the “yellow peril” rhetoric and led to an increase in hate crimes and harassment against Asians (Gover et al., 2020; Guo &

Guo, 2021; Lei & Guo, 2022; Li & Nicholson, 2021). However, Asians continue to be ignored in conversations about racism and discrimination and viewed as a homogenous group in social science research (Hwang, 2021; Yip et al., 2021). As Nguyen et al. (2019) contend that “[d]espite a history of exclusion and racialized stereotypes of Asian Americans, theories on racial prejudice have generally left Asian Americans and other minority groups out of the racial rhetoric in attitudinal studies” (p. 567), suggesting the need for research such as this dissertation, which specifically examines the experiences of Chinese individuals and therefore bridges the gaps and break the silence.

### ***Asian Racialization in Higher Education***

Asian faculty are generally believed to be overrepresented in the academic workforce relative to their percentages of populations in Canada and the U.S. (Henry et al., 2017b; Kim & Cooc, 2021). This overrepresentation is particularly notable in STEM and business programs, whereas their presence in humanities and social sciences tends to be comparatively lower (Henry et al., 2017c; Li & Koedel, 2017). Asian faculty often encounter discrimination in hiring and salary, and exclusion from leadership roles and senior positions (Freeman & Forthun, 2019; Hartlep et al., 2018; Lee, 2019; Teranishi, 2010). Research has shown that Asian women faculty members are disproportionately concentrated in lower positions (Hune, 1998, 2006). Kim and Cooc (2021) examined numerical data from US postsecondary institutions and found that, although Asian and Asian Pacific American (AAPI) women begin with higher entrance rates into faculty jobs, they fall behind along the promotion pipeline. AAPI men, on the other hand, are overrepresented across all faculty ranks and among doctoral degree holders. They argued that research lacking consideration of gender, rank, and time often portrays an overrepresentation of AAPI faculty, contributing to ambiguity and omission of AAPIs and AAPI women in discussions of faculty diversity (Kim & Cooc, 2021). This emphasizes the importance of recognizing distinctions among Asian academics along

the lines of gender in the North American context and the necessity of further studies employing an intersectionality lens.

The underrepresentation of Asian faculty in tenured and leadership positions in the U.S. has been a significant focus of academic inquiry. Lee's (2002) multiple regression analysis of national survey data claimed to find no evidence of a glass ceiling or unequal pay for Asian faculty. However, Yan and Museus' (2013) analysis of national survey data examining differences in promotion among faculty of various racial groups found that racialized faculty are less likely to obtain tenure or leadership roles compared to White faculty, with Asian faculty experiencing the most obvious disadvantage. This conclusion is supported by Wu and Jing (2011) who discovered that Asian academics, particularly women, are seldomly found in roles of full faculty, deans or presidents, but more commonly enter nonfaculty positions, such as postdoctoral researchers, lab assistants, or non-tenured faculty positions. Similarly, Lee (2019) found that Asian faculty have much smaller chances to hold leadership roles compared to their white, Black, and Latinx counterparts, while Lu et al. (2020) further asserted that East Asians are less likely than South Asians and whites to attain leadership positions.

East Asian academics' challenges in career advancement have led scholars to term this phenomenon the "bamboo ceiling" (Hyun, 2005; Litam & Chan, 2021). Existing literature attributes the bamboo ceiling to various factors, including Asian faculty members entering tenure positions later than their peers, different perceptions of leadership due to Asian collectivist values, unfamiliarity with US cultural expectations, and stereotypes portraying Asians as unsocial, reserved, and uncharismatic (Lee, 2019). Scholars contend that neo-racism has significantly contributed to the exclusion and exploitation of Asians in Western academia. For instance, because of neo-racist racial stereotypes, Asian postdoctoral researchers, who are perceived as technically skilled but theoretically weak, are routinely steered toward short-term, unstable contracts, whereas their White counterparts are usually

guided toward more stable faculty positions (Cantwell & Lee, 2010).

Recent studies on the experiences of Asian American faculty in US higher education consistently show instances of racial discrimination and microaggression (Hong, 2022; Hyun et al., 2022). Many Asian faculty reported feeling disregarded and underappreciated for their leadership skills, estranged from colleagues, and uncomfortable or awkward in collegial situations. They also view experiences of discrimination and stereotypes as subtle and confusing, attributing them to unintentional behaviours (Hong, 2022; Hyun et al., 2022). Some suggested a lack of support and recognition from their organizations, while others expressed gratitude to organizations that value them and create positive work environments. These themes are consistent with earlier research, such as Huang (2013), where participants expressed feeling alone and disconnected from their departments, which resulted in a perceived cold institutional climate and low Asian faculty retention.

Asian academics encounter high expectations stemming from the model minority myth, pressure to adhere to white norms, and difficulties in asserting authority and gaining recognition for leadership roles, supposedly due to appearing younger than their actual age (Hong, 2022; Hyun, 2022). East Asian Faculty, particularly women and immigrants, face more disrespect and negative evaluations by students who discredited their knowledge and discriminated their accents (Choi & Lim, 2021; Bang, 2015; Hong, 2022; Mayuzumi, 2008; Nguyen, 2016). Their lack of authority and credibility is intertwined with both Asian stereotypes and overlapping systems of race, gender, nationality, and cultural membership.

### ***Asian Women Faculty***

Research on Asian women faculty (AWF) across various academic disciplines exposed their absence in tenured, senior, and leadership positions (Hune, 2006; Lee, 2006; Nguyen, 2016; Wu & Jing, 2011), leading some to point out the contrast between AAPI women's persistent underrepresentation and their increased entry into academia (Chen & Hune, 2011).

AAPI women often face hurdles early in their academic career, particularly during hiring and tenure processes. As a result, their representation dwindles as they progress through academic ranks. The number of AAPI women in full professorship roles is minimal, and their presence as campus presidents exceedingly rare (Chen & Hune, 2011).

At the intersection of race and gender, AWF are not only implicated in the model minority myth (Okiihiro, 1994, Nguyen, 2016), but also confront objectification, exoticization, and sexualization through the colonial fantasy of Western masculinity (Mayuzumi, 2008, 2015; Shrake, 2006). These perceptions of femininity and passivity undermine their authority and academic credibility, which leads to difficult work experiences and impeded career advancement. Ng (1993) and Shrake (2006) recounted challenges teaching predominantly white students equity-focused courses, where they faced backlash, complaints, physical threats, and pressure to perform “feminine qualities of passivity, submissiveness, self-effacement and reticence to speak out” (Shrake, 2006, p. 184). Ng (1993) spotlighted the systemic nature of sexism and racism, while Shrake (2006) underlined how students deemed her “too aggressive and outspoken” (p. 185) for deviating from gendered racialized expectations. The resistance from students was so strong that they felt forced to internalize the model minority myth and adopt traits of quiet perseverance and compliance to avoid confrontation.

Subsequent research on AWF have revealed similar challenges, where phenotypical differences, immigration status, and accent contribute to their experiences with racism and racial stereotypes. Mayuzumi’s (2015) study on East Asian women faculty in Canada showed how the exoticification of Asian women’s bodies as tiny, younger looking, and cute, has led to their infantilization and delegitimization. Choi and Lim (2021), facing dismissal and disbelief when teaching about social injustice, attributed the invalidation of their expertise to racialization, sexism, and xenophobia, as their immigrant status, accent, and cultural mannerisms were perceived as inferior by white students. Bang (2015) found that foreign-

born professors often face resistance in their teaching, with some reporting being bullied by students. Stereotypes portraying AWF as submissive further created underlying “assumptions that it is acceptable to discriminate against Asian American women, because they are passive and, if they encounter discrimination, will not fight back” (Huang, 2013, p. 268).

While foreign-born AF commonly face discrimination about their accents, AWF overall endure more intense disrespectful behaviours from students, leading to heightened stress, anxiety, and self-doubt (Liang, 2006; Mayuzumi, 2008). Liang (2006) described her classroom as a “minefield of student resistance and negative attitudes” (p. 85) where she had to navigate carefully, while Choi and Lim (2021) felt fear teaching in the US classroom:

Our foreign accent is a primary source of discrimination and lack of respect. We routinely encounter students who pretend not to understand our English, blame the foreign accent for their lack of progress, and exchange their ridicules and disrespect when an additional clarification or reiteration is requested. (p. 107)

Interestingly, in Hong’s (2022) study, an Asian American woman faculty member, despite being a native English speaker and not speaking any other language, faced challenges to her teaching as students remarked on her perceived accent. This underscores how stereotypes and discrimination against AWF are predicated upon the perceptions from the dominant group. Creese and Kambere (2003) identified a hierarchy in accents, where European accents are deemed more legitimate than those of racialized individuals. Choi and Lim (2021) also affirmed discrimination regarding their accents not only from students but also from their institutions questioning their language skills. These experiences should not be viewed as individual student’s biases but must be understood within the context of institutional whiteness, which assumes Eurocentrism as the norm and perpetuate racialized stereotypes.

### ***The Invisible “Visible Minority”***

AF often encounter employment discrimination in HE, which are largely ignored by academic studies (Nakanishi, 1993). Turner et al. (1999) revealed a prevalent myth about Asians in academia: “the Asian American experience in academia is ‘exemplary’ and devoid

of any racial/ethnic bias” (p. 27). As a result, educational research and evaluation of faculty diversity in the U.S. often categorizes Asian faculty separately from underrepresented minority, failing to reflect the reality for Asian faculty. When acknowledged by academic research, however, Asians are “used to make legitimate or devalue the experiences of other racial and ethnic groups” (Yan & Lin, 2011, p. 166). For example, Settles et al. (2021) used Asian faculty as a comparison group, juxtaposed with Latinx, Black, and Native American faculty, whom they defined as URM faculty. Unsurprisingly, Asian faculty voiced a sense of invisibility and ambiguity about their minority status. As one participant in Hyun (2022) contemplated, institutions often fail to consider Asians as equity seeking or deserving:

I feel like minority here is more sort of black. That’s why I said I can’t think of a clear; it’s just my general feeling... it’s always like a black people face they try to present there. Not so much about Asians...we are a forgotten group of people. (p. 215)

In an attempt to address the invisibility of Asians education research, a group of East Asian American faculty and educational researchers shared their deeply personal and upsetting encounters of “not counting,” being ignored as legitimate contributors to diversity, despite enduring marginalization within academia (Kim et al., 2023):

I was involved in a conversation about what “counts” as diversity. As the discussion turned towards the kinds of racial and ethnic diversity we should be valuing in the academy, I expressed how Asian American faculty were still vastly underrepresented in the social sciences and humanities given the relatively large proportion of Asian Americans we serve on our campus. To that, I received a blunt response, three words, simply put and aimed squarely in my direction: “You don’t count”. (pp. 10-11)

Kim and colleagues (2023) argue that Asian Americans are excluded from the systems of knowledge production and their experiences in educational settings have not received enough scholarly attention. They advocate for a broader inclusion of Asian American perspectives in educational discourse as well as a more thorough investigation of Asian American voices in research, especially their intersectional identities and diverse experiences (Kim et al., 2023).

The hyper-invisibility and epistemic exclusion of Asian Americans are linked to the model minority myth in many ways, which depicts them as universally successful and

unworthy of critical research (Kim et al., 2023; Louie, 2004). This myth is compounded by their positioning within a historic Black-white binary that renders Asians as the outsider that do not fit in an intelligible race system (Kim, 1999). The acceptance of Asians is often contingent upon their silence regarding their own racialization and broader social inequalities, which leads to internalized racism, intra-community divisions, and the reproduction of oppression (Hwang, 2021). A pertinent example is findings presented by Henry et al. (2012) that Chinese and South Asian academics, comprising more than twice the number of Black academics, reported a much smaller number of grievances related to racial discrimination. “While individuals of Chinese origin also encounter racism, its manifestations tend to be more subtle and elusive compared to the sometimes overt practices reported by Black faculty” (Henry et al., 2012, p. 9). While this explanation may hold merit, it is crucial to explore the silence of Chinese faculty and its correlation with racial stereotypes and the internalization of racism.

In summary, racialized faculty members face racism, marginalization, and various structural barriers in Western HE, which is organized around and upholds white dominance. Under the neoliberalization of HE, existing EDI policies have consistently failed to bring about systemic changes and equity for racialized and Indigenous academics. Due to their unique racialization and histories in North America, Asian individuals grapple with their special racio-cultural in-betweenness and otherness. Asian faculty members experience racial discrimination and microaggression that are often covert, and are severely underrepresented in leadership and senior positions. Asian women academics encounter explicit disrespect, discrimination, and dismissal associated with gendered stereotypes of docility and inferiority. The difficulties Asian academics face in Western academia raise important questions about the factors shaping their academic trajectories and personal identities. Despite these challenges, the general belief that Asians are white adjacent and do not experience

discrimination has largely excluded them from equity considerations and academic attention. The persistent invisibility of their diverse intersectional experiences further brings to the fore the necessity for research that a feminist anti-racist and intersectional framework. My research delved into the intricacies of Chinese academics' experiences and feelings in Canadian HE, with the goal of fostering greater equity within academia. In the following chapter, I outline methodological considerations and research methods this study employed.

### Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods

This study examined, under a feminist framework, how structural racism, alongside various intersecting forms of social institutional dominance, shape the lives of Chinese faculty members in Canadian higher education (HE) by delving into their lived and affective experiences. It aimed to deepen the understandings on how they navigate their racialized academic life amidst the backdrop of a neoliberal, neo-racist, post-pandemic era, and how they think/feel about their experiences, contributing to a bigger project shedding light on the perpetuation of racism and neoliberalization of HE, and their implications on diverse social groups. To address the central question, “What is it like to be a Chinese faculty member in Canadian higher education,” this research adopted a qualitative case study methodology under the interpretative paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Yin, 2009, 2018), for its effectiveness in understanding human experiences, social practices, and meaning-making processes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

This study was driven by a feminist willfulness (Ahmed, 2017) to counter neoliberal notions of meritocracy, neutrality, and universality, which has been informing equity policies and general understandings of racial justice in Canadian society and HE. It drew upon feminist epistemology (Collins, 1986; Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1992; Smith, 1999, 1990) and feminist critical theories as a lens through which to examine established norms, structural power, and institutionalized knowledge production, particularly in the context of HE that epitomizes knowledge hegemony and intertwined forms of domination. Grounding this study in the tradition of feminist research shapes its perceptions regarding reality, knowledge, and value, and therefore its choice of methodology, data collection, and analytical methods. This chapter thus begins by elucidating the philosophical foundations, beliefs, and values that inform the study, and then proceeds to discuss the specific data collection and analysis approaches employed in detail.

## **Feminist Epistemology**

The methodology and research methods were informed by feminist epistemology. It challenges conventional ideas of objectivity and value-neutral inquiry by arguing that knowledge is situated within social, historical, and cultural contexts and mediated through particular experiences and viewpoints (Collins, 1986; Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1992; Smith, 1999, 1990). This perspective emphasizes the importance of recognizing how gender, race, class, and other intersecting power dynamics shape what constitutes valid knowledge and whose voices are given more weight during the knowledge-creation process. It also draws attention to that the study, the researcher, and participants are all embedded in systems of power and contextual particularities. Feminist epistemology centres on the lived experiences of marginalized groups, who are more attuned to domination, oppression, and discrimination, as a vantage point for understanding social structure and power relations (Collins, 1986; Hartsock, 1983; Smith, 1999). In this way, feminist epistemology problematizes hegemonic power structures that are maintained through institutional knowledge production by shifting the focus to the local, personal, material, and the ignored. Instead of adhering to a singular, abstract, top-down truth, feminist epistemology advocates situated, contextual, and divergent forms of knowing and collective yet heterogeneous construction of knowledge (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1992). This entailed awareness that participants experience both shared realities and differences due to discursive privilege and marginalization based on racialization, gender, class, sociocultural background. By centring on their knowledges and placing gender, race, and intersectionality at the forefront of analysis, this study disrupts monolithic Chineseness stereotypes, and advances inclusive equitable knowledge about Chinese experiences in the Western academy.

A key implication of feminist epistemology for my methodological and ethical considerations is the call for critical reflection on the presumptions, values, and power

dynamics that underpin the research process is (Harding, 1992, 1986). Feminist epistemology refuses positivist ideas of objectivity and generalizability and the supposedly disembodied, unbiased researcher for playing “the god trick” (Haraway, 1988, p. 581). Rather, a feminist strong objectivity strives for situated knowledge that is accountable, divergent, and socially and collectively constructed (Harding, 1987, 1992; Smith, 1999). Throughout the research process, I, as the researcher, reflexively examined my own positionality and biases, recognizing how my social location and identities shaped the questions I asked and the interpretations I made. Instead of detached observing from distance, I assumed the role of collaborator and knowledge co-creator with participants, negotiating a range of different individual perspectives through a critical intersectional framework grounded in feminist commitments. By embedding reflexivity into the methodology, I hope to generate knowledge that is not only ethically responsible and socially just but also politically relevant and transformative for the academic community and society at large.

### **Qualitative Case Study**

This study examined how Chinese faculty members encounter Canadian HEIs through their perspectives and the meanings they make of such encounters, as well the institutional culture and practices that shaped their experiences. The epistemic and theoretical lenses I employed and research questions I asked align with the qualitative paradigm, which strives to provide nuanced understanding, thick description, and situated accounts of social problems (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Although the term qualitative is used to encompass a wide range of research designs and practices, Denzin and Lincoln’s (2018) definition captures its essence as situatedness, materiality, emphasis on human experiences and meaning making, and the transformative goal of critical qualitative research:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. [It] consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. [...] This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of

the meanings people bring to them. (p. 43)

Given that the study centred on the lives and emotions of Chinese faculty members, attempting to quantify their intersectional identities, lived realities, and affective experiences would be both impractical and counterproductive. A qualitative approach is appropriate to serve the research objective in challenging dominant neoliberal narratives of equality and illuminating the complexities and nuances of Chinese academics' experiences. Intersectional feminist studies and CRT prioritize understanding the experiences of marginalized social groups, shedding light on how structural forces intertwine and shape experiences and identities. This involves an inductive, interpretative, open-ended inquiry that draws on the life stories, feelings, and interpretations of individuals to comprehend how they construct their worlds and attribute meaning to their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 6). The focus on complexity central to intersectional studies is (McCall, 2005) aligns with the goal of qualitative research, which is to explore complex human and social dynamics (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The intricacies of social positionality, relationality, embodiment, affect, and power dynamics can be explored effectively using a qualitative interpretative paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2018; Smith, 1990, 2005).

Grounded in the critical qualitative paradigm, the study focused on embodiment and affect to push back the persistent mind/body reason/emotion binaries and the “gold standard” of “detachment, linearity, and generalizability” in determining the legitimacy of intellectual work (Gonzales, 2018, p. 681). This emphasis is crucial in advocating for critical inquiry in educational and social justice-oriented research, where objective empiricism is still wrongly perceived as superior (Anyon, 2009). Oakley (2000) observed a “gendering of methodology”, wherein “experimental methods are seen as the most quantitative and ‘hard’, with qualitative methods ‘soft’ and thus feminine” (p. 3). Denzin and Lincoln (2018) reaffirmed the ongoing “paradigm war” in global academia, as positivist ideologies continue to dominate critical social research, imposing a rigid standard that undermines critical qualitative studies.

Feminist scholars have long grappled with the politics of methodology, evidence, and criteria for legitimate data, as qualitative approaches are often dismissed for lacking scientific rigor or intelligibility under positivist scrutiny (Gonzales, 2018; Lather, 2013; St. Pierre, 1997).

The study had a dual objective: to delve into the lived and affective experiences of Chinese faculty members working in Canadian HEIs, and to scrutinize social structures, norms, and institutional mechanisms and practices Canadian HEIs holds toward Chinese faculty members. In essence, it explored the personal (Chinese faculty members' experiences in today's Canadian HE), and through it, the political (factors that underlie their perceptions and emotions). These objectives are in line with the case study design, which entails a holistic in-depth examination, often through probing "how" and "why" questions, of a particular social phenomenon's intricacies and complexities from various perspectives within a contemporary real-life context (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009, 2018). To further explain, Creswell and Poth (2018) defined case study research methodology:

as a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case themes. (p. 153)

Characterized by its intensive detailed investigation of socially located specificities, "case studies have become important methodological tools for the specific work of feminist and critical race philosophers" (Grasswick & McHugh, 2021, p. 2), especially through engaging with cases that focuses on the experiences of marginalized and oppressed peoples. Feminist epistemology and theories informed the entire research process of this study, including the selection of the case, data collection, and interpretation. In what follows, I address two important aspects of my case study research design: case making and data collection.

"The single most defining characteristic of case study research lies in delimiting the object of study: the case" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 38). A crucial step of planning a case study is to make "a choice of what is to be studied" (Stake, 2005, p. 443), the object of study

and unit of analysis, instead of the topic or focus of the study that usually characterize other qualitative research approaches. Considering my study's goal, which was to problematize the structural, the political, and the cultural through the daily, the individual, and the local, I perceived both Chinese faculty members' experiences and Canadian HEI as the objects of inquiry. Therefore, I conducted a multi-case study, grounding my interrogation of institutional and structural power in the in-depth examination of individuals' lived and emotional experiences. This multi-case approach allowed thick descriptions and nuanced understanding of the experiences of Chinese faculty members, probing into the intersectional dynamics of racism, colonialism, and neoliberalism as experienced by each participant. Through cross-analysis by comparing and contrasting the experiences, exploring common themes and intersectional differences, and situating different participants' experiences within the broader institutional context, I conducted analyses of systemic and structural patterns.

### **Data Collection Methods**

While there is variability in how scholars describe and implement the case study approach (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Schwandt & Gates, 2018), there is a consensus that case studies employ a diverse array of data collection and interpretation practices (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2018). Yin (2009) brings out the importance of interviews as a primary source of data for case studies:

For case studies, “listening” means receiving information through multiple modalities—for example, making keen observations or sensing what might be going on [...] As an interviewee recounts an incident, a good listener hears the exact words used by the interviewee (sometimes, the terminology reflects an important perspective), captures the mood and affective components, understands the context from which the interviewee is perceiving the world, and infers the meaning intended by the interviewee. (p. 70)

Meaningful interviews involve capturing textual data and being paying attention to linguistic, affective, and cultural dimensions of communication (Yin, 2009). This entails paying close attention to body language, implicit meanings, visual cues, intuitive perceptions, and the larger social structural contexts in which the interactions take place. In this sense, qualitative

interviews are inherently multimodal, incorporating a variety of data collection techniques like research memos, storytelling, observation, and discourse analysis (Yin, 2009, 2018). This enriches research data, deepens the inquiry, and informs data analysis approaches. To improve my data collection and interpretation, I drew methodological inspirations from a variety of qualitative research designs, particularly from ethnomethodology (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2009, 2018).

To explore the depth and complexity of Chinese faculty members' experiences and knowledges, the study collected data through one-on-one interviews with purposefully selected Chinese-identifying individuals who have been employed by Canadian universities or colleges for at least two years in the past decade. Recruitment was conducted through: 1. Purposeful sampling by contacting faculty members potentially of Chinese descent through faculty information publicly available on university websites. Emails asking about their eligibility and interest were sent to these potential participants. 2. Snowball sampling by seeking referrals from existing participants. At the end of each interview, I asked the participant to share the information about the study and my contact with people they know that might be interested in participating. Once potential participants contacted me, I sent them the consent form after which we agreed on a suitable time for the interviews.

The majority of interviews (24) were conducted online via Zoom, and two were in-person. Each interview lasted 1-2 hours. Interviews for qualitative case studies and resembled guided conversations rather than structured queries. Like Yin (2009) recommended, although pursuing a consistent line of inquiry, my actual stream of questions in the interview were fluid rather than rigid (Yin, 2009, p. 106). Interviews in this study were all semi-structured and organic, designed to promote a relaxed and open atmosphere as well as a natural conversational flow. I developed relevant interview questions designed to answer the research questions by consulting existing literature and considering the current context. These

questions were adapted and flexibly incorporated into the interviews to allow dynamic engagement with participants and addressing emergent themes. Participants were given the choice to use Chinese Mandarin, English, or both during the interviews, to foster comfort. Fourteen (14) interviews were done mostly in Chinese, while 12 were mostly in English.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed manually. Zoom interviews were video recorded. Although participants were given the option to switch their cameras off, most of them (22) chose to have the camera on. In-person interviews were audio recorded. In line with Yin's (2009) recommendation regarding the multimodality of research data, I tried to capture the nuanced aspects of interview data through deliberate observation. Following each interview, I wrote detailed research notes documenting my reflections and areas worthy of analytical attention, especially non-verbal cues. Conversations in Chinese were transcribed in Chinese and then translated into English by the researcher. The transcriptions and research notes constituted textual data and went through iterations of thematic coding to identify patterns, commonalities, and exceptions. Throughout the analysis, I carefully examined and revisited both textual data and the recordings. The video/audio data enhanced this process by informing affective coding and providing contextualization.

For this study, it is crucial to develop an ethical, reciprocal, and equitable feminist interview approach (Edwards & Mauthner, 2012). Through active listening, empathy, and validation, I tried to create a safe, radically open interview space where participants could discuss topics that are often ignored, have difficult conversations, and relive potentially complex or painful experiences. Radical openness means being open about my experiences, positionalities, political beliefs, and critical dedication to combating injustice. It also means vulnerability and candidness, the willingness to share my experiences of difficulties, racial injuries, and challenging emotions with research participants. By doing so, I made room for myself and participants to openly express our authentic feelings and experiences and exercise

resistance against dominant power structures, in terms of the researcher-researched duality, as well as existing racial dynamics (Doucet & Mauthner, 2008; Jenkins et al., 2019).

Non-hierarchical, participatory interview has been widely recognized as a key feminist research practice (Buch & Staller, 2013). To achieve this, feminist researchers must acknowledge and address the fluid and intersectional nature of power dynamics between the interviewer and the interviewee (Ackerly & True, 2020; Doucet & Mauthner, 2008).

Reynolds (2002) recounts her experience as a Black woman interviewing Black women:

Where the researcher and research participant share the same racial and gender position, [...] power between the two groups is primarily negotiated through other facts such as social class and age difference. This [...] suggests that power in social research is not a fixed and unitary construct, exercised by the researcher over the research participant. Instead, power is multifaceted, relational and interactional and is constantly shifting and renegotiating itself between the researcher and the research participant according to differing contexts and their differing structural locations. (pp. 307-308)

To ensure a collaborative and non-hierarchical dynamic between the researcher and participants (Buch & Staller, 2014; Oakley, 1981), I valued participants' diverse perspectives and experiences, while actively working to mitigate power imbalances that may arise, considering the researcher has the power to set the agenda and provide interpretation, and the participants, as faculty members, are in a position of power vis-à-vis the researcher, a doctoral student. I also kept in mind that while commonalities like ethnicity, language, and educational background might have facilitated rapport between participants and myself, the researcher, socioeconomic status, gender identity, and age differences required critical acknowledgment and negotiation. Navigating the complexities of identity and power inherent in the research relationship, particularly during interviews, both the participants and the researcher inevitably presented and performed their identities to align with societal norms and expectations. It has been essential to understand, and consider as a crucial part of research data, how these complexities and the performativity of identities influence the verbal and affective interactions during the interview process, as well as the types of conversations that were enabled or constrained as a result. I will reflect further on this in the concluding chapter.

## Research Participants

In total, 26 academics who have been employed in Canadian higher education institutions participated in this study. All participants identify as Chinese, with diverse cultural heritage from across East and Southeast Asia. Some had lived in Asia (including Hong Kong, Mainland China, Singapore, Taiwan, and Vietnam) before immigrating to North America at different stages of their lives. Some were born and raised in Canada and/or the U.S. Linguistically, some participants are bilingual or multilingual, speaking Mandarin and/or Cantonese in addition to English, while others use English as their primary language. They work(ed) in higher education institutions across multiple Canadian provinces, including Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Newfoundland and Labrador, Ontario, and Quebec, holding faculty positions with diverse teaching, research, and leadership responsibilities. Many had experiences working in different Canadian tertiary institutions. Except for one individual who left Canada for academic career elsewhere not long before the interview, and one participant who left their academic job but remained connected to the Canadian academic community through their practice and activism, all participants were working in Canadian academic institutions at the time when the interviews happened.

The table below provides information about participants including their preferred pronouns, academic fields, and career stages. The majority of participants (19) identified as women, 7 identified as men. Seventeen (17) participants are in Social Sciences, 6 in STEMM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, and Medical Sciences), 3 in Arts and Humanities, with 15 participants in early career stages (pre-tenure faculty, including assistant professors, adjunct faculty members), and 10 mid-career or beyond (associate professors, tenured lecturers or instructors, full professors, and those in senior leadership positions).

### Table 1

*Overview of research participants*

Name	Pronouns	Academic Field	Position
Amy	She	Social Sciences	Associate Professor
Brian	He	Social Sciences	Professor
Cheng	He	STEMM	Assistant Professor
Diane	She	Social Sciences	Lecturer
Eric	He	Social Sciences	Assistant Professor
Fei	She	Social Sciences	Professor
Guo	He	STEMM	Lecturer
Hao	He	Arts and Humanities	Lecturer
Ivy	She	Arts and Humanities	Associate Professor
Jiao	She	Social Sciences	Associate Professor
Kwan	He	STEMM	Professor
Leah	She	Social Sciences	Assistant Professor
May	She	Social Sciences	Assistant Professor
Nuo	She	Social Sciences	Assistant Professor
Olivia	She	Arts and Humanities	Associate Professor
Ping	She	STEMM	Professor
Qian	She	Social Sciences	Assistant Professor
Rui	She	STEMM	Senior Instructor
Sophie	She	Social Sciences	Assistant Professor
Tian	She	Social Sciences	Assistant Professor
Ursula	She	Arts and Humanities	Associate Professor
Vivian	She	Social Sciences	Lecturer
Wei	She	STEMM	Professor
Xin	She	Social Sciences	Assistant Professor
Yuan	She	Arts and Humanities	Associate Professor
Zhe	He	Social Sciences	Lecturer

### **Feminist Critical Analysis**

Data analysis is complex and multi-layered in a qualitative case study informed by feminist critical institutional study, affect theory, and intersectionality. With its emphasis on the embodied and emotional experiences, affect theory (Ahmed, 2010, 2014, 2017; Berlant, 2011; Cvetkovich, 2012) converges with feminist critical institutional study, which examines how oppressive systems are interconnected to reveal power dynamics in institutions (Ahmed, 2006, 2007a, 2007b, 2012; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Collins & Bilge, 2016). In line with the critical qualitative paradigm, I conducted an interpretative thematic analysis of the research data through close reading, iterative thematic coding, and cross case examination

(Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Boyatzis, 1998).

The main analytical framework in this study is the intersection of race and gender, concepts that hold ontological and conceptual significance. Critical and feminist scholars have conceptualized race and gender as socially constructed, performative, and fluid (Butler, 2004; Crenshaw, 2019; Chang, 1993). Building upon intersectional feminism (Collins, 2001, 2016; Crenshaw 1989, 1991) and Peterson's (2005) analytical framing of gender, I take on gender as an organizing principle that permeates various forms of domination and shapes social consciousness and realities. Gender "structures and differentially valorizes masculinized and feminized identities, desires, expectations, knowledges, skills, [...] activities and experiences" (Peterson, 2005, p. 500), creating and legitimizing hierarchical binaries such as masculine/feminine, white/racialized, mind/body, and reason/emotion. Social categories and forms of subjugation, including race, class, and (dis)ability, are inherently gendered and interconnected. This framework helped me probe into "the ways in which gender is understood and made meaningful in social life, as well as the ways that gender is related to the distribution of power and resources" (Buch & Staller, 2014, p.107).

Analytically, gender operates as a value system that assigns meanings to everything through hierarchical binaries. This gendered value system constructs and intersects with other social categories, including race and class, perpetuating marginalization and discrimination (Buch & Staller, 2014; Butler, 2004). In an empirical sense, such a gendered racialized value system, entrenched in social structures, has tangible effects on the material lives of social groups. Those perceived as feminine, other, and inferior, are often marginalized, discriminated, and confined in accessing resources and opportunities (Cohn, 2013). Viewing gender from the perspectives of social construction (analytical) and production (empirical) and recognizing the discursive construction and interwoven nature of social markers deepens the intersectional perspective (Collins, 2019). These constructs are dynamic and context-

specific, yet interconnected under the dominant Eurocentric androcentric social structure, which bell hooks termed “white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” (1994a, p. 248; 2004, p. 17). As previously discussed, the racialization of Chinese individuals in Western contexts is linked to gender dynamics, underscoring the analytical significance of gender in this study.

Feminist scholars have delved into the complexities of intersectionality and the challenges it poses to researchers, due to the problematic nature of social categories and the lack of established methodologies for intersectional studies (McCall, 2005; Nash, 2008; Shields, 2008). This study tried to avoid the trap of naturalizing essentialist identity categories and perpetuating normative constructs (Sedgwick, 1990) while conducting intersectional analyses. Instead, the analysis “provisionally adopt[ed] existing analytical categories to document relationships of inequality among social groups and changing configurations of inequality along multiple and conflicting dimensions” (McCall, 2005, p. 1773). This approach entails acknowledging identities as both personal and social, as well as fluid and contingent (Nash, 2008), and examining the changing meanings and boundaries of discursive social markers (McCall, 2005). I try to make sense of various individual narratives by contextualizing the personal in the structural and critically incorporating my reflections and embodied knowledge into the interpretations. I employed dynamic centring and relational thinking (Collins, 2008) by situating multiple social categories at the core of analysis to examine how these categories influence one another to form interconnected systems of power. This involved placing individual experiences within the current zeitgeist and socio-geopolitical circumstances, to address the complexity of cases (Stake, 2005).

The elusiveness and richness of affect complicated data analysis and interpretation. This called for combining ethnomethodological approaches. In feminist and queer theories, affect is a complex collection of corporeal sensations and psychological experiences, include moods, emotions, motivations, and attachments, that are woven into the fabric of everyday

life (Ahmed, 2012; Berlant, 2010; Cvetkovich, 2012). By exploring the emotional and embodied aspects of human existence, a comprehensive understanding of how social structures, norms, and individual subjectivities interact to influence the affective landscapes of Chinese academics was made possible. Recognizing that affective experiences link the individual to broader institutional dynamics, I drew upon Madison's (2019) critical ethnographic framework that situates feelings, senses, and physicality within their social, historical, local, and relational contexts. "The various relations and locations of where and how we belong with and to others define our being, i.e., how we think, feel, and see the world around us as well as the orientation of our bodies, gestures, and musculature" (Madison, 2019, p. 8).

Adopting an auto-ethnographic approach further enabled me to reflexively engage with affective data through my own lived experiences and experiences conducting the research, which provided insights into the intersubjective dimensions of affect. Stanley and Wise (1990) advocated recognizing emotion as an important research experience, and the significance of intellectual autobiography of researchers as it brings values and particular dispositions to the research experience. Harding (2018) also underscored that "[d]ata analysis required tracking how affect influenced the interviews through understanding the form of the conversation, the content of the dialogue and the researcher's own emotional memory of the event" (p. 140). I drew on my experiences as a Chinese woman in Canada and Canadian higher education as a rich source of knowledge informing affective analysis. In conclusion, using analytical tools from ethnographic approaches, this study was able to explore how institutions and societal forces shape marginalized everyday lives, reveal hidden power dynamics and ideological foundations, and ground these understandings in my own knowledges and experiences. These analytical tools provided a comprehensive framework for dissecting the interplay of identity, power, and affect in the institutional lives of Chinese

academics. In what follows, I organize and analyze research findings in three main themes corresponding to the research questions.

## **Chapter 4: Encountering the Institutional: Marginalization and Othering**

This chapter explores how racialized othering functions on both institutional and interpersonal levels by examining the social and structural positioning of Chinese faculty members in Canadian higher education institutions. The chapter begins by analyzing institutional whiteness, masculinity and patriarchal dominance that defines the North American academic institutional environment, to show how the marginalization of Chinese faculty members are produced and maintained through underrepresentation and limited institutional commitment to equity. The chapter then explores two prevalent stereotypical and racialized narratives that shape Chinese faculty's experiences: the perpetual foreigner stereotype that positions them as forever outsiders through various forms of racial othering and aggression, and the model minority myth that both elevate and constrain Chinese faculty within narrow racialized expectations. These themes shed light on the various ways that Chinese faculty members experience and resist racialized marginalization and provide a foundation for further comprehending their personal and professional experiences in Canada.

### **Institutional Whiteness and Patriarchy**

Participants consistently spoke of racial homogeneity and symbolic equity and diversity in their workplaces. Although faculty ethnic composition differed by institution and discipline, the majority of participants reported feeling excluded and facing difficulties as they work in white, male-dominant environments. Institutional whiteness and masculinity is reflected not only in numerical representation but also in institutional structure, culture, and norms (Henry et al. (2012)). Participants also noted a discrepancy whereby greater representation did not result in genuine inclusion in institutional structure and culture, even for institutions with seemingly more diverse faculty or progressive diversity initiatives in terms of policies and promises of improvement. Despite increasing diversity among junior faculty and student populations, white men continued to dominate leadership roles and senior

administrative positions in most higher education institutions, while Chinese and women academics remain disproportionately underrepresented. These findings call attention to important structural barriers to equity, inclusivity, and career advancement for Chinese, women, and racialized faculty members in Canadian academic institutions, which is consistent with previous research on the representation of racialized faculty members (Henry, Choi, & Kobayashi, 2012; Henry, Kobayashi, & Choi, 2017c; Henry & Kobayashi, 2017).

### *Underrepresentation of Racialized and Women Faculty*

In line with extant research about the underrepresentation of racialized and women faculty members in Canadian HE (see James, 2012; Henry & Tator, 2012), participants in this study described their academic working environments as overwhelmingly white and/or man. Contrary to the general perception that Asians are overrepresented in academia, being the only (or the first) non-white individual, the only Asian, or the only woman in their institutions has been a recurring theme. As Fei, a senior faculty member in social sciences, exemplified:

When I first came, I was the only non-white, non-native speaking faculty. [...] [My colleagues] were almost purely white, and mostly local. So, you don't see much diversity here. I was the first one. And yes, I encountered, I'd say, racism, or some attitude.

Same remarks were made by participants Cheng, Qian, Zhe, and Guo, who started their academic careers in the past three years, and all found themselves as the only Chinese faculty members in their respective faculties.

Institutional whiteness (Ahmed, 2012, 2017) extends beyond racial dimensions, with significant gender disparities particularly pronounced in certain fields. Xin, an early career social science faculty, described her field as “male dominated, majority white,” where retaining women faculty has been challenging. Xin added that: “There is really not that many women present. I am the only woman in my department. I heard before I joined, there were two other women faculty members, but they left around the same time.” Senior STEM faculty member Ping further emphasized that the underrepresentation of women is not only

prevalent in her institution but also in the entire academic field:

There are very few women faculty in [my field]. It is a de facto male dominated field [...] I was at a national meeting for [academic leaders] in [STEMM]; I only saw about three, four women. Percentage wise, it's even lower. Overall, among faculty members, even when you look at assistant faculty level, you would not see that many women.

Participants provided nuanced accounts of exclusion shaped by race, and gender, as well as nativist xenophobia, suggesting the complex, intersectional nature of marginalization in academia. Wei, a senior STEMM faculty member, echoed Fei's experience of being not just the only Chinese and only racialized individual, but also as she described, the only "outsider" in their academic institutions. Wei's previous workplace was not just racially homogeneous but also culturally insular, confronting her with discrimination and ostracization:

There were two challenges. One was visibly I look like a minority. I was treated as such. And then also, it was very, how should I say it, culturally insulated. So, for example, all the faculty members of that particular department were graduates of that program. [...] There was a real discrimination against not just those from non-Western countries but also [other areas of] Canada. And I came from [another part of] Canada. So, it was like, you are an outsider. [...] if you're not from here, we don't trust you and you're not one of us. So I had to fight against many, many levels of discrimination.

Akin to Wei and Fei, Kwan had a profound sense of alienation in an institution that perpetuates whiteness through a habit of inner-circle recruitment. He observed: "[University A] is an interesting place. The graduates from [here] still maintain a tight-knit network. They like to hire their own graduates, many from local communities. They are still very much like an old boys' club." As a Chinese man who has worked at this institution for an extended period, Kwan was still excluded from this "old boys' club," a network that embodies the intersection racial, cultural, linguistic, and nativist marginalization (Huber, 2011).

The underrepresentation of women and Chinese faculty, according to several participants, has been a pattern across multiple academic fields over an extended period. When asked if there are Asian or Chinese faculty in her department, Yuan, a mid-career faculty in arts and humanities, reflected on the persistent whiteness in her discipline:

No, there really aren't any. And there haven't been since I was a student. My

undergraduate and graduate [...] I would be either the only Chinese person or maybe one of two. And that was my norm. And the majority of students were white.

Vivian, an early-career academic in the social sciences, also emphasized a consistent low representation of Chinese and Asian individuals in her academic field:

There's just one other Chinese faculty member. [...] The percentage of Chinese people in the field is already quite small. It had been so since when I was a student. So it wasn't a surprise. It was never a surprise.

Similar experiences were shared by Rui, an early-career STEMM faculty, who notes: "There aren't many [racialized or Asian faculty] Among my colleagues, there is only one other Chinese. It's still mostly white, but it's getting more diverse." Although equity cannot be measured only by numbers, the above accounts about the underrepresentation of racialized and women faculty members across time, location, and academic discipline point to the persistence of eurocentrism and androcentrism in Canadian institutions of higher learning.

### *Implications on Marginalized Academics*

The underrepresentation of racialized and women scholars in academia has significant consequences on their mentorship, leadership opportunities, and professional development, particularly for faculty and students who are racialized and women (Carter-Sowell et al., 2019; Turner et al., 2008). The absence of relatable role models and culturally sensitive mentorship creates barriers to navigating white-dominant academia. Sophie, an early-career faculty member in social sciences, have always faced challenges in a field with minimal diversity and absence of mentors who share her experiences and cultural background:

There's not as many people who I can look to, who have done this path before me [...] So it's quite challenging, I think, navigating the tenure track and like, understanding that there are a lot of structural barriers to succeeding in this industry.

Ping, who has rich experience mentoring women academics, has witnessed how the scarcity of women in leadership discourages many from pursuing leadership positions:

Many women hesitate because they lack role models. There just aren't enough female deans, research chairs, or other senior figures. Without examples to follow, when the opportunity arises, they often question whether they should step into leadership. I have

many female colleagues [across different Canadian universities] who, as assistant or associate professors, have been encouraged to take on department chair roles, but they hesitated and refused.

The lack of Chinese faculty members also affects students by shaping their sense of belonging and professional aspirations. Vivian recalled her own experiences as a student to demonstrate the significance of having Chinese faculty members to look up to:

When I was in school, both undergrad and grad school, there weren't a lot of Chinese faculty or Chinese women faculty. I don't think I ever had a single Chinese woman faculty member. And there were very few Chinese in general. I remember gravitating towards the Chinese faculty members, so I think that experience shaped me.

These accounts illustrate how the structural underrepresentation and un-representation of racialized, Chinese, and women scholars perpetuates institutional whiteness. Without sufficient mentorship and leadership, racialized and women academics face additional hurdles in career advancement, and academic institutions and fields that already have limited diversity further fail to break and change structurally entrenched patterns of exclusion.

In the context of under/un-representation, participants described being reduced to tokens of institutional diversity. Like Fei, who came to symbolize the diversity of her faculty, Diane's experience as the only racialized faculty in her previous organization illustrates the dynamic of being singled out based on her race: "I heard that during orientation, students would ask, 'What's the diversity of your faculty like?' the leadership would respond, 'Oh, we have Dr. [Diane]. We have one. She's Chinese, and she's great!' I was a token, the representation." This tokenization represents a mechanism of microaggression (Nguyen et al., 2024; Sue et al., 2007) and institutional self-congratulation that negates the individual professional identity and academic contributions of racialized faculty members.

Furthermore, participants reported encountering more racialized aggression and discrimination working in white dominant contexts, especially with student bodies that are predominately white. Ursula attributed her encounters with overt racism from students to the lack of diversity in students' educational experience:

These kids grew up in a completely white environment. I'm probably the first Chinese professor they had ever had. They grew up in the suburbs, went to high schools where their teachers and classmates were all white. So, for many of them, I'm also their first racialized professor.

Having worked in different institutions, Leah observed contrasting student reception in different contexts, and how regional demographic patterns shaped her experiences:

My experience in [Province X, where I taught very diverse students] was completely different from my current experience here in [Province Y, where the majority of students are white and local]. For example, when I taught in [Province X], if, at the end of a semester, I felt I had done okay, got along with students well, and could give myself an 80%, that would be roughly the score I receive for student evaluation. But in [Province Y], I put a lot of effort into my teaching, and in terms of my interactions with students, I did my best to accommodate them. [...] I tried my best, you know... At the end of the year, I felt like I had performed well enough, but the grade I received was below average. When I saw the evaluation, I was shocked; it was completely different from what I had expected. [...] this difference really surprised me.

Kwan echoed that teaching experiences and feedback tend to be more positive with diverse students, and students from predominantly white backgrounds are less cooperative:

There have been more "problems" with undergrads than postgraduate students. [...] A lot of undergrads are quite homogeneous, growing up in a close community, not having much contact with us [racialized/Chinese persons]. I actually did find that the feedback from the undergrads I got when I worked in [University A] was much better. Because they live in big city. They've seen us, they know what we are. A lot of them are also from minority roots.

The lack of racial diversity in educational and social spaces (re)creates unfamiliarity and hostility toward racialized individuals, especially in positions of authority, and fosters white ignorance that result in resistance when students encounter Chinese faculty. This demonstrates how institutional whiteness (re)produces conditions where Chinese faculty face additional challenges navigating student resistance that stems not from their teaching ability but from their racial identity and differences. Ford (2011) contended that

White students often (unknowingly) come to college with a privileged White, male-centered, heteronormative worldview; in this worldview, White men are constructed as rational and objective conveyors of knowledge. Women of Colour faculty, unfamiliar bodies within the academy, thus come to physically, behaviorally, and intellectually represent a raced and gendered "other" (p. 447).

For Chinese faculty members whose racialization is already always gendered, their bodies,

and therefore legitimacy, are also constantly under scrutiny. I will return to the interplay between Chinese faculty members' embodied differences and contestation of authority and validity in Chapter 5.

### ***Limited Institutional Diversity Progress***

Participants recognized progress in terms of representation and institutional diversity discourses, but stressed the limitation and constraints of institutional transformation. The increase in diversity has been largely confined to junior faculty ranks, while leadership structures remain overwhelmingly white. Olivia, a mid-career faculty in arts and humanities, reiterated the gap between diversity initiatives and meaningful structural change by contrasting increased institutional efforts and persistent whiteness in her organization:

I'm pretty sure I was the first Asian in the department when I took the job there. [...] In our faculty, there have been definite pushes to try to diversify. But those diversification efforts have focused specifically on Indigenous and Black recruitment. At our university, we have a lot of East Asian students, and South Asian students as well, international students in particular. [...] There's a heavy presence of East Asians on campus, but mainly in the STEM fields. Much less so in the arts. So have I noticed increased diversity? I would say in our department and my classes, it's been about the same. Yeah. And I would say that [my faculty] is overwhelmingly white and kind of not that diverse.

Vivian, as the only Chinese faculty member at her department, acknowledged comparable EDI initiatives, which, while not altering the white majority, have contributed to what she believed to be a relatively more diverse faculty composition:

As for other ethnicities [than Chinese], I think our program actually has a relatively good range of diversity. White faculty are probably still the majority, but if you were to compare institutions, I feel like ours might actually have slightly more diverse representation. The institution itself has a strong emphasis on diversity and inclusion, which might contribute to that.

Kwan pointed out a discrepancy between the increasingly diverse student body in STEM and the comparatively static faculty demographics: "Nowadays, [the student body is] actually dominated by Asian and students of colour, yet most of the faculty members are still white, but I have been seeing a little more diversity." Similarly, Yuan observed that albeit the minor yet noticeable diversification of students in her field, the majority of full-time

faculty members remained overwhelmingly white:

I notice in my own classrooms, there might be a little bit more diverse, but not that much more. [...] [In my department] there are a few people of color, they're not Chinese, but there are a few people of color who are sessional instructors or like lecturers. But in terms of people who are full-time permanent, it's pretty narrow.

Echoing several other participants, Diane insightfully critiqued the institutional celebration of superficial diversity in representation while racialized and Indigenous faculty members are represented but not empowered: ““Oh yeah, look at how diverse we are. Look at all these Asian and Black and Indigenous [faculty]!’ But they’re not leaders. They’re not high up, that they don’t have decision-making power.” Senior social science faculty member Brian also observed a significant increase in Chinese and women faculty representation and overall diversity among faculty and students in his faculty, but noted that leadership and senior positions continued to be exclusively white and male:

When I joined this school there was only one Chinese faculty member. [...] Back then, the faculty was almost entirely white, and when I walked into a classroom, the majority of students were also white. So, I felt my difference. But now, there are more than ten Chinese professors out of over a hundred. That’s a huge increase compared to when there was only one or two of us. Students have changed too. When I first arrived, most of undergraduate students were white. But now, many of them are second-generation Chinese students, and the classroom has become much more diverse. [...] However, on higher level, things did not change. I am the only Chinese, and the only Asian faculty in leadership. [...] The majority of full professors are men. But when you look at associate professors, there are relatively more women. For assistant professors, [my school] has been prioritizing EDI in recent years, so they have recruited a lot of female faculty. So, among assistant professors, women make up the largest part.

These observations echo existing studies that have revealed both the underrepresentation and marginalization of racialized, Indigenous, and women academics in Canadian academia (Henry et al., 2012, 2017b, 2017c; Ramos & Li, 2017). The persistence of institutional whiteness suggests that institutional EDI efforts have operated as symbolic gestures that failed to bring about substantive transformations and reproduced the status quo. Hao and Ursula in arts and humanities both said that although relatively diverse, their organizations have maintained white dominance through administrative hierarchies. Early career faculty

Hao described, “we have more Asian than white faculty, and a balanced gender ratio, but our admins, like the dean, are white. We have some chairs who are Chinese or Asian, but the higher up you go, it’s mostly white.” Ursula’s comments further revealed how power remains concentrated and reproduced through institutional networks of whiteness:

My academic discipline [...] is inherently diverse, and my department is also quite liberal and diverse. However, my institution is not. The student population is predominantly white, and the leadership and admin are largely local and white. This contrast definitely shapes the perspectives and interactions within the institution.

Tian, an early career social science faculty, shared her view that surface-level diversity does not equate meaningful inclusivity. Using her university as an example, she explained that representation can obscure long-standing systems of marginalization:

We have a lot of Asian professors, and quite a handful Chinese faculty members. We have the recent batch of hire, there was a black scholar initiative. So we have a lot of black scholars. From the surface, we’re very diverse. [But] no, not inclusive at all. [...] As I get to know our staff members—our faculty staff is mostly women—they told me that some faculty would openly comment, “Staff members are just window curtains. You’re just there to look pretty. You don’t really serve any functions.” So it makes me feel like this whole school is like 20 years behind on all these conversations and discourses [about EDI]. At least other universities are like, even if they’re sexist, or racist, at least people know to hide it. Here, there’re incidents where it’s very blatant. Very blatant sexism, very blatant racism that makes me feel really icky.

While this study, in line with existing research, has established the persistent underrepresentation of racialized and women faculty members, participants’ experiences reveal the politics of representation and the mechanism of institutional power. When marginalized groups begin to achieve increased representation, institutional mechanisms work to maintain existing hierarchical structures. Representation and inclusion are contested sites, and more diversity does not necessarily mean more equity and inclusion. As Ahmed (2012) points out, including racialized individuals and diversity workers in colonial institutions that are unwilling to change often serves to maintain existing racist structures. Olivia’s perspective on gender representation illustrates how progressive changes trigger institutional recalibration:

Actually, funny enough, we have the opposite problem in my field. It's become quite feminized and most of our students now are female. So, we actually, you know, we're quite aware of the fact that... Well, how can I say? So, our hiring committees are predominantly female, for example. And in our statements, we have to make about that, we actually have to show that we're making sure that we include male candidates as well in our faculty searches. So, it's kind of a problem. I mean, we're fine. We're pretty balanced right now. But we are aware, that our field is becoming, has become quite feminized, and we know that when that happens, the field is devalued.

Rui echoed this observation of institutional anxiety when transformation occurs, and referred to male faculty as a "protected species" in her field to show how institutional efforts actively recruit men due to the perceived overrepresentation of women. Comparably, Ping jokingly remarked, "Unfortunately, white people in my field are almost becoming minorities. They need protection and preservation because they are so rare. I am chairing search committees, and we try, we just cannot find white male candidates." Even though Jiao, a mid-career social sciences faculty member, described her faculty as having "a good balance" in terms of gender representation, she observed different treatment: "in this workplace, male faculty members are better treated than female faculty members. [...] It is about what kind of requests got responded, and how they were responded. I do see the gender differences with regard to leadership responses." These comments reveal a contradiction in institutional diversity efforts. While most academic fields remain predominantly white and/or man, any perceived "overrepresentation" of women or racialized individuals quickly becomes a site of concern or moral panic, reinforcing entrenched hierarchies.

This section establishes the context characterized by a pervasive and persistent pattern of institutional whiteness and the systemic marginalization of Chinese and women faculty across various academic disciplines. In the following discussion, I will examine the multifaceted challenges they face in white- and male-dominated Western academia, aiming to deepen the understanding of the specific forms of discrimination and exclusion captured by AsianCrit's concept of Asianization (Iftikar & Museus, 2018; Museus, 2013).

### **The Perpetual Foreigner: Discrimination and Dehumanization**

Although previous research has argued that Asian individuals are perceived as perpetual foreigners in Western societies, regardless of their immigration status or nationality (Kawai, 2005; Iftikar and Museus, 2018; Tuan, 1998; Wu, 2002), little academic attention has been devoted to understanding the lived and emotional experiences of Chinese scholars navigating Western academic environments while being perceived as the other. Participants in this study articulated various encounters with systemic othering, manifested in pervasive exclusion, microaggressions, and the problematic conflation of their individual and cultural identity, routinely merging their Chinese heritage with an oversimplified representation of China. Chinese academics are frequently reduced to a monolithic categorization that fundamentally denies their personhood and agency, and their perceived differences from whiteness are systematically construed as unwelcome deviations from the normative framework.

#### ***Lumping and Othering***

Faculty members of Chinese descent frequently encounter systematic denial of their Canadian identity, being persistently positioned as perpetual foreigners despite their deep roots in Canadian society. Chinese academics' perceived foreignness is then frequently framed as inferiority, which reflects racial violence rooted in orientalism and imperialism (Said, 1977, 1994). Mid-career arts and humanities faculty Ursula described a particularly painful interaction at a meeting, where she was introduced to a white woman faculty member from another department. She was happy about the opportunity to connect with a peer, only to be met with othering and aggression:

I was glad to have this opportunity. So I introduced myself and my scholarship and asked about her research. She told me she studied feminism, how women are discriminated in [a certain context]. "For example," she said, "in your country, women are discriminated against." She didn't even know where I'm from, but just by looking at me, she assumed that in "my country," there is gender inequality.

Ursula's encounter with the white feminist colleague epitomizes the act of lumping, a form of

othering Asian individuals often confront (Lee et al., 2017). Through merging Ursula's individuality into broad essentializing identities of foreignness and cultural inadequacy, this act of othering automatically assumed Ursula's national and cultural membership and Western cultural superiority. Vivian's and Hao's experiences with cultural representational pressure brought to light another aspect of othering and lumping through tokenization. Vivian, an early-career social science faculty member, reflected on her experiences as an unwilling "spokesperson" for Chinese culture and the draining effects of constantly being labelled as different:

I think it comes up for a lot of minority groups when there are not a lot of people who are of the same ethnicity or cultural background in the faculty. [...] You kind of become the spokesperson of that group. Like, oh, something Chinese comes up. It's like I have the answers. You don't always, right? And on the one hand, like it makes sense. But at the same time, it highlights that difference.

Vivian's uneasiness and heightened sense of alienation were result of objectification and exoticization, which reduces Chineseness into an alien monolith. Her assertion that different worldviews are not inherently strange or inferior, but rather reflect cultural epistemologies that are difficult to translate and should not be judged, provides a counternarrative to racial-cultural stereotyping and white superiority (Museus, 2013). This perspective challenges the normative academic discourse that prioritizes white, Western ways of knowing.

Hao was assigned to teach courses about China, even though this falls outside his primary research interests and thus requires additional time and effort in teaching preparation. The assumption of expertise based on race/ethnicity illustrates the systemic reduction of racialized faculty to cultural tokens and lead to additional workloads for Hao. Yet, although Hao was thought to be knowledgeable about China, his course enrollment suffered from students' different preconceptions about his national belonging and political stance. While non-Chinese students thought he lacked criticality of China, Chinese students feared that he might be too critical and outspoken in opposition of Chinese government:

They [students] have this preconception. Since I'm from China, they assume I'm pro-Communist or I carry a "Chinese supremacy" mindset. They worry that taking my class, they won't have the freedom to openly critique things. [...] I also asked a few Chinese students. They told me that some students hesitate to take my class because they have, kind of, conspiracy-theory-like fears. They hear things about how phones are under surveillance and worry that if they take my class, they'll get into trouble.

Hao's experience illuminates the complex mechanisms of racialization and stereotyping of Chinese faculty members in Western academe. Caught between the essentialized perceptions of their Chineseness and geopolitical anxieties, Chinese academics' professional identity and experiences are mediated through multiple racist institutional structures and inter- and intra-group tensions. This paradoxical positioning further demonstrates the ways in which Chinese academics are forced to negotiate multiple, often contradictory expectations that challenge their professional agency, career advancement, and intellectual autonomy.

Racial othering further works by transforming embodied differences into sites of marginalization within academia. As May, an early-career social science faculty articulated:

I look differently, I speak differently. And all those differences, one part of diversity, puts me on different labels that are continuously of negative effects when it comes to working in higher education. [...] there are many encounters that I have been judged regarding my name, my appearance, and regarding all the things other people think are visible differences. So differences in general presented by racial minorities has been used against them. [...] Once I attended an international conference. While standing in the hallway talking with colleagues, one professor picked up my name tag and read it. My name is a Chinese name. It's difficult [for her] to pronounce. And then she looked at me, "where are you really from?" And then basically like, "who are you?"

May's embodied and linguistic differences are not neutral characteristics but a text to be read, interpreted, and ultimately judged against an implicitly white, Western standard. The difficulty in pronouncing her name also became a performative act of othering that marks her as fundamentally different, alien to the linguistic and cultural landscape of the institution.

May's encounter is a critical revelation of how racialized bodies and names are perpetually marked as unintelligible, illegitimate, and external to the normative academic (Ahmed, 2012).

I will revisit the politics of (mis)naming and embodied differences in the following section.

Kwan described a systemic form of discrimination where his professional qualifications

from his home country were rejected in Canada, creating structural barriers and extra burdens:

When I first immigrated here, there's adaptation problem [...] I had to sit for certain exams to satisfy the Canadian system. That's a real headache. In a way, that's discrimination too, because at that time [my country of origin] was not considered "developed." So the discrimination is that if you have a degree from [my home country], your degree will not be recognized. When I came, I was already a qualified specialist in [STEMM]. But I needed to retrain. That means they're not recognizing what I've learned or my degree, but they do recognize that degree from UK, Australia, South Africa, New Zealand, basically, the white countries, the Anglophone white countries. I found it very Anglocentric. Even Hong Kong, India, because we are the colonies, they don't recognize us. You can see that the reason is definitely they think that, oh, you don't look like us.

Kwan identified how Canadian academic, professional, and immigration systems perpetuate colonial power structures by identifying a racial and colonial hierarchy that is ingrained in the institutional practices of credential recognition. The us-other binary became the basis of structural exclusion through classification of what counts as legitimate education and who are the credible knowledge holders. In this way, institutional policies that systematically devalue non-Western knowledges serve as important tools for racial exclusion and epistemic violence (Dotson, 2011), and Chinese bodies are phenotypically racialized as perpetually foreign, thus doubtful and inferior.

Humanities professor Ivy further articulates the paradoxical expectations placed on Chinese faculty in Canadian academia. Whereas assimilation and conformation to Canadian social norms are demanded, they are denied meaningful social membership:

I feel like in Canada, [...] people want you to assimilate to the extent that they want you not to be disrespectful, they want you to be polite. But they also don't want you to assimilate.... Like, they don't want you to marry their children or teach their children or, you know, become their friend or go to the cottage with them. [...] They just want us to be here and live our own separate lives. Like, they want us to live in this little ghetto, and they'll allow us to have T&T [large Chinese grocery store chain] and some restaurants.

The "little ghetto" Ivy described serves as a metaphor for the experiences of Chinese and otherwise racialized faculty members who are accepted only if they conform to dominant

norms, while being relegated to marginalized racial spaces and subjected to constant scrutiny (Ahmed, 2012). This dynamic reinforces Chinese academics' "perpetual foreigner" status, positioning them as strangers and outsiders regardless of their contributions to Canadian society or their efforts to integrate, and upholds whiteness as the norm. Full acceptance and belonging thus remains perpetually out of reach for Chinese individuals, even if they perform the model minority to perfection and meet all professional standards and social expectations. The conditional acceptance and systemic exclusion in Canadian social and institutional structures work to maintain racial hierarchies by allowing surface-level inclusion while preventing questions to the status quo.

Interestingly, Eric, an early-career social science faculty member and second-generation Canadian, exemplifies the nuances in racial othering where well-intended gestures can be experienced as othering and microaggression:

One thing I received from my department head is kind of an assumption that I, as a minority, would feel stressed. They said, "You can join these diversity and equity groups, but don't feel pressured, because we know that minority groups are often expected to join those groups." [...] I know it comes from a good place. I appreciate that, but it does impact me, assuming how I perceive pressure or how I'm pressured. So, I want to shed light on the other side of that coin, not all members of minority groups feel that stress. That assumption can be a microaggression in itself. Just because someone is Chinese doesn't mean that they are "fresh off the boat," or they're foreign to Canada.

The department leader's act of support appeared to be informed by literature that showed racialized faculty are often given more diversity work and academic service tasks (Fox Tree & Vaid, 2022; Guillaume & Apodaca, 2022; Henry et al., 2017b, 2017c). Nonetheless, for Eric who did not experience stress from diversity and service work, this act reinforces racial stereotypes and othering by ignoring his lived realities and treating all racialized minority faculty as a single, homogenous group with a set of needs and experiences. Particularly relevant to Eric's Chineseness is that the consideration and support were based on presumptions about his foreignness. Eric's narrative confronts the enduring perpetual

foreigner stereotype (Huynh et al., 2011) by reflecting on and questioning such assumptions and expressing discomfort, exposing the processes by which Chinese faculty are othered.

### *Know My Name*

Delgado and Stefancic (2017) argued that racism operates not only through explicit discrimination but also through mundane, everyday actions to uphold racial hierarchies. A recurring theme in the narratives of the participants has been how Chinese academics' names and bodies were turned into a site of ethnic lumping, erasure, and racialized othering. Ivy expressed her frustration about constantly being confused for her Chinese and Asian colleagues, which she felt was a fundamental denial of her individuality and existence:

My colleague [a Chinese woman] and I have been confused for each other by so many people at work. [...] Despite our obvious physical differences, people still mix us up. The dean confuses us all the time. He calls her by my name and calls me [by hers]. I've been at this university for ten years, and [she] has been here even longer, yet last fall, the dean still kept calling [her] by my name. It's so bad that when [she] got tenure, I received congratulatory cards. [...] I'm older; she is younger than me, yet somehow, in their minds, we are interchangeable. I just don't understand how this happens. We are physically incredibly different, and we are completely different people, yet some people still can't tell us apart. It happens all the time. There are students who also confuse us, white Canadian students usually. Usually the Asians can tell us apart because they have that "magic" ability somehow. It happens constantly, in my teaching, in my everyday work. It's ridiculous. It's infuriating. It's absurd.

Ivy's powerful use of emotional vocabulary, such as ridiculous, infuriating, and absurd, captured the intense, visceral pain of being routinely dehumanized and deprived of individuality. She went on to share her experiences of being misidentified in a broader academic setting and compare her experiences with white peers to demonstrate how misnaming has been a pattern of her racialized experiences in Western academia:

I work in [a humanities field] that is majority white. There aren't many people of colour in this field. [...] At every single conference I've been to, I have been mistaken for one of the other women [academics] of colour. It happens constantly. [...] every single conference, without fail, someone confuses us. [...] At one event, a senior white male scholar took [an Asian woman academic] out to lunch and said, "I really loved that paper you gave about [...]" [She] had to tell him, "Well, then you should be having lunch with [Ivy], because that was her paper, not mine." [...] I asked my white colleagues, "Do people confuse all the white women with short hair for each other?" And they say no. [...] Only recently have I started telling white colleagues about it. And they were

horrified. They couldn't believe it. But I told them, "This has been happening to me for 15, 20 years, at every conference I attend, one of you messes up my name. I don't understand why you can't tell who I am."

The prevalence and persistence of such instances, as Ivy described, signify how misnaming and misrecognition reflect systemic othering of racialized individuals (Sue et al., 2007). The cumulative effect of such day-to-day, mundane acts of othering and microaggression goes well beyond isolated instances. Through its repetition and pervasiveness, it denies Chinese academics' personhood and erases their identities and intellectual work, and erodes both their professional and personal dignity (Huynh et al., 2022). In parallel to Ivy's account, Olivia's experiences further attest to the truth of misnaming as an institutional practice of ethnic essentialization and othering of Asian faculty members:

In my department, there's one other Asian female professor. And we look very different, like we don't look anything alike, really. But we're mistaken so many times. We've been called the other person's name or mistaken for each other with frequency. And this was after, you know, even after years of being there in a small department. Other people in the faculty will still call us by the wrong name and stuff, which is kind of, you know, I mean it's not horrible, but it is sort of shocking after all this time.

Lee et al. (2017) argued that "the process of being lumped into the pan-Asian category is central to the racialization of Asian Americans, and schools, including education policies and practices, play a central role in panethnic lumping" (p. 502). Misidentification and misnaming thus become a metaphor for systematic marginalization of Asians as it encapsulates the persistent and pervasive reduction of Asian individuals to interchangeable, indistinguishable figures (Lee et al., 2017; Yu et al., 2024). Sophie's experience with misidentification was intensified by the aggressiveness of the white gaze. Even when she pointed out the mistake, she was met with insistence that demanded her compliance:

It was a very microaggression thing. It was like one of those moments where somebody got, they mixed me up with another Asian person. And I politely tried to correct them, and they kept on insisting that I was this person for some reason. It wasn't in my department, it was in the university. And I thought that was like a really strange kind of interaction because I was like, no, I'm pretty sure that you're talking about someone else. But I just like, you know, try to play it off like, oh, ha, ha, ha...

This insistence indicates dominance and arrogance. Sophie's attempt to downplay and laugh off the blatant denial of her identity reveals the emotional labour required to navigate racist interactions. This performative politeness is a survival strategy, an effort to defuse hostility while maintaining composure in a space that refuses to recognize her personhood.

Nominal mispronunciation and omission are typical racialized experiences participants had in common that fostered a sense of foreignness and otherness in professional settings. Rui recalled incidents when she failed to be acknowledged while her white peers did not have to face the same identity erasure: "my colleagues would be like, Congratulations, and pause at my name. They can never say it right. Once [faculty leader] tried to introduce me to a group, but she got stuck at my name too." By the same token, Kwan complained, "These guys [co-workers] never know how to pronounce my name. There are very few people who really take the pain to learn my name. [...] They will still pronounce my name wrong even after they've known me well." These encounters of mistaken identities, mispronounced names, and deliberate erasure served as potent mechanisms of racialization that simultaneously rendered participants hypervisible as racial others while paradoxically erasing their individual identities (Settles et al., 2019).

### ***Becoming the "Yellow Peril"***

The COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately affected racialized and women faculty in Canada (J. Davis, 2022). For Chinese academics in particular, who have already been seen as the forever foreigner, racialized othering was further exacerbated during the pandemic, which led to the resurgence of the "yellow peril" discourse (Wu & Nguyen, 2022), fueled Asian hate, xenophobia, and Sinophobia, and created additional emotional weight on top of Chinese faculty members' professional responsibilities. This section analyzes participants' accounts about how their perpetual foreignness led to an extreme form of racial aggression and othering: the yellow peril narrative that marks them as inferior aliens, threatening intruders,

and socio-economic scapegoats and undermined their wellbeing, professional experiences, and sense of safety and belonging. To begin with, Kwan, whose roots are in the Chinese diaspora, observed that the treatment of himself and other Chinese persons in Canada directly correlates with public opinion about China:

To be honest, it depends on how well China is doing. As immigrant, even second third generation, what you have to be aware of is that, when countries like China, Japan, US, India, say they get into conflict, this type of thing will actually descend into racism. And I'm sure you read the history, how the Japanese were treated during the Second World War. They were interned and kept in prison and their property confiscated by the Canadian government at that time. These people are third generation Japanese. They probably couldn't even speak a word in Japanese. But that still happened to them.

Chinese faculty members' identities are flattened into a simplistic homogenous racial group and representation of China as a monolithic geopolitical entity (Lee, 2020; Lewis, 2020).

Their professional standing and personal lives in Canada are then contingent upon Sino-Canadian relationship and politics, and China's global reputation. This demonstrates a problematic form of collective racialization. As Kwan pointed out, the slippage of individual Chinese identity into forever foreigners echoes historical precedents of racial profiling and scapegoating of Japanese Canadians during World War II, where ethnic identity was criminalized through political antagonism (Sugiman, 2004).

Ursula repeatedly encountered hostility from a colleague who projected negative opinions about Chinese government onto her and harassed her even when they no longer worked together:

The colleague later left to work in [a nonacademic job in another country]. She sent a group email to all of us in the department and wrote about her new job. she said that she was so mad at the Chinese and Chinese government. They made her job extremely difficult. I was furious when I read her email. I wouldn't have been if she had never made that earlier comment [...] I would have simply interpreted it as her venting about challenges in her new job. But the memory of our previous conversations was still fresh.

Remarkably, Ursula and Kwan are originally from different regions in East and Southeast Asia, and have no membership in the People's Republic of China. Their experiences further unveil how racialization and Asianization work through homogenization that socially

construct Chinese individuals as foreigners and threatening others and erases their individuality (Iftikar & Museus, 2018; Omi & Winant, 2015).

The “perpetual foreigner” and the “yellow peril” frameworks are deeply interconnected racialized tropes that have historically shaped East Asians’ marginalization in the settler-colonial white-majority Western societies. They derive from orientalist xenophobic logics that cast East Asians as inherently alien, threatening, and unassimilable. Ivy’s account vividly illustrates how the perpetual foreigner discourse amplifies into the yellow peril, informed by stranger danger and foreigner threat (Ahmed, 2000) and demonstrates how yellow peril anxieties cause racial injury and undermine belonging:

Canada is so racist. There are so many instances. [...] When we first moved here, we were renting a house [...] in a fairly high-income area. So I sort of thought that income would match education level, which would match acceptance. [...] My son [befriended a kid in the neighbourhood] [...] One day, the dad came over to us and said, “I’m really sorry. [My child] is not going to be allowed to come over to your house to play anymore.” And I said, “Oh, I’m sorry to hear that. Is it something that we’ve done?” He said, “Well, you know, [my child] had lice, and it was such a pain in the neck. [...]” And I said, “Do you think your child got lice from my children? Because my children don’t have lice.” [...] He was like, “And your house is so dirty. We know you don’t have time to clean it.” And I was like, wow, this is just straight-up racism. I said, “My children did not give your child lice, okay? Your beautiful, blonde child!” I would say that racism here is so in your face. It’s so blatant. It just astonishes me that Canadians talk the talk about multiculturalism. [...] In terms of reality, it’s just garbage. [...] After all those bad experiences, we thought, okay, we have to move to the part of [the city] that’s immediately adjacent to the university, where there’re more people of colour. Maybe it would be better for our children. And in some ways, it was somewhat better. There were a lot of Chinese, a lot of Indians, a lot of Middle Easterners. But it wasn’t really better, because the school was still super racist. The school was still run by white Canadians.

The neighbour’s baseless assumption and insulting comments directly invoked the “yellow peril” tropes that have depicted East Asian bodies as disease-carrying and sources of contamination (Shah, 2001). Ivy calling out the racist nature of this stigmatization and ironically the underscoring neighbour’s child as “beautiful” and “blonde” accentuates the unspoken racial binary being constructed in this dynamic. Whiteness symbolizes cleanliness, innocence, and superiority, while Asianness means dirty, inferior, a threat to white wellbeing. The anxiety about Chinese contamination represents the affective dimension of racial

formation where emotions are mobilized to define boundaries between bodies deemed safe and those marked as threatening (Ahmed, 2000, 2004). This affective dimension of the yellow peril discourse generates what Ngai (2005) terms “ugly feelings” of fear, distrust, and detest that attach to racialized, Chinese bodies to reproduce their alienation and marginalization.

Ivy’s recognition of the discrepancy between her lived reality and Canada’s multicultural rhetoric is consistent with criticism of Canadian multiculturalism as a national project that often conceals persistent racialization and systemic injustices (James, 2008). The easy recast of the perpetual foreigner as the yellow peril demonstrates how deeply racial anxieties and panic about the Chinese presence are embedded in Canada’s national imaginaries. As a result of institutional whiteness, Ivy’s relocation to an area with higher racial diversity near the university failed to shield her family from racism, in the same way that the representation of racialized individuals in universities does not necessarily disrupt white dominance within institutional structures. Ivy’s experience therefore reveals how institutional and social spaces intersect to maintain racial hierarchies that consistently position Chinese as outsiders.

Kwan further contemplated that the reductive understanding that collapses individual Chinese identities into a monolithic national narrative becomes particularly pronounced during times of crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, when yellow peril narratives about disease and threat were revitalized in public discourses: “It’s hard to see racial discrimination in the time of peace and prosperity. It’s the time where there’s crisis, like war, pandemic, short of resources, then you will have it. In many countries, Chinese [individuals] had great difficulties...” Echoing this perspective, Xin recounted how this conflation operates within academic settings, where colleagues used Chinese historical and contemporary trauma as tools of racial and political interrogation:

Xin: They always bring up things like the Cultural Revolution or the Great Famine to challenge me. But I find it ridiculous. Why use events that happened before I was even

born to attack my identity? [...] Sometimes, I want to push back. But it's really difficult. Something you can't explain in just a few words. For Chinese people living abroad, our political positioning is incredibly delicate. [...] They may not have strong negative feelings about your identity, but when it comes to China as a country, especially the authorities in China, they might have some stereotypes. Like, for example, how China handled the pandemic. Of course, this is also shaped by Western public opinion. Subconsciously, they think that COVID was caused by China. Not that they blame me or blame Chinese people, but like, look at their policies, locking people up and all that. And maybe they won't say much, but you can tell from their expressions, their attitude. Maybe they'll just give a little snort, and from that snort, you know exactly what kind of attitude they have. They don't even need to say it; you can just see it.

Researcher: In those moments, how did you feel? Do you feel like, "Well, they are against the government, not me. It doesn't affect me." Or did you feel...

Xin: I do feel a bit uncomfortable.

Tokenized as an unwilling spokesperson for Chinese politics, Xin is forced to navigate the geopolitical tensions between East and West, which become inscribed onto individual bodies and interactions and shaped her academic workplace dynamics. The tricky position as a representative for complex national history, politics, and events creates a form of racialized responsibility where Chinese academics are held accountable for things beyond their control. Xin's acknowledgment of discomfort reveals the emotional toll in being implicated in the "yellow peril" narratives in a professional setting, which position China and Chinese individuals as sources of disease and authoritarian threat. These challenges illustrate how the particular racialization of Chineseness work as a complex system of othering and limits Chinese academics' collegial relationships, professional opportunities, and sense of institutional acceptance.

The resurgence of anti-Asian racism and Sinophobia in North America during the COVID-19 pandemic reinforced the "yellow peril" discourses that mark Chinese bodies as sources of disease and threat. This greatly heightened the vulnerability and alienation for Chinese individuals. Vivian described how hate crimes targeting Asians and anti-Chinese sentiment in Canada caused fear and anxiety going about her everyday life as a Chinese:

Things like that [Sinophobia] during COVID was even more. It comes in a lot of interaction and exposure, I guess, and kind of just being afraid of, like, I remember being afraid of walking out with a mask or without a mask; I wasn't sure which one was

safer at the time. We were hearing a lot about instances where physical violence was directed towards those [East Asian/Chinese individuals] [...] it wasn't like, directly targeted at me, but definitely something was there. And then around that time, even when you were walking outside, you just became hyper-aware of your surroundings. I think it's something that started to draw out the difference being a minority. It started to highlight a lot of aspects of that, that I think has always kind of been there, something that I have thought about, but perhaps not to the same extent. So I would say, it kind of just added on to the lens of seeing the difference.

Vivian insightfully pointed out that the pandemic did not create racism and the yellow peril discourse against Chinese and East Asians, but intensified existing patterns of Asianization and racialization to disproportionately affect Chinese individuals. This reveals how times of crisis activate historical constructions of racial violence that has always attributed blame on the forever foreigners. The hyper-vigilance and awareness of her own otherness Vivian described therefore exemplify the emotional and cognitive load Chinese individuals carry in navigating hostile environments. The worries and self-monitoring about how to present herself further demonstrate how the perpetual foreigner and yellow peril frameworks operate not just through explicit aggression but through the creation of affective intensities that weigh down Chinese bodies.

In the same vein, Ursula and Olivia described their strategy in limiting public exposure as a protective measure against potential racial targeting:

An [East Asian] student told me that even on cloudy days, even if there's no need, she always wore sunglasses when she went out [during COVID-19], so that people wouldn't notice her Asian eyes. And an acquaintance told me that when they were walking in a grocery store, a white person deliberately coughed to their face. I didn't experience anything like that. I rarely went outside. The news reports were terrifying, so I just didn't want to go out. Unless I had to, like for grocery, otherwise I stayed home. (Ursula)

I stayed in a lot, and I wasn't out in public very much. I kind of just hold up, so I didn't experience anything personally directly like that. But of course, you read about it [Anti-Asian aggression] in the news, and of course, you know, it's worrisome and difficult. [...] I mean, of course it had some kind of emotional thing, but it was less about personal experience and more about just reading the news and media about the attacks on people. (Olivia)

The self-management to avoid racial violence, as reflected in Ursula and Olivia's social-spatial retreat, as well as the Asian student's self-disappearance by minimizing her embodied

foreignness, represents the difficult navigation work and sacrifices borne by racialized individuals in hostile environments. Same as Vivian, Olivia and Ursula described the emotional tolls of being the potential target of aggression and discrimination, despite not experiencing it directly. This illustrates how broader social conditions of racial violence can produce trauma and stress, and how experiences of racism are mediated through visceral affective responses. Participants commonly reported fear, worry, avoidance, and an acute sense alienation during the pandemic. These affects become “public feelings” (Cvetkovich, 2012) and reflect the interplay between individual experiences and collective racialization. However, in a time of great need for solidarity and connection, the resurgence of racial violence and the pandemic led many Chinese individuals to withdraw from public life. Through the threat of violence, racism fosters powerlessness, precarity, and isolation.

Indeed, the rise of anti-Asian racism in the COVID-19 pandemic triggered prevalent affective distress among Chinese academics, disrupting their sense of purpose and belonging in Canada. Echoing Vivian, Olivia, and Ursula, Nuo, Tian, and Xin spoke of feeling not only concerned but also enraged and depressed by racial injustice. As Nuo recalled, “I was really angry. I definitely heard about those news stories, and every time I saw one, I would get very angry, and stay very angry for a while. [...] And I was really alarmed.” Such emotional turbulence accumulated into what Nuo called “undiagnosed depression” that challenged her wellbeing and focus on academic work. Tian further shared how racial hostility severely affected her professional identity and personal wellbeing:

I was in a really dark space during that time. It's just everything kept happening. [...] I was worried about my family back at home, and I'm not able to do anything to help. And it makes me question the whole thing about, what the... sorry for swearing, but what the F am I doing here when other people can go into hospitals and help and actually do something? Like I'm just here looking for extra 3% of variants to explain in some silly model. Like I question the whole thing. And then the xenophobia, like just keep getting stories about people being attacked in Toronto. There was one that I remember still, like a woman just getting pushed off the subway, like all those things keep happening to me that I got into a very like a major depressive episode where I was literally just crying for two weeks and I couldn't do anything else. I was just crying.

Tian's raw emotional account reveals the devastating affective impacts of Sinophobia and racial violence fueled by the pandemic. This is compounded by social isolation and disconnection, which resulted in her anguish of being unable to help her family far away in China, the Chinese communities undergoing intensified racial violence, as well as those whose lives are threatened by the pandemic. Torn between obligations to loved ones and navigating hostility in her immediate environment, Tian's emotional trauma characterizes transnational experience in its most painful form. Further, the sense of despair, helplessness, and disillusionment constitute what Cvetkovich (2012) identifies as political depression, as they are collective, embodied response to ongoing injustice, racism, crises, and existential precarity of racialized others. When compared to the dire, urgent reality of the pandemic, Tian's doubts about the worth of her academic work reveal a disorientation from institutional narratives of purpose and productivity. According to Ahmed (2013), the affective state of disorientation is characterized by misalignment with socially established directions, when bodies no longer feel in place and animated forward. The affective weight of racialized violence, professional disorientation and self-doubt, and physical and emotional immobility, amalgamated and stuck to Tian's body, manifesting as depression and a loss of will or capacity to act. These sticky affects thus attest to how the affective weight of systemic violence are placed on racialized and gendered bodies, and how these burdens lead to emotional paralysis and exhaustion.

While many participants accounted how racism immobilized and disoriented marginalized bodies, Diane offered a different affective trajectory where pain, anger, and grief can be transformed into political advocacy, connectivity, and solidarity:

One of the big reasons for me to start the [advocacy], is because of the anti-Asian racism [during the pandemic]. You know, San Francisco, Vancouver, Atlanta, like across the world, people call this coronavirus "Kung flu." Now, next president of the US, he would say those things. So yeah, I was angry, very much so. I was sobbing. Now I know I was using creative anger, something creative that came out of that, right? I'm going to do more. I want to start something to create awareness and meet diverse people, and I

wanted to know their story. I want to know their calls to action.

For Diane, the emotional ruptures caused by anti-Asian racism during the pandemic became a turning point into community building and collective advocacy. This is a testament to how affect can animate bodies to acts of resistance. In this sense, Diane's response expands the spectrum of public feelings into politically generative affect. The personal affective states of depression and emotional intensities are both affected, as in shaped by and responsive to collective conditions, as well as affectable, in their ability to foster political coalition and change (Cvetkovich, 2012; Massumi, 2002). These public feelings, Cvetkovich (2012) contends, while often debilitating, should not be pathologized as individual failure or passivity, but rather understood as potential forces of agency and collective actions, drawing bodies together around shared experiences of harm and hope.

### **The “Model Minority Myth” Lived and Resisted**

Likely the most well documented Asian stereotype, the model minority myth (Chang, 1993; Okihiro, 1994; Walton & Truong, 2023) ostensibly benefits Chinese academics in advancing a career in the academy where high intellectual achievement and diligence are considered of paramount importance. However, existing research also documented the ways in which such entrenched preconceptions create high level of pressure, conceal difficulties Asian individuals confront, and discourage academic studies from examining Asian experiences in higher education (Lee et al., 2017; McGee et al., 2017; Museus & Kiang, 2009; Museus & Chang, 2009). This section sheds light on how Chinese academics live, resist, and negotiate the model minority myth, and how it functions as a mechanism of racial control by homogenizing diverse Asian experiences and identities, erasing structural inequity, and creating hierarchical divisions among and within racialized communities.

### ***Model Minority as Survival Strategy***

Under the existing structures of social and racial hierarchy, the docile, overachieving

model minority has become an existential imperative for Chinese academics in Canada, and is negotiated through diaspora, colonial displacement, intergenerational trauma, and economic precarity (Chou & Feagin, 2015; Noh, 2018). Several participants discussed how the value of diligence and educational pursuit was imbued in them at an early stage through familial aspiration for survival and social mobility. As Sophie reflected, her Chinese upbringing instilled in her a strong work ethic and a deep commitment to education:

Growing up in a Chinese household definitely instilled within me a sense of the value of hard work. And because my parents didn't have the opportunities that I had when they were growing up to get an education, I took it a lot more seriously. And I think, you know, the financial struggles I grew up with, just made me realize that I have to work really hard and make sure I take advantage of all of the opportunities that I get. [...] They [my parents] were actually quite supportive of me pursuing a social sciences degree, I think as long as I like worked hard and, you know, kept my grades up and things like that [...] I don't know if they, I don't know how much my parents understand what an academic career entails, I think they were just like, happy and proud for me.

This narrative reveals how academic achievement becomes individual obligation and familial redemption, as well as and the tremendous emotional burden the model minority myth places on Chinese individuals, especially immigrants and first-generation academics (Walton & Truong, 2023). In a society that has historically marginalized immigrant communities, the emphasis on hard work becomes as a deeply internalized value that has been passed down through generations as a survival strategy and a way to negotiate belonging.

Corroborating this, Yuan explained that, as a second generation Chinese Canadian, academic success and model performance have been framed as a moral and survival imperative and instilled in her through family upbringing:

There's already kind of an immigrant model minority understanding in education where the parents have given up so much to move their kids and their whole families to another country like Canada or the US have already ingrained in their children, like "you have to work really hard at education because we gave up everything so you could come here!" [...] And that makes a greater pressure on us to work harder. The model minority thing is also like culturally, there's a lot of emphasis on education anyway. That's not something that can necessarily be taught, like because it's from early early age...

For Chinese communities living in Canada as a racialized minority, especially immigrant

families facing hardship, the emphasis on hard work and education are not only shaped by traditional cultural value but also a necessary survival strategy. The emotional implications of this are especially worth noticing. The high level of survival anxiety in an exclusionary society and familial sacrifice narrative therefore compound into intense pressure for Chinese individuals to achieve social mobility and professional advancement through high education attainments. Kwan also connected the model minority myth to the need of self-preservation in times of difficulty and scarcity:

I make the [Chinese model minority] stereotype. I'm [in STEMM], my children too. I think it's probably because our parents indirectly impart certain values to us. They think math is very important because their life was hard and they needed this skill to live.

When certain types of educational achievement represent the only channel to gain cultural capital, social mobility, and economic opportunity for Chinese immigrant communities, the model minority becomes an empowering yet ultimately constraining way of living, being, and knowing. The intergenerational reproduction of the model minority myth, as Kwan described, shows how model minority as a survival strategy is solidified into both a personal and collective project that is often internalized and shape Chinese individuals' lives and desires. This is further encapsulated by Ping's narrative about how Chinese academics have achieved high representation and affirmation in STEMM fields through fulfilling the myth:

In my field, there are a lot of Chinese scholars, and overall, Chinese academics in Canada tend to perform relatively well. [...] Chinese scholars are incredibly hardworking; they are diligent and don't tend to underperform. So, while there are variations, most people strive for excellence. From what I've observed in my own department and across different faculties, as well as at academic conferences where I meet other Chinese scholars, the overall standard is quite strong. [...] Within this field, we are generally seen as high achievers and respected professionals. That's because we work hard, we don't cause trouble, we maintain a positive attitude, and we are highly professional. So, in many ways, we are quite well regarded.

The pursuit of academic achievement and the good model minority life becomes a site of resilience and hope that simultaneously addresses historical racialization and marginalization, fulfills parental expectations, and constructs an individual identity. As a result, the model

minority stereotype can become a lived reality and an internalized self-stereotype for Chinese academics through their resilience and existence in academia. By emphasizing Chinese scholars' "diligence," "hardworking" nature, and tendency to stay "positive" and not "cause trouble," the model minority narrative reinscribes the stereotypical expectations of assimilation and conformation to white institutional expectations of model behavior. This quiet perseverance maintains the status quo that allows Chinese faculty members' survival while marginalizing them. The celebration of the model minority thus constitutes a form of violence that demands Chinese scholars to perform a submissive, depoliticized version of subjectivity while concealing the structural barriers and ongoing microaggressions they navigate. This leads us to the following theme.

### ***Model Minority Myth as Racial Control***

The institutionalization of the model minority myth serves as a social control and discipline mechanism that reinforces white supremacy and racial hierarchy. Yuan's story exhibits how the myth functions almost as a coercive force, imposing severe pressure through impossibly high standards, and shaping the professional and emotional experiences of Chinese faculty:

We can't even be good. We have to be best. Because if I'm not better than everyone expects, then it's like, oh, we only picked her because... So, I think that it's like, we don't... like a lot of people won't have that um, a lot of, especially non-model minority, people will not have that expectation that it's like that you get picked because you're the best of the best. So, I'm like, I have to be, I have no choice but to be the best. There's no option to be like, oh, she presented a fine keynote. Like, no, it has to be better than you expected, or else you won't know why I was picked. So, I feel like that puts so much pressure on me. But it's fine. It went really well and everyone was like, wow, that was flawless. I'm like, yeah, it had to be. Like, I didn't say that to them, but it's what I thought. I'm like, I had no choice. It had to be perfect.

Yuan's emotional burden of both individual excellence and collective representation unveils how Chinese academics' accomplishments are stereotypically ascribed to and mandated by the model minority myth. Failing the model minority myth is inconceivable, as Chinese faculty exist under constant scrutiny, where any perceived imperfection could be

used to delegitimize them, each performance serving as a test on whether they truly belong. Repeating “it had to be perfect” while acknowledging that the event “went really well,” Yuan’s compulsory perfectionism underscores how even success provides no relief from the extreme pressure. Chinese faculty must immediately prepare to prove themselves again in an endless cycle of validation seeking that extracts significant emotional costs.

Rui recalled how her existence in Canadian academia felt conditional and dependent on her ability to embody the hardworking the model minority stereotype and live up to the high standards set by other Chinese academics’ success:

My master’s advisor told me that many professors are hesitant to accept international students as they worry these students got poor writing skills and cannot complete theses. But he told me, [...] he had a Chinese student before [...] and very positive experience with her. [...] Based on this, he believed Chinese students are hardworking, which is why he decided to accept me. When I graduated, he said, “See, the two Chinese students I’ve supervised, both very hardworking. At the very least, they were determined to graduate and put in the effort to complete their work!” [Researcher: Did this put pressure on you?] yeah. Back then, I did feel that way. At this point, I’ve basically achieved what I came to Canada for. But back then, I definitely felt that if I didn’t work hard, I ...

While the model minority myth portrays Chinese individuals as hardworking, self-motivated, and excelling academically, it is also framed through the stereotypical assumptions about their lack of language proficiency and critical thinking skills (Bai & Zhao, 2024; Zhang, 2010). This deficit lens imposes the burden to continuously prove their diligence and perseverance to maintain their academic legitimacy on Chinese academics. The legitimacy defined in this colonial system is contingent upon their proximity to whiteness. Embodying the model minority stereotype means assimilating to and excel within institutional structures designed to uphold whiteness, rather than challenging systemic inequities. Being the model minority, a necessity for institutional acceptance, thus inherently means maintaining white dominance. As a normative mechanism, the model minority myth enforces conformity and diminishes resistance against racist institutional structures.

The model minority myth not only impacts Chinese academics through its

normalizing and disciplining power but also conceals racial inequity and fragments solidarity between racialized communities, creating hierarchical divisions that serve to maintain broader systems of white supremacy (Kim & Taylor, 2017; Kumashiro, 2006; Osajima, 1998). Several participants offered stories where the model minority narrative was weaponized to create comparative frameworks of belonging and acceptance. Ursula's encounters capture the hostility created through the myth and what Kim (1999) terms "racial triangulation," where Chinese communities are considered free of discrimination or succeeding in Canadian society, surpassing other racialized groups yet forever foreign:

Once, a group of faculty members were discussing racism and anti-immigration in Canada. I shared that it's important to acknowledge the racism immigrants face, and Chinese immigrants frequently experience discrimination. I wanted to ensure that in conversations like this, the voices of Chinese immigrants were heard. A [white woman] colleague interrupted me, saying, "You Chinese people came here willingly. You are not the same as refugees. We are talking about refugees here!" [...] [Another time] I mentioned the experiences of Chinese immigrants in Canada. A [racialized] woman academic suddenly took offense and said to me, "They all say Chinese people fit in better here, while my people don't. That's not true!" [...] I did not know how to respond. I understood that [her community] also face negative stereotypes and discrimination and I did not want to create hostility. But I felt ridiculous.

Ursula's experience is a potent example of how the model minority myth works as a powerful tool of racial triangulation by pitting perceived Chinese success against other racialized groups' struggles while maintaining white dominance (Kawai, 2005; Kim, 1999; Wong, 2024). This dynamic casts Chinese individuals as a racial wedge complicit in marginalizing other racialized groups and prevents them from recognizing their shared experiences of marginalization and forming solidarity (Wong, 2024). Ursula's discomfort about dismissal and hostility from both white and racialized colleagues reveals the profound emotional toll navigating racial aggression and racial triangulation at the same time (Kim, 1999; Osajima, 1998). As is consistent with other participants' narratives, the model minority myth frequently positions Chinese individuals in a predicament of being held personally responsible for systemic racial injustice, while feeling frustrated that their experiences of discrimination are

denied through comparative frameworks of suffering.

In a similar line, model minority myth subjected Diane to surveillance and animosity, through which her achievements became grounds for suspicion and perceived rivalry rather than recognition, which cause her consideration of departure from her academic job:

One faculty member, she was a director, just questioned, “Oh, [Diane], how are you able to do all the things you do? I don’t believe you. I don’t believe that you work all these hours. How can you teach? How can you do [advocacy]? How can you write a book with your colleagues, and how can you do research? How can you take care of our students?” [...] There’s no issues with students. It’s this one faculty member just didn’t believe that I was doing all that work. She just didn’t think it’s possible. “And you have kids, how is that possible!” she goes. [...] And I’m like, but were there complaints about me from students? Were there with the faculty? You know, this is during the COVID era. So everything was online and everything was documented. [...] The questioning of my ability, that’s just ridiculous. [...] Well, another faculty member witnessed all of this. This director speaking to me, and she didn’t defend me. She just watched. [...] And I finally thought, you know what, maybe this is not for me.

The director’s disbelief operates through a complex racial logic that positions Diane’s accomplishments as suspicious rather than the result of competence and dedication. This experience perfectly reveals how model minority expectations create paradoxical double binds where high achievement becomes both demanded and questioned. The model minority, always one step away from becoming the yellow peril when they outperform their white counterparts (Kawai, 2005; Tuan, 1998). The model minority-yellow peril dualism represents a sophisticated form of institutional control and racialization that demands exceptional performance from Chinese academics while scrutinizing their exceptionality.

Comparably, Cheng sensed “cold vibes” from colleagues joining a Canadian university in a tenure-track position that was highly sought after:

When I joined the university, it was... Well, when the tenure track position opened up, quite a few internal candidates also wanted it. But I was parachuted in, a total outsider. There were several people who were also qualified, but in the end, I was the one who got the job. And they stayed where they were. So, how do I put this? I didn’t feel like they [behaved that way] only because I am Chinese. It’s more that I was an outsider.

Cheng stated that he remained socially isolated throughout his tenure at the university. It was only after his departure that former colleagues reached out to socialize. The model

minority/yellow peril dialectic is evident in Cheng's successful procurement of a highly competitive position over internal candidates, the very success that sparked resentment (Kawa, 2005; Okihiro, 1994), as was visible in colleagues' coldness. As Coloma (2013) argues, the yellow peril trope frames Asians as threatening competitors depriving opportunities of the white. Cheng's presence clearly activated anxieties about Asian encroachment into spaces of academic power and privilege. His description that he was an outsider that was "parachuted in" suggests an acute awareness of being perceived as an unwelcome intruder in the academic community. The intersection of these three tropes, model minority achievement triggering yellow peril anxieties while reinforcing perpetual foreigner status, creates thorny situations impossible to navigate for Chinese faculty members. As Cheng eventually left this academic position, the triple exclusion mechanism successfully maintained white hegemony.

Through the comparative systems of merit, the model minority myth creates intra-racial competition and antagonism, and impossible standards for all racialized individuals (Kim & Taylor, 2017). For instance, Yuan's exemplary accomplishments were used as a benchmark for other Chinese students, which created interpersonal friction and tension:

There was one [Chinese colleague] I remember during my PhD [...] But that person was very, very competitive with me. He was a younger PhD student. And he saw me as his direct competition, even though we didn't work on the same thing. [...] And I guess you can kind of chalk this up to being like model minority thing. The graduate director would talk about me to other PhD students and say, well, she finished her comps in record time, so you all have to do it too. And I think he took that as a challenge.

Kwan's account further exposed how the model minority myth was deployed as a gatekeeping mechanism, establishing impossible standards that maintain racial exclusion through claimed meritocracy:

When I was a student, there're very few "coloured" student, let alone "yellow" students. And since I'm the first, the way they judge[d] [other racialized individuals] is that they'd look at me and say, "Okay, he's good. He's doing well in our department. Anybody not better than him is lousy." They judge all [racialized academics] using one person. One day [a colleague] made a comment, he said, "This guy is no good." I said, "How do you

know?” “Oh, because we compare him to you.” I was quite surprised to hear that. If people are not as good as I was, they are not accepted.

The model minority myth serves a dual function in maintaining white dominance and racial control, and in providing a convenient distraction from claims of systemic racism made by racialized groups. Asian subjects are labeled as and, by virtue of this label, disciplined into conforming to white expectations of the “good minority.” This hierarchical positioning and disciplinary force suggest limited institutional space for racialized bodies and limited definitions of excellence, and create divisions between and within communities that might otherwise recognize their shared experiences of marginalization by (Kim, 1999; Okihiro, 1994). Asian individuals’ proximity to whiteness thus remains conditional and precarious, offering limited acceptance without challenging the fundamental power hierarchies that privilege whiteness in Canadian academia and society at large (Ng, 1993).

### ***Challenging the Model Minority Myth***

Participants actively contest and resist the prevalent model minority myth. Sophie’s testimony provides a powerful example of critically challenging the stereotype by exposing how the myth denies Chinese agency and devalues their achievements (Hune, 2006):

Throughout life, there’s this assumption that Chinese people, they just work really hard because their parents make them work hard, because they have tiger parents. And therefore, they have no agency or capacity for individual creativity or like inherent motivation on their own. [...] And it almost robs us of the accomplishments that we have because it’s like, oh, it’s because of your culture that you get good grades. It’s not because you actually like to work hard yourself or you’re personally interested in these things. Like, you’re very strategically wanting to get good grades, not that you actually care about the subject matter or are passionate about it. [...] So I definitely felt that growing up. Also I felt like a lack of... like teachers in school growing up, they didn’t really differentiate between Asian people like Chinese people. They just like lumped us into this group of like, automatons that are just intent on getting good grades [...] but have no other kind of personality, because they don’t make space for that possibility.

Drawing on her experiential knowledge growing up in Canada, Sophie poignantly identifies the dehumanizing and homogenizing effect of model minority myth that denies Chinese individuals’ agency, emotionality, and creativity (Bai & Zhao, 2024; Chou & Feagin, 2015)

and the emotional toll it causes. By calling out this implicit assumption, she rejected the myth attributing Chinese academic achievement to cultural programming and instrumentalist pursuit of social mobility instead of genuine interest or self motivation (Hune, 2006).

Ursula and May also confronted how the model minority myth obscures the ongoing discrimination, individual differences, and historical exploitation of Chinese communities (Lee, 2005). Ursula voiced her frustration about the dismissal she experienced when she tried to initiate a conversation about the racialization of Chinese individuals with colleagues:

I emphasized that Chinese people face exclusion and discrimination in Canada. She responded in disbelief, “But you are the model minorities!” I was upset that she denied the historical struggles of Chinese communities in Canada, and the exploitation of early Chinese immigrants’ labour.

Ursula further expressed concerns about the monolithic racial stereotypes about Chinese individuals being perpetuated through her colleagues who are educators: “This made me feel uneasy, because they teach, what they think and say will be taught to students.” Like Ursula, May’s presumed success was used as evidence against her individuality and potential claims of discrimination. The flattening effects of the model minority myth felt like being put in a box she did not fit in:

There’re assumptions about socioeconomic status. You just make a living, and then... it is hard to say, like the traditional model minority... all what is viewed by the general public is like, for Chinese students, “Oh they are rich kids” [...] “They have rich parents at home”, and that is not my case. I do not fit in a box of particular understanding regarding what a Chinese person is, what a Chinese family looks like.

AsianCrit scholars, including Chang (1993), Chou and Feagin (2015), and Museus and Chang (2009), have articulated that their attempts to address issues of Asianization and anti-Asian racism are frequently met with resistance and dismissal, largely due to the model minority myth that renders Asian struggles invisible. By insisting on acknowledging historical trauma and individual agency and distinctions, Sophie, Ursula, and May offered counter-storytelling to challenge dominant narratives that erase the exploitation, exclusion, and discrimination against Chinese communities in Canada. Further, while model minority

stereotype portrays educational achievement as an unequivocally positive path toward social mobility and success for Asian Canadians/Americans, participants' narratives further reveal how structural barriers and racial dynamics create divergent outcomes that contest this simplistic narrative. Ping's observation, for instance, calls attention to how educational pathways reflect systemic inequities along racial lines:

Most PhD students, probably over 80%, are minority or international students. Canadian students really don't want to do PhD. There're a lot of white undergraduate students, but when it comes to master's degrees, much fewer, and at the PhD level, there're very few. None of my undergraduates continued to do graduate studies with me. [...] White students with high capacity often don't have to go through the trouble. They can easily find great jobs with an undergraduate degree. When they graduate, they immediately get high salary job offers. Becoming a professor is not as attractive, and the salary is lower. So, why would they stay in school for another five or eight years, then do a postdoc, and maybe after ten years, they'd be making the same money as they'd have right after undergraduate studies? There's no reason for them to choose this path.

Ping challenged the model minority narrative by exposing differential opportunity within the educational and professional systems afforded to students based on race. The high educational attainment Chinese and other racialized minority students pursue are in fact results of unequal allocation of career opportunities and resources along racial lines (Delgado, 1995). This insight reveals how ostensibly neutral, meritocratic social structures reproduce racially disparate outcomes and keep existing racial systems in place (Delgado & Stefancic, 2023). Corroborating this view, Rui suggested how model minority myth is perpetuated by the interplay between structural marginalization and cultural expectations:

The education we receive from a young age values and encourages academic pursuit. We are taught that getting a graduate degree and going further with our studies is good for us. Working at a university is also seen as prestigious. But to be honest, in [my field], the money I earn working at a university is less than my friends who are practitioners. And the gap keeps getting bigger. [...] In many fields, local white people who pursue [a higher degree] can definitely find great jobs. But for Chinese people, it's different. There was a business professor, he's Chinese, who actually talked to me about this. He spoke frankly that white persons who do MBA usually got good jobs, often at the management level. [...] He said, as Chinese, even if you complete the [graduate degree], you're very likely to still struggle to find a job, and you'll have to then get a PhD. So many Chinese people just continue to do PhD, and as a result, there are many Chinese PhDs [...] This leads to a lot of Chinese people going into teaching positions as well.

The detrimental effect of the model minority myth is further evident in Tian's and Qian's experiences negotiating their personal agency, familial expectations, and racialized constraints in making life and career choices. Tian had long lasting passions for a profession that she eventually decided to give up due to language constraints, cultural differences, and family expectations:

My initial dream was to go into [practitioner field X]. As an international student, using my second language, I kind of had that negative self-talk telling myself that it's such a competitive discipline. You're never going to be able to make it because you're second language speaker. [...] So, I talked myself out of it. [...] I remember in high school when I was trying to pick my major for university, it was a big battle too, because they [parents] obviously want me to do something more practical, but I always had my heart set in [field X]. And so, it was like a battle for quite a bit of time. [...] Now thinking back to how I changed my um, life trajectory. [...] I'm that cheesy person who wants to provide my parents a good life once they retire [...]. And then I was like, okay, I also like research, so why don't I pursue [academic field Y] and be a professor afterwards.

Tian chose academia and her current field out of practical concerns: what can enable her to succeed and potentially provide for her family. This choice, however, caused melancholy as she expressed feeling “in the wrong place” in her current academic job till this day. By the same token, Qian was pressurized by her family to study overseas and pursue a doctoral degree: “My whole family are PhDs. [...] When you're surrounded by PhDs, you start to feel like PhD is something you have to do [...] you feel the invisible pressure.” This implicit expectation becomes problematic when considered alongside the structural challenges for Chinese academics in Canada, as Qian continues:

But it's almost impossible to get an academic job here. Specifically in fields like social science, job openings were never many to begin with, and when you have to compete with white people, it's tough because language isn't your advantage. Well, you don't have any advantages overall. [...] And then the salary [for academic jobs] is definitely... how should I put it? I'll give you a simple example. An acquaintance recently graduated with a bachelor's degree and found a job that pays more than me. I really feel like I'm just working hard for nothing, like, what am I even doing? I feel it's unfair.

The contrast between educational expectations and outcomes also challenges the model minority narrative portraying education as a guaranteed path to success for Chinese persons. The compounded effects of model minority myth and institutional racism, funneling Chinese

individuals into academia and simultaneously devalues their educational attainment, illustrates what Poon et al. (2016) identify as model minority myth's dual function of maintaining institutional whiteness and racial hierarchies while denying the existence of systemic racism. Drawing on her firsthand observations in academia, Ping demonstrated critical consciousness about how the model minority myth creates a false narrative of Asian exceptionalism (Museus & Kiang, 2009). Her view confronts the central tenets of model minority myth that Chinese individuals inherently possess diligence and superior work ethics by interpreting it as survivorship bias:

Academia is full of overachievers. If someone isn't an overachiever, they wouldn't enter academia. You'll find that it's not just Chinese professors who overachieve, but also scholars [from other racial groups]. It's actually doubtful... I don't think the Chinese being the most hardworking is necessarily true [...] if you're asking whether we, as a group, are doing significantly better than other ethnicities, that's not the case. [...] there's no clear indication that we're better than others in this regard.

More participants provided their personal stories and perspectives, actively rejecting the essentialist narrative of the model minority myth. Fei consciously repositioned herself as an active, rights-bearing citizen rather than a perpetual foreigner or model minority, challenging the model minority myth's core assumptions that Chinese and Asian persons as politically inactive, accommodating, and unwilling to challenge authority or fight for their rights (Okiihiro, 1994):

Being "model minority" doesn't mean people will always recognize your excellence and respect you because you're Asian. No. Racism is everywhere. [...] So when you have to fight, you gotta fight. [...] There is a stereotype that Asians don't like to hire lawyers. When I told people I hired lawyers to fight for me, they go, "What? Really? Wow!" Well, if I felt I was wrongly treated and there was something not my fault, or if people said something racist, I would find a lawyer. You have to know how to defend yourself living in this country, you know, you're supposed to get fully recognized as a citizen.

Zhe and Eric resisted essentialism and cultural determinism central to the model minority myth by foregrounding their individuality and conscious resistance to stereotypes:

Chinese people are often described as shy, introverted, and not good at socializing [...] hiding their opinions and not willing to stand up for their rights. This is prejudice. [...] My personality is very different from these. [...] When I teach or interact with students,

I'm more outgoing. Recently, a student sent me an email saying they really liked my class for my humor and great organizational skills [...] So I don't feel like I fall into the stereotypes.

Eric rejects the connection between his technical abilities and his racial identity, as well as the burden of managing colleagues' racial discomfort:

I fall under this common stereotype of being great with technology, and numbers. For faculty members who know me well, they don't really, well, they still ask me to demo things, but I do see people cringe, or like... It's awkward. You know, to be the one to always fix people's slide shows, project their slides, or what have you. But...it's never been offensive for me. It's just... a role that I've fallen into, for whatever reason.

These narratives reveal that the model minority myth is structurally reproduced, and works to erase Chinese/Asian experiences and struggles, undermine solidarity among racialized minorities, and exploit Chinese individuals to suit the needs of the dominant social groups and uphold white supremacy (Hwang, 2021; Kawai, 2005; Lee, 2005). Participants deliberately reject and demystify the model minority myth by critically analyzing it, refusing to validate stereotypes through expected performances, and maintaining their individuality and personal boundaries. In opposition to the homogenizing and flattening effects of the model minority discourse, these actions constitute collective narrative resistance (Delgado and Stefancic, 2023), reclaiming the agency, heterogeneity, individuality, and historicity of Chinese communities. Notably, because the seemingly banal or even positive nature of the model minority myth and other Asian stereotypes, such acts of resistance are often subtle and individual, not through explicit confrontation. I will revisit the resilience strategies and affective dimensions of this resistance Chapter 6.

In brief, the historically constructed Asian/Chinese stereotypes, especially the Model Minority Myth, the forever foreigner stereotype, and the yellow peril stigma, continue to shape and pose challenges on Chinese faculty members' academic working life. They frequently confront othering, erasure, homogenization, and pressure to work extremely hard to conform to white institutional norms as they navigate Eurocentric patriarchal Canadian

HEIs. As a result of their unique racialization, they are often undervalued and dismissed, excluded from leadership and career advancement opportunities, and remain underrepresented and marginalized among academic staff, especially in social sciences and humanities. Building on the analysis of the racialization and marginalization of Chinese academics, the next chapter further examines how Chinese faculty navigate professional challenges in their day-to-day academic lives from an intersectional lens.

## **Chapter 5: Moving in Institutional Space: Challenges and Negotiation**

This study deploys gender in an analytical sense and considered the racialization of Chinese academics inherently gendered and affective. Chinese academics' institutional experiences are contextualized through an intersectional perspective to trace social-institutional power that work through the convergence of race, gender, emotions, social-economic factors, neoliberalism, colonialism, and so forth. Thus, this chapter looked at how racialized and gendered assumptions about racial differences materialize in everyday professional interactions to challenge Chinese faculty's legitimacy and authority. It also zoomed into Chinese women faculty's experiences, who face multilayered discrimination and tensions between gendered cultural and professional expectations. As Chinese faculty cope with competing societal-cultural-institutional norms, (in)visibility and institutional neglect, the chapter concludes by examining the racial constructs and social-cultural in-betweenness that influence their experiences and identities.

### **Contesting Professional Legitimacy: Linguistic and Embodied Differences**

Previous discussions of the perpetual foreigner stereotype have shed light on mechanisms of exclusion that racialize Chinese faculty members and position them as illegitimate outsiders (Hyun et al., 2022; Settles et al., 2021, 2024). This section further examines how Chinese faculty members in Canadian academia experience structural and institutional discrimination through two main racial markers: linguistic features and physical appearance. The analysis reveals how Chinese academics are positioned as less authoritative, less experienced, and less legitimate within academic spaces as a result of the colonial construct of white dominance and the othering and exoticization of Asian bodies. The first subsection analyzes how racism manifests through English language hegemony and accent discrimination. Chinese faculty's intellectual legitimacy is often overshadowed by attention to perceived language deficiency. This specific manifestation of racism is described by

scholars as linguistic racism, the discrimination and aggression directed at individuals from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to reinforce dominant languages and create uneven linguistic power between language users (Dovchin, 2020; Huber, 2011; May, 2023; Wang & Dovchin, 2023). The second subsection examines how the racialized and gendered stereotype about Asian individuals' youthful appearance undermines Chinese academics' authority and creates persistent patterns of misrecognition. Together, these distinct forms of racialization reveal how embodied differences become sites of marginalization that cannot be overcome through Chinese faculty members' academic accomplishments, demonstrating the persistent nature of racial hierarchies in ostensibly meritocratic academic institutions.

### ***Linguistic Racism***

Accent discrimination and Anglo-English dominance are among the most mentioned forms of racism by participants in this study, especially immigrant academics. Wei's experience as a department head and a member of the hiring committee provides an in-depth look into how linguistic racism functions within academia:

She's very, very successful. But of course, if you're educated in another country, you're going to have an accent. And her teaching was fine. We all understood what she was saying. [...] And I remember back then, we didn't even talk about diversity or women or inclusion. It was just she was just good. And she was teaching and doing research on a subject that we needed. [...] And it was this one particular [white man] dean, who was the reason I left [the university], he chaired the selection committee. In the end, he did not want to hire her. Because he had a discrimination against anybody who is not white and not male. And it was quite obvious because he always favored the white male. [...] It was unanimous among the department, among everybody, that we would recruit her, but he had the final say. And he said, "okay, I see you really want her. It should be good for the department. I will let you hire her under one condition, that she takes the accent reduction course." [...] I called him on that, and I said, "that's racist. I will not do that."

Accent discrimination serves as an institutional gatekeeping mechanism that excludes racialized and immigrant bodies from academia. Although the dean tried to present his discrimination as concerns about communication, Wei exposed that it has little to do with comprehensibility but instead about maintaining racial hierarchies within the institution. The dean's reluctance and conditional approval requiring the candidate to do an "accent reduction

course” further underscores that linguistic assimilation is used to uphold white supremacy. As *white accents*, such as European, North American, and Australian, and white South African accents, enjoy more value and legitimacy than those of racialized individuals (Barrett et al., 2022; Creese & Kambere, 2003; Rangan et al., 2023). In the colonial structure of Western academia, where eligibility depend on English proficiency and accent purity, linguistic racism is framed as a socially acceptable way of excluding racialized individuals, and often systemically deployed to perpetuate inequality and reinforce the exclusionary practices.

Several participants, including May, Ursula, Zhe, and Hao, described their painful first-hand encounters with aggressive accent-based discrimination, where accent was used as an excuse to question their knowledge legitimacy and teaching ability (Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Creese & Kambere, 2003). For example, May recounted mockery and disparagement from colleagues and students due to her linguistic difference:

Microaggression is often about accent, how we speak, how we sound. Colleagues in the past made comments on the way I speak English and my accent. Students also made comments in course evaluation, in written comments, regarding my accent, which has no benefits on course evaluation and how I improve my pedagogy. And then in our conversations, graduate students also asked, how can a Chinese professor teach me? So that is a racist comment. And I was speechless.

May’s story resonated with Choi and Lim’s (2021) and Bang’s (2015) research on how racialized faculty members’ accent and cultural mannerisms were viewed illegitimate, leading to students’ resistance and aggression. Akin to May’s encounters, Ursula endured gross disrespect as her perceived accent became a site of mimicry and derision for white students:

Oh, students can be terrible, you know? When I was first hired, my first year, some students mocked my accent by mimicking the way I spoke. Yeah, just imagine! [...] they mimicked, mocked me. I was so furious. I told them, “What you’re doing is racist!” [...] And there had been students who commented in the teaching evaluation that they couldn’t understand my accent, and some even wrote “She is stupid!”

Zhe and Hao further stressed how linguistic racism undermines their perceived academic competence, using institutional assessment tools as potent vehicles (Subtirelu, 2015). Attacks on Zhe based on his English proficiency left him with self-doubt and lasting emotional

turmoil that can be detrimental to his emotional wellbeing and career:

At the end of each semester, there's a teaching evaluation where students rate the teacher and provide feedback. One piece of feedback I received was shocking. A student said my English was not good and that I wasn't qualified to be a teacher, and so on. That made me feel quite...I went through a series of self-doubt, and emotional ups and downs.

Hao was assumed to be less competent than his white colleague and prone to encounter communication barriers, regardless of his actual expertise or teaching skills:

There's this course I teach, and I have a white colleague teaching the same content at a different time. White students tend to take his class instead of mine, because they feel there are no language barriers or communication difficulties with him. [...] When I was teaching at [University Z], I was discriminated by students. They wrote something in the evaluations. I didn't know what they wrote. One day, the dean called me in. He was very polite and told me someone wrote very racist comments in my evaluations, targeting me specifically. The dean reassured me, "Don't worry, we'll remove those comments and give you a report without them." I thanked him, but I thought, there was no need to tell me. Since they were going to delete the comments, I wouldn't even know about them.

These narratives expose the pervasiveness of linguistic racism and institutional linguistic hegemony (Reagan, 2018) and the racist assumption prevalent in academia that Chinese faculty members' linguistic differences compromise their academic eligibility (Hansen & Dovidio, 2016). Significantly, participants articulated the affective labour they undertake coping with racist aggression without any institutional support. May's speechlessness reveals the emotional efforts needed to process racial injury. And while Ursula's immediate response in calling out racism represents resistance, she was left to cope with the emotional aftermath of such traumatic experiences, especially when racism emerged in covert forms of teaching evaluation, which was also the case for Zhe and Hao. The dean's approach to remove racist comments, although considerate and supportive on the surface, avoids addressing systemic racism. The way Hao was informed further placed him in a precarious position of having to express gratitude while still experiencing racial trauma. Akin to Hao's experience, when I asked Ursula how the racist comments were dealt with by the faculty, she replied, "when the dean and I went through the evaluations, these were filtered out. We only focused on constructive feedback, such as how I could improve my presentations or things like that."

Filtering racism means that racism and its harm go unacknowledged. This tokenized approach, managing racism through superficial gestures rather than structural transformation, is commonly adopted by institutions (Ahmed, 2012).

The additional affective labour to manage encounters with racism and process racialized injury represents an invisible workload that white faculty members typically don't face in the Western context, creating unequal conditions that hinders Chinese academics' professional advancement. Institutional linguistic hegemony and its emotional and professional implications thus become a mechanism for perpetuating the disadvantages for Chinese scholars. Leah exemplifies that linguistic racism operates not just through external discrimination but through self-regulation and self-policing for Chinese faculty members who are vulnerable to aggression and othering:

I don't want to give special treatment to my Chinese students. That wouldn't be proper. But sometimes, during breaks or after class, some Chinese students would ask questions, often in Chinese. My first instinct is to respond in Chinese, but I instantly think, Oh no, I shouldn't have done that. I should have responded in English. I don't mind speaking Chinese during office hours or in one-on-one settings, but when other students are around, I feel like it's not a good idea. There's a possibility that some student will report this. [...] I want to minimize risks of getting complaints [...] I've seen cases like this elsewhere, though it hasn't happened to me. But I know things like this have happened.

Within the colonial system of Canadian higher education, equality is defined through English-only norms and deviation from English as "special treatment." Leah's self-regulation and conformation to Anglo-normative expectations are employed as risk-management within hostile institutional environments. Her awareness of the complaints that are aimed to suppress linguistic diversity created a chilling effect even without direct personal experience, showing how such stories circulate as cautionary tales that uphold institutional norms and white supremacy. As a result, Leah had to constantly self-monitor her linguistic performance through the lens of potential white judgment and institutional discipline.

Rui's concern encapsulates how internalized linguistic racism affects Chinese academics' professional identity and confidence (Liang, 2006; Mayuzumi, 2008):

In my teaching, oftentimes I feel that, since English isn't my first language, I worry that student might not understand me, or that I might be speaking too fast. [...] So I always tell my students, if you don't understand, just ask. I will clarify.

Rui's willingness to take responsibility for potential miscommunication rather than expecting students to adapt to linguistic diversity reflects the uneven distribution of affective and work load. Her proactive approach to manage accent comprehensibility demonstrate the efforts Chinese faculty invest in mitigating anticipated communication barriers and accent-based discrimination. Here, the perpetual foreigner and the model minority work in tandem to make Chinese faculty feel they must achieve perfection under white standards in order to fit in, and perform hypervigilance and additional labour to legitimize their presence in academic spaces.

In my conversation with Qian, I was surprised by the internalization of linguistic hierarchy, where native English is considered superior:

Researcher: Do you think your identity as a Chinese prof informed the way you teach and interact with students? In your view, is it beneficial for racialized students to have professors that share their cultural or linguistic background?

Qian: I don't think... It's not like that, oh, I'm a Chinese professor, I can just teach Chinese students in Chinese. I don't think I can provide them with any special support. [...] Sometimes, I even feel like, my broken English, it's worse than if they just had a white professor teaching them instead. I genuinely believe that would be better for them.

Qian described her English speaking as "broken" despite being a professor with advanced academic credentials. This indicates how deeply institutional Anglocentric linguistic norms can affect Chinese immigrant scholars. Rather than recognizing linguistic diversity as a pedagogical asset, Qian accepted the system that positions non-native English as deficit and questioned her own value. Internalizing linguistic subordination reflects a symbolic violence (Samuel, 2013; Wang & Dovchin, 2023) as those subjected to linguistic discrimination come to reproduce the hierarchies that marginalize them. As Zhe, Rui, and Qian have illustrated, linguistic and English hegemony leads to self-effacement and self-doubt.

Participants also showed resistance to linguistic racism. Xin challenged dominant ideologies in Western contexts that equate accent with failure in communicative:

After all, as long as you're speaking English, even if there's some accent or slight mistakes, it's okay. Most people will understand at least some of it, and that's what matters. [...] I've thought a lot about language. My English isn't perfect, I'm not a native speaker, I also have an accent. But I think language is a tool for expression. The most important thing is to get your meaning across, especially in class.

Xin rejects the colonial linguistic expectations and impossible standards applied to non-native English speakers, shifting the focus from linguistic performance to communicative effectiveness. This helps her, as an immigrant academic, counter the colonial hierarchy of accents and challenge linguistic discrimination. May further challenges the social construction of accent hierarchies:

It is not about accent. It is about comprehension, if people in general can understand what you say. Comprehensibility is more important. [...] There're misunderstandings regarding what [accent] is valid. [...] Years ago, CBC did an [interview] with a professor in Toronto, and she was recommended or forced to take pronunciation courses. And in that same [program], a black person who speaks perfect English with British accent, was trying to meet the interviewer, but the interviewer went to the parking lot and did not see the interviewee, didn't realize it was a black person.

The juxtaposition of two cases reveals the arbitrary and fundamentally racialized nature of accent discrimination. This is consistent with the critical insights of Hong (2022) and Creese and Kambere (2003) regarding how perceptions of accents are shaped by visual and racial cues rather than actual speech patterns. "The accent barrier is not, after all, about communication. It is about power and exclusion, and 'othering', racism and discrimination" (Creese & Kambere, 2003, p. 571).

Some understandings about English hegemony and accent discrimination suggest the longing for individual agency. Brian, for instance, recounted the linguistic barriers in his academic career but denied experiencing linguistic racism:

I had to listen and respond in real time. I would pose a question, students would answer, and I had to immediately react and provide responses. This created a lot of pressure [...] Almost 100% of the students here spoke English as their first language, whereas English was my second language. It was a struggle. Some students spoke very fast, and honestly, I couldn't always catch everything they were saying. [...] [But] I never had this issue [being discriminated because of accent]. I think the most important thing is confidence. [...] The most important thing is to have a clear point of view, and to be confident.

While the emphasis on individual confidence constitutes a form of resistance to linguistic hegemony, it inadvertently adopts a neoliberal framing that places responsibility on racialized individuals, rather than addressing systemic barriers. The contradiction between Brian's linguistic challenges and denial of discrimination brings to light how Chinese academics may normalize existing structures and reframe them as personal hurdles. This tension conveys the contradictory position of racialized faculty who must resist and adapt simultaneously to racist structures and norms while maintaining professional credibility in white academic spaces. I will elaborate on this affective reorientation in Chapter 6.

### ***You Look so Young***

In line with existing literature on the experiences of Asian and Chinese faculty members with the stereotype of being young and inexperienced in Western academia (Hong, 2022; Hyun, 2022; Shin et al., 2022), this study found that the perception of youth among Chinese academics plays a key role in their infantilization and invalidation. Multiple participants, especially women and early-career faculty members, talked about being mistaken as students and the challenges to establishing professional credibility and authority. Diane's description about misrecognition from students epitomizes such encounters:

I would wait outside the classroom, first day of class. And students don't know that I was a prof. They're like, "Oh, what's your name?" trying to be friendly with me. And I just say hi and greetings. And then when we get in there, I go to the front and people are just shocked. And then one student, she was so worried that I would be upset at her. She was like, "I'm so sorry, I didn't know you were the prof. You look so young and you, you don't look... I'm so sorry!" I go, "That's okay. That's okay." It shows that it's systemic, right? Like, people don't think an Asian woman can be the prof, you know? [...] But I don't blame them [students]. They were not rude...

Multiple dimensions of othering are present as Diane's authority was questioned specifically through the racialized and gendered perception of her youthfulness, a stereotype frequently applied to East Asian women (Mayuzumi, 2008). Diane's comment demonstrates a critical awareness of the structural nature of the assumptions about who can legitimately occupy the position of professor, assumptions that exclude Chinese women. Her immediate pardon of the

students further reflects the emotional labour racialized women faculty perform to manage awkward racial encounters while maintaining professional relationships with students.

Eric experienced perceived youth and devaluation of his competence and credibility as well, which he considered as a quintessential part of Chinese racialization:

Part of being Chinese is looking young. [...] So I often get assumptions about that. I get those comments from coworkers, from students, from everyone. Frankly, it makes me feel devalued. Like, it makes me feel like I haven't accomplished enough. It makes things harder. It makes it more difficult to lead. I feel like I have to prove myself more, like I have to meet a higher standard. Because if someone looks older, people just assume they have experience. But when you look younger, people assume you don't have the experience to take on leadership roles or to be in certain positions.

The pervasiveness of such comments about Eric's youthful appearance substantiates how professional credibility in academia is racially and visually coded in ways that systematically disadvantage Chinese and East Asian academics. The ostensibly banal stereotyping, endemic to the academic environment, constitutes a significant form of everyday racism that creates cumulative disadvantages and chips away professional confidence, eventually creating limitations on career advancement and leadership opportunities for Chinese academics.

Leah's recount of her colleague's experience further indicates how the stereotype about Chinese faculty's youth and competence create ongoing patterns of disrespect that contaminate their professional relationship:

My colleague [a Chinese Canadian woman] [...] took on a student, a man with some work experience; basically, a very self-assured, overconfident type. He wasn't Chinese. [...] In their very first meeting, the student looked at her and said bluntly, "Wow, you look so young. Are you even qualified to supervise grad students?" He questioned her directly, despite that she was highly accomplished academically, and she wasn't really that young [...] But this student questioned her straight away. Their supervision process was not pleasant. He never seemed to take her seriously or fully respect her authority.

The "presumed incompetence" (Muhs et al., 2012) of Chinese academics functions as a form of racialized and gender bias that transcend actual qualifications, age, or position, preserving white male privilege in academic spaces even when confronted with contradictory evidence of expertise and accomplishment. Similarly, Yuan encountered the stereotype through

inappropriate boundary violations and persistent professional misrecognition:

I saw some students when I was carrying gift bags some colleagues gave me, and they realized it was my birthday. And immediately a bunch of them started asking how old I was. I was like, well, this is not an appropriate question. But then they were just kind of guessing, like, are you older than 30? Like [mid-30s]? I said yes, and then they were shocked. It's not that they don't respect my authority, but I think it's none of their business, and lack the boundaries [...] I don't know what it feels like to be, say, a man or a white man in academia. But I do know when I started out [...] absolutely people thought I was a graduate student. And even now still, I get asked, what's your PhD on?

Such encounters represent an intrusion permitted by racialized assumptions about who can be questioned and in what ways, constituting microaggressions that reinforce the infantilization of Chinese women in academic spaces. This narrative illustrates how racial microaggressions function through seemingly innocent interactions that nonetheless communicate persistent messages about who properly belongs in positions of academic authority.

Xin also reflected on how Chinese women faculty members' belonging and competence are continuously questioned in the context of Canadian academic contexts:

In classroom setting, I'm supposed to be the authority figure. But I can clearly sense some students, especially white students, have strong doubts about whether I'm capable. [...] The same happened when I applied for this job. Most of the interviewers, people assessing me, were from different racial backgrounds than mine. Right from the start, I noticed their skepticism. They saw me as inexperienced and questioned whether I was really capable of handling the job. I definitely felt that doubt. [...] As an Asian woman, you really have to work very hard to prove yourself, prove that you have the ability, the authority in your field. You have to put in much more effort than a male colleague just to demonstrate your competence in your role, let alone in a leadership position.

The racialized perception of youth of Asian bodies is systematically linked to a lack of authority and competence, as the bodies that are viewed as other are marked as inferior.

While racialized faculty and racialized women in general tends to experience misrecognition and doubts on their credibility (Harlow, 2003; Ford, 2011; Settles et al., 2021), the conditions of Chinese faculty members are mediated through intensified bodily interpretation and agism, which effectively cancel out the ostensible advantage of model minorities. The socially constructed Asian/Chinese/women bodies are thus infantilized, exoticized, and delegitimized (Matthews & Nagata, 2014; Mayuzumi, 2008; Moon, 2022), merged with the perpetual

foreigner and mobilized as justifications of professional marginalization.

Much like Xin and Eric, Vivian described her encounter with the racialized and gendered stereotypes about her age and credibility, burdening her with the sense that she needs to prove her legitimacy:

In [practitioner] work, I've encountered more direct instances of people questioning my experience based on my age, like, "You look so young. How many years of experience do you have?" I get asked those kinds of questions more often. But in the academic setting, I think it's more about my own feelings, because no one explicitly asks, or at least not in a direct way, right? [...] I don't get outright questions about my age or experience. Still, there's always this underlying feeling of it. Especially in my field, [...] the average age of students is generally older. So looking young is one factor, and then on top of that, I am actually quite young myself. These two things combined make it feel like I have to do more to prove myself.

The emphasis placed on self-proof emerges as a common pattern among participants, corresponding to Joseph and Hirshfield's (2011) expanded notion of cultural taxation where racialized faculty members are burdened with proving their legitimacy and academic belonging. Yet it is worth noting that there are limited means for Chinese academics to do so other than over-conforming to white norms, especially given that the perceived lack of competence has little to do with actual academic credentials. For instance, Wei navigated the complex interplay between agism in the academy and racialized and gendered perceptions of Chinese academics through carefully managing visual images:

When I first started, I even had graduate students that were older than me. So it's not just how I look. As an Asian, we tend to look younger, but it's also that we actually sometimes are younger than the students that we take on. And, you know, you walk into a class and sometimes they think you're one of the students. So I had to make sure I was dressed more professionally or whatever.

Wei was critically aware that the misrecognition posed questions on her legitimate position within academic hierarchy and chose to engage in compensatory behaviours through bodily management, or what Ford (2011) termed "bodily recognition work" common among racialized women faculty.

Leah, having been repetitively mistaken to be a student, had become wary of the

misrecognition and started a routine for all her class to establish authority: “Every time, in the first class, I introduce myself and emphasize that I have [X] years of work experience. I tell them about the many courses I’ve taught, so that they know I’m actually very experienced.” Other compensatory actions include strategically pursuing leadership positions as a means of countering persistent misrecognition, as exemplified by Yuan and Eric.

Sometimes it feels like I had to literally get a [leadership role] to stop that from happening. I had to like, have my face on the poster in order for people to not misidentify me. Like if you go to an event and I’m the keynote, then you know I’m not a graduate student. [...] That’s how I’ve avoided the experience I had for probably six years or so, where, as a professor, people assumed I’m a child. (Yuan)

Because of that, I, I mean, subconsciously, I seek out leadership roles in order to prove my experience, to show that I’m capable. Like, being a president of [a professional association]. Right before that, I had a member ask me, “How long have you been a member? How long have you been [in this profession]?” Assuming that I don’t have much experience. (Eric)

While Yuan and Eric have managed to secure leadership positions as a way to assert their legitimacy, this approach may be unavailable to many other Chinese academics who face the same stereotypes but encounter insurmountable barriers to leadership advancement. A paradoxical dynamic has to be underscored, that the stereotypes that position Chinese faculty as model minority but at the same time construct them as young, inexperienced, and lacking authority function to exclude them from the leadership positions they may pursue as a strategy of resistance. This contradiction proves the limitations of individual resistance strategies within systems of structural racism. Importantly, the above narratives from Diane, Wei, Leah, Yuan, and Eric elucidate the extraordinary measures required of Chinese faculty members to establish the same level of professional legitimacy and authority that is automatically granted to white colleagues.

In summary, participants’ narratives revealed that they face various forms of discrimination and devaluation related to their somatic racialization, which constantly undermined their authority and academic validity in Canadian academe. This is consistent with existing studies that have revealed that Asian Faculty, particularly women and those who

are immigrants, are prone to experience aggression and disrespect that discredit their knowledge and discriminate their accents (Choi & Lim, 2021; Bang, 2015; Hong, 2022; Mayuzumi, 2008; Nguyen, 2016). These testimonials illustrate the affective dimension of racialization, in that the Chinese bodies are constantly and institutionally being read, interpreted, and (mis)recognized according to white colonial norms and criteria in the Western academe. As bell hooks (1994b) poignantly asserted:

Once we start talking in the classroom about the body and about how we live in our bodies, we're automatically challenging the way that power has orchestrated itself in that particular institutionalized space. The person who is most powerful has the privilege of denying their body. (pp. 136–137)

Through continuous self-regulative efforts and embodied and emotional labour, Chinese faculty try to assert and reassert professional identity against stereotypes that position them as perpetually junior or inferior, regardless of their actual position or accomplishments. The cumulative toll of such labour, in tandem with other institutional barriers, create significant additional challenges for Chinese academics to establishing professional authority and leadership advancement. Moreover, as this study and existing literature have shown, linguistic racism and infantilization frequently targets immigrant, women, younger, and early-career Chinese faculty members, regardless of their gender (Choi & Lim, 2021; Bang, 2015; Hong, 2022; Mayuzumi, 2008; Nguyen, 2016; Shin et al., 2022). I will delve into the intersectionality of gender race in the section below.

### **Experiencing Intersectionality: Gender, Racialization, and Beyond**

This section examines the experiences of Chinese women faculty in Canadian HE through three interconnected dimensions: professional marginalization, cultural navigation, and family-career negotiations. It first analyzes how racialized and gendered stereotypes about Chinese women's docility enable discrimination, harassment, and exploitation and hinder them from establishing professional legitimacy. Following this, it explores how Chinese women academics negotiate disparate institutional, cultural, gendered norms, and

stereotypical expectations. Finally, it investigates how institutional structures position family, particularly motherhood, and career advancement as mutually exclusive options or competing priorities for Chinese women academics. Gender and racialization intersect with institutional demands and create unique challenges for women. These intersecting challenges reveal how Chinese women faculty experience Canadian academic institutions as white patriarchal spaces that were not designed with their needs in mind. Albeit various constraints, they demonstrate agency and resilience in constructing meaningful professional and personal identities. It is worth noting that although many of the challenges Chinese women experience are consistent with those confronting racialized and/or women in academia (Fox Tree & Vaid, 2022; Henry et al., 2012; Ng, 1993; Wijesingha & Robson, 2022), themes discussed in this section are not mentioned by men who participated in this study.

### ***Bullying, Exploitation, and Disrespect***

Women faculty members shared their experiences with bullying, belittling, disrespect, undermining, exploitation, even harassment and intimidation, from their colleagues, leaders, and students. Wei experienced and witnessed the bullying and exploitation of herself and her mentor, another East Asian women from institutional leadership:

Wei: She [white woman, head of the department] was trying to bend the rules and get me to do something [...] and I challenged her. I said, has this been through ethics? And she would say something like, “well, you don’t have to worry about that”. And I said, “well, I won’t do it unless you can show me the ethics approval.” [...] Suddenly I became the problem. And there were a lot of efforts to get rid of me, even campaigning with students to write negative feedback or like just very, very unethical things started to happen from leadership, from people that you should be trusting...

Researcher: Do you think that is because at the time, you were a junior faculty member, and as an Asian woman, they would expect you to be more submissive?

Wei: Yes, absolutely! Yeah. [At the time] there weren’t very many... I think between [my mentor, an East Asian woman faculty] and I, we were the only Asians. [...] Even as strong as she was in helping me, I could see through my career, until she retired, there was still a lot of attempts, among senior administrators [...], like, you know, white male deans or whatever, who would take advantage and think that she is submissive. And then they realize that she’s not. So I think there’s a lot of assumptions. Definitely. There’s that. Being a woman is a double jeopardy.

Wei’s encounter with unethical retaliatory actions from leadership and her observation of

her mentor's struggles painted a grim career trajectory where gendered and racialized expectations enable persistent exploitation of Chinese women. The "double jeopardy" Wei identifies illuminates her critical consciousness about the intersectional nature of oppression faced by Chinese women faculty (Espiritu, 1997). Her account demonstrates how assumptions about Asian women were embedded in deep-seated institutional structures that maintain white patriarchal authority in academic spaces. Under these structures, Chinese and Asian women are often targeted, and face heightened scrutiny and punishment when they challenge authority and hierarchical structures (Huang, 2013).

The administrative request and punishment for Wei's refusal reveals how stereotypical expectations of Chinese women's docility function as mechanisms of gendered-racialized control in academia (Shrake, 2006). When these expectations are not met, institutional power mobilizes to restore the gender-racial order through extreme, tactical, punitive weaponization of institutional mechanisms, including the manipulation of student evaluations as instruments of delegitimization. Echoing Wei and consistent with existing literature, participants Xin, Leah, and Sophie, also voiced that when they or their Chinese women colleagues refused to conform to the expectations of their acquiescence, they face escalated backlashes and punishment (Shrake, 2006; Henry et al., 2017a; Osei-Kofi, 2012).

Diane offered her experience of workplace bullying from a white faculty leader, whose behavior escalated after Diane tried to resist:

In these Zoom meetings, students saw this director kind of bullying me, too. They saw her say something like, "oh, [Diane], you're not that great with APA [citation style]. I thought you knew everything about APA?" and the students just like, were so confused. And I told her, I do know APA well because I taught it, and I helped write a course around it at the university. But if it's just like, [very detailed specifics,] we have to go through the APA book. [...] And those moments were also affecting students. After they graduate, [...] they reach out to have a meeting with me. Some of them were crying, "[Diane], I saw her bullying you. And I couldn't do anything." I go, "don't worry about me. You were a student. You didn't have much power. You didn't have to take care of me. Trust me, I took care of myself." Because I told her off. When I decided to leave the university, I told her why I was leaving. [...] Near the last few weeks [before I left], this director was ridiculously volunteering me to grade other instructors' papers. She said

that's a part of my job. Even though the instructors never asked me to. So the last few weeks, I was grading papers all hours of the day, just to finish my role there.

The director's open comment about Diane's lack of knowledge in front of students represents a calculated attempt to undermine a Chinese woman's professional expertise and authority. In a strikingly similar manner, Diane's former doctoral supervisor, a white man, publicly demeaned her academic legitimacy:

This guy was a real bully. [...] He copied the whole committee and even the graduate program advisor, saying that I'm just a weak doctoral student, I can't write. And then I talked to my master's supervisor, and she said, "you're one of the strongest writers I've ever seen." So, he copied everyone, like to tell them that I'm pretty much, I don't belong there. [...] You know, I was Googling after my second year, should I quit my PhD? How do I quit? What's life like after I quit? [...] So, this man almost had me quit my PhD.

These incidents of bullying uncover that, in white patriarchal academic institutions, the marginalization of Chinese women scholars often comes in the form of epistemic exclusion. Racialized women's knowledges are systematically doubted and delegitimized (Settles et al., 2022, 2024). For Chinese academics in particular, the contradicting reality of institutional epistemic exclusion and the prevalence of model minority myth's portrayal of Asians as academically superior creates a and heightened self-doubt, shame, and emotional burden. The public questioning of Diane's competence by her supervisor echoes Wei's experience of retaliation from leadership when she asserted ethical boundaries, demonstrating how Chinese women faculty who claim professional authority face disciplinary mechanisms designed to diminish their standing.

The material and emotional impacts of such bullying tactics are also surprisingly alike: Wei and Diane both felt burnt out and left their former university. Although, when she was a PhD student, Diane almost quit her studies but persevered and managed to find another supervisor. Further, Wei's and Diane's accounts confirm how stereotypes about Chinese women's docility create conditions where resistance to bullying and exploitation triggers aggravated punishment, making them particularly vulnerable to disproportionate workloads

and marginalization. These racialized, gendered power dynamics severely disrupt academic trajectories of Chinese women scholars, requiring extraordinary resilience of Chinese women navigating academic environments.

Disrespect and invalidation from colleagues can also manifest through refusal to acknowledge Chinese women academics' presence. Fei recounted a white man coworker who repeatedly ignored her and demonstrated passive microaggression:

One particular faculty, whose office was next door to mine, never spoke with me. First time I passed his office, like I would do to everyone, "Hi, morning," right? And I got no response. So I said maybe he was busy and didn't hear me. The next time, "Hi, good morning." No response. So I said, okay, if you don't want to talk with me, I'm not talking with you either. And so we never talked. [...] I just thought he was a weird personality, perhaps. When I talk with other faculty members, my colleagues were surprised. They all said "[he] is a lovely person! Really? That's strange. That's not possible!" I said, "But he's not nice to me." [...] I thought, you folks are white. Of course you have no trouble. I'm different.

The contrast between how the white faculty member interacted with Fei versus how with other white colleagues unveils the unmistakable racial factor in Fei's encounter. In her statement about her difference, Fei recognized that what her experience with hostility was shaped by racialized and gendered power dynamics and conveyed critical insight about structural racism. The frustration was visible in Fei's body language when recounting this experience. In fact, not just Fei, many academics in this study, especially women, such as Wei, Diane, Tian, and Ivy, narrated their encounters with aggression and discrimination with emotional expressions, verbally and nonverbally. The strong, vivid emotional reactions transform racism from abstract structures into embodied, sensational experiences, and indicate the enduring trauma and injustice they confronted that was never institutionally acknowledged. The accumulation of negative affects from being wronged, ignored, rendered invisible, and excluded creates what Ahmed (2004) describes as "sticky" emotions that adhere to racialized bodies navigating institutional spaces, leaving lasting impressions. These seemingly isolated incidents become collective testimonials through this study.

Besides belittling and exploitation from colleagues and leadership, Chinese women academics also experience bullying and disrespect from students, sometimes even in overt, hostile forms. Tian vividly recounted encountering aggressive resistance from students to her simple request for professional acknowledgment:

One, as a woman, two, as East Asian women, there are these stereotypes about us, like being gentle and soft and quiet, right? But then our perceived credibility also suffers. Like I try to tell the students, don't address me as miss or misses, but they have that habit from high school, I gave like a whole thing at the beginning of the semester about like, it's improper to use those greetings in this particular setting. My marital status or lack thereof had nothing to do with my identity as your professor. You can call me a professor, a doctor, whatever, right? And then I had one incident this semester [...] They [two students] were talking about me very loudly [...]. And I could hear them verbatim, "I never come to class, but I knew that she's a bitch, telling us to call her professor!" It's not like, to my face, but it was really loud, and I just overheard it. I think it was intended for me to hear. In the moment, [...] I want to just go over there and pick a fight. But then I'm like, no, don't do that. I need to teach the class. [...] And I don't know if my identity has part to do with it. From what I gather from other colleagues, my hunch is that it does have something to do with it. [...] And it's also not just me. My Black colleague also got, like a lot of backlash from students in her class. I've heard of women professors being threatened physically [by students].

These troubling experiences of abuse, humiliation, and threats to physical safety, akin to those described by Choi and Lim (2021), Ng (1993), and Shrake (2006), expose how for Asian women faculty working in colonial racist institutions, challenging racialized gendered expectations can trigger violent backlash. This prevalent and persistent pattern also points to the extreme measures dominant social powers deploy to maintain racial-gender hierarchies when Asian women faculty try to assert authority, professional legitimacy, and dignity. Further, Tian connected this experience to her racialized gendered identity and the backlash her racialized women colleagues faced. Her critical awareness conveys the structural patterns of intersectional oppression (Liang, 2006; Choi & Lim, 2021; Muhs et al., 2012).

In parallel, May, going out of her way to help a student, was met with disrespect and contempt. Although the disrespect was displayed in relatively subtle ways, the affective experience was vivid as May described it with tangible distress:

I was working with a student on something. Through the whole conversation, the

nonverbal communication, facial expression, [...] was disrespectful. [...] [She was] not even saying yes or no. And then for the one hour of time and effort I spent helping her to improve her essay, she did not even pick up a pen to note any comments I suggested.

May acutely observed the embodied nature of disrespect through nonverbal cues, facial expressions, and the student's refusal to engage with her guidance. Such behaviours speak to a form of aggression that runs below the surface of explicit cues. For racialized women academics like May, these subtle dismissals and contempt can cause deeper trauma due to the covert nature of the aggression and the frequent questioning of their authority. In addition, May voiced the intensified emotional toll of this encounter, as she was disappointed that the student was also an Asian woman: "What hurts most is when you can see that your people, people from similar linguistic and cultural backgrounds, did not understand, did not show respect." This intra-racial tension attests to how colonial and racialized power structures can be internalized and reproduced within minoritized groups and create complex layers of harm that extend beyond inter-racial discrimination.

Consistent with extant literature that uncover the challenges East Asian women academics face in meeting higher accommodation demands from students (see Bang, 2015; Shrake, 2006), Ursula and Ivy described how students challenged their authority through persistent disputes that exceed normal academic inquiry, further revealing how gendered racialized expectations shape student-faculty interactions for Chinese women:

Ursula: They [students] think I'm easier to push around. My male colleagues probably wouldn't experience what I did. For example, students would come up to me and say, "I think I deserve an 80. Why did you give me a 50?" There were even students who argued with me aggressively about their grades. And they'd come up with all sorts of strange excuses to get me to bend the rules for them.

Researcher: Do other women faculty in your department face similar situations?

Ursula: They might get some disagreement about grades, but not on the same level. When I tell them what happened, they're shocked. They can't believe how outrageous these students are. I remember my colleagues said, "You know what? The male profs would never be treated like this. This only happens to you." I think that because I'm double minority, I get this kind of treatment.

In their edited book, Muhs and colleagues (2012) discussed how race, class, and gender

together construct the presumed incompetence of women in academia. Mirroring this multifaceted understanding, Ursula explicitly identifies the intersectionality of her experience, noting her “double minority” identity leading to students’ perception as less authoritative and more yielding to pressure, making her a target of aggression and disrespect. Ivy contemplated her “complicated relationships” with students:

There was a kid in my class who just did that [quibbling over grades] to me. He was like, “Professor, I need to meet with you about the exam. [...] Why did I get a 75 on my essay?” I said, “Well, let me walk you through it. This is the rubric. I asked for a definition. You didn’t give me a definition. [...]” And then he just wanted to argue with me. He said, “Well, you know, I think I gave an implicit definition.” [...] And then he just kept giving me a hard time. He was like, “I think I demonstrated that...” [...] I just don’t understand this behaviour like, push the teachers, and challenge their authority.

Ivy’s detailed account of the student repeatedly questioning her judgment despite clear rubric and patient explanations was with visible upset. These interactions indicate the influences of mainstream Asian women stereotypes that are docile, accommodating, and conflict-avoidant (Nguyen, 2016; Shrake, 2006). When students regularly challenge Asian women faculty members, the action is more than disputing grades. It is in fact used to test power boundaries informed by racialized gendered expectations. Such interactions undermine Chinese women faculty’s authority and institutional eligibility in Canadian higher education, consume disproportionate emotional bandwidth, and create additional academic and affective labour.

Yuan’s account further illuminated the disproportionate labour expected of Chinese women in academia, revealing how gendered and racialized expectations create an unequal distribution of informal caregiving responsibilities that impacts her professional capacity:

I end up spending a lot of emotional labour supporting students when they won’t ask my male counterparts. [Students would say], “well, I can’t, I feel like I can’t talk to him.” I’m like, [...] you’re spending time with me and not with him, and he gets more time to do stuff that he needs to do. And I have less time. I don’t say this to them. [...] So one thing I try to do, with boundaries, is to tell students, I don’t want to say it rudely, like, I’m not your therapist. Although the amount of students, they might be women of color, usually women, who end up crying in my office, I think is higher than it should be.

In line with existing discussion about the invisible care labour racialized women faculty

members undertake in Western higher education institutions (Docka-Filipek, & Stone, 2021; Gordon et al., 2024; Reid, 2021), Yuan pointed out how students approach faculty selectively, based on gendered assumptions. She was cognizant of the workload imbalance this creates as students seek emotional support from women faculty while avoiding such interactions with men but found it hard to maintain the tricky balance of supporting students and maintaining personal boundaries. The pattern of women students, particularly racialized women, seeking Yuan's support suggests an intersectional dynamic where institutions fail to support racialized women students in meaningful and culturally responsive ways. The efforts and emotional labour that guarantees the smooth operation of the institution is thus offloaded to racialized women faculty members. The institutionalized invisible exploitation then affects the research productivity, professional advancement, work-life balance, and overall wellness of racialized women academics (Padilla, 1994; Guillaume & Apodaca, 2022; Fox Tree & Vaid, 2022).

### *Negotiating Cultural and Institutional Norms*

Chinese women academics in this study demonstrated a critical awareness of their racialized and gendered stereotypes, as well as institutional expectations that limit their professional opportunities and exploit their emotional labour. Through reflective practices, they exhibit insights about their cultural backgrounds, gendered socialization, socio-institutional positioning, and how these factors intersect to create unique challenges and possibilities for resistance. Such conscious reflexivity, as a collective practice, also corroborates the labour required to constantly monitor and adjust their behaviours in professional settings, reflecting the dynamic nature of intersecting systems of oppression.

Fei articulated her frustration that her embodied differences become sites of stereotype projection regardless of professional accomplishment: "I have an Asian face. I'm an Asian woman. And the Asian woman stereotype, you know, we're supposed to be submissive, being housewives or doing [...] less intellectual work. [...] People would judge you by your skin

color.” This statement reveals her acute consciousness of the racialized-gendered expectations that follow Asian women in professional spaces (Okiihiro, 1994, Nguyen, 2016). Further, Tian pondered on how her cultural background and upbringing had led to her instinctual avoidance of confrontation and conformation to the compliant Chinese women stereotype:

Speaking from my personal experience, I was very vocal as a kid, but I was beaten down for it, like, “You shouldn’t do that.” So I think there is a cultural perspective. Growing up, I had incidents where, when I saw injustice by teachers in classrooms, I would try to fight against that, and then I got punished for doing it. And when I talked to my parents about it, the thing you would always hear is 枪打出头鸟 (the bird that sticks its head out gets shot). So you’re told to just endure; [...] enduring hardship is something to be praised. And then, plus having the feminine gender role as part of it too, in combination with the cultural stuff. It’s like you just don’t say anything. It’s almost like it’s not even a conscious thought. It’s not a conscious decision-making process. It’s just an immediate, intuitive next step; you just don’t... It’s not even something that comes across your mind.

What is remarkable in Tian’s narrative is her awareness of how Chinese cultural norms intersect with gendered expectations and Western institutional power to create a compounded silencing effect that deeply internalizes domination and oppression (Ahmed, 2021). The internalization of cultural norms about endurance and deference not only emerges as a critical aspect of Chinese women faculty’s negotiation of Canadian academic environments but also a prominent component of the passive, uncomplaining, feminized model minority image (Okiihiro, 1994; Nguyen, 2016). Tian’s critical reflection through an intersectional lens represents an act of resistance. By naming the unconscious nature of her silence, she began to externalize cultural and gender socialization and question what had felt instinctual. Tian’s thoughts thus reveal both the powerful social, institutional, and cultural conditioning that constrains Chinese women academics, and the capacity for critical reflection that can potentially disrupt these internalized patterns and facilitate change.

Leah and Rui considered how their internalized cultural and gender norm shape their professional experiences and identities:

One characteristic of Asian women is being overly humble. We tend to attribute our successes to external factors. I often chat with my [East Asian] women friends, and they often say that they feel like they only got something because of luck, not because of

their abilities. They use this kind of reasoning to explain their achievements. And I myself, have felt that way. I used to have what they call imposter syndrome, always feeling unworthy and thinking that something I got was just because I was lucky. Even now, I sometimes still think that way. For example, not long ago, I received [major national] funding, and it was my first time applying for it. I got it right away, and my first reaction was, “Wow, I’m so lucky!” But if it were a white man, he would have thought, “I did a great job. Wow, I’m awesome!” (Leah)

We Chinese tend too humble. One time, one of my committee members, who is Chinese, called me after a meeting and said, “Don’t say you don’t know much. You’ve reached this level; you’re already an expert. You always have to be confident!” Chinese people often have this Confucian mindset, what’s it called? “三人行必有我师” (In a group of three, there’s someone I can learn something from). But that doesn’t fly here. You should think that you’re an expert in this field. He told me confidence is really important. And then he said, “Look at white Canadians. They may not know as much as you, but they speak with so much confidence. They present it in a way that makes it sound great. (Rui)

Leah and Rui were both cognizant that their lack of entitlement and self-affirmation represent not merely individual characteristics but the compounded effects of gendered and cultural expectations, and that such tendency was often misconstrued in the context of Canadian higher education as signs of incompetence and inferiority. In their act of reflection on how their learned dispositions can influence career trajectories, they illuminated the tension between Chinese cultural norms of humility and the Canadian academic environment that privileges white masculine displays of confidence and competence. Such power imbalance and absence of cultural sensitivity entrenched in Canadian academia therefore reproduces the perception of their invalidity and illegitimacy (hooks, 1994b; Ahmed, 2017).

Like many other racialized minorities in higher education, Chinese women have to consciously negotiate gender norms, cultural values, and ways of self-presentation that are intelligible and rewarded in Western professional and academic spaces (Lee, 2019; Henry & Tator, 2012). Uniquely, however, Chinese women find themselves caught in a paradoxical position where Western institutions perpetuate stereotypes of Asian women as docile and submissive while rewarding assertive behaviours that contradict these very stereotypes. This creates an impossible standard whereby Chinese women are expected to demonstrate Western-normative assertiveness to establish professional credibility, yet face backlash when

their performance disrupts racial-gender expectations. Navigating these contradictory demands requires exhausting affective labour, and constant calibration of self-presentation.

Sophie further pinpointed the discomfort and emotional burden for her to conform to the norms of Canadian academic contexts and adopt a Western professional persona that distanced her from her own cultural upbringing, lived experiences, and personality:

I guess that is one of the cultural differences like, you know, being somebody who has to be like, you always have to promote yourself, and you have to really speak about your accomplishments. And I don't think I was, you know, brought up to be very vocal about my accomplishments. I was brought up to be very humble and maybe, maybe even more deferent to authority, and not somebody who was used to speaking up in these public settings. So all of that, like networking at an academic conference, it feels to me like a very unnatural way of interacting with people.

Sophie's observations on how confidence is performed and received differently across cultural contexts echo existing scholarship on cultural taxation (Joseph & Hirshfield, 2011), where racialized faculty must not only outperform institutional standards but also learn to present their achievements in culturally specific ways to gain recognition. Such narratives Sophie, Leah, and Rui shared thus revealed how Chinese women academics constantly translate and navigate between their internalized cultural values and institutional expectations that privilege Western norms and white ways of self-presentation.

Yuan's navigated among multiple identity dimensions in her institutional life. This has shaped her experiences and resistance strategies. Her insights offer a detailed map of a Chinese woman scholar's lived and affective experiences occupying ambiguous racial and gendered spaces between various identity markers within Western power structures:

There are multiple factors, in addition to me being Chinese and a woman, also it's like, me looking younger, but also the fact that I don't have a Western name, but I also don't have an accent. So all of these things kind of like play into the fact that I have a very specific and unique experience. [...] People expect that I'm an immigrant. They expect me to have an accent. They don't expect me, for instance, to be tough or very confident. I guess as a Chinese woman in particular, there might be an expectation of me being placid or docile or agreeable and approachable. Now, I think just being a woman in general in academia is hard, for the ways in which people will, for instance, describe me as being approachable or compassionate. [...] Those are all expectations I push against. [...] I think that's sort of, media representation of what Asian women are like. It doesn't

really match up with how I know Asian women to be. I mean, [...] like even my mom is not like a docile quiet woman. But it doesn't mean she doesn't prize, or like, idolize that sort of demure Asian woman. And so she might even tell me like, you should be more gentle. I'm like, are you gentle? But also that's not how I got my job, by being quiet and letting people make decisions for me. [...] It's hard to grapple with that. [...] Like if I don't like something in a department meeting, I will still tell them, but I want to do it in a way where I'm not upsetting people. Whereas I'm pretty sure some of my colleagues don't care who they upset. And I can afford to do that. I do have tenure. I also have a [academic leadership position]. You'd think I wouldn't care, but I do care. I do.

Yuan experienced the situated complexity of her identities and the contradictory stereotypical expectations stemming from her racialization, gender, culture, and linguistic positionalities.

The interplay of various identity markers pinpoints the intersectional, nuanced power regimes Chinese women faculty members navigate. Her observation that these stereotypes failed to reflect the lived reality of Chinese and Asian women enabled her to separate racialized stereotypical imagery from her own identities. Such critical reflection consciously resists the inconsistent professional-institutional, gendered-racialized, and cultural-familial expectations. Yet her acknowledgment that she still inadvertently performs the emotional labour taking care of others' feelings epitomized the tricky balance between assertiveness and likability that racialized women academics have to maintain, especially in view of how institutional disciplinary mechanism punished Chinese women faculty who refused to perform the obedient, submissive stereotype.

Ivy also resisted the stereotypes of Chinese women by exposing their contradictory, essentializing, and dehumanizing nature:

This is where I think the racialization gets very interesting. So I think that to the West, Asian women are submissive and quiet and don't open their mouths and whatever. If you talk to any [East Asian] person, [...] like there's this kind of stereotype of, you know, this very fierce woman who's super bossy and runs the household and tells her husband what to do and is domineering. I mean, sometimes in a positive way on soap operas [...] So I think the problem is that the stereotypes [...] circulate in completely different veins. [...] I think they do understand what a tiger mom is. That's like the one thing that, they're kind of like, oh, the pushy Chinese mom. [...] And I guess the dragon lady, sort of... and "crazy rich Asians." But I mean, those images definitely resonate very differently for someone who is actually Chinese or [East Asian] than they do for a white person. [...] I'm 100% unremarkable [in my home region in China]. I am not too loud. I am not too pushy. I'm not too in-your-face. I'm not doing anything. I'm just normal

there. This is just how people are, right? But I think in that sense, they will racialize me because they don't recognize the type. Because they're completely unfamiliar with it.

Ivy deconstructed how aspects of Asian womanhood that confirm certain Western narratives gain popularity and obstruct meaningful cultural understandings. Her recognition that stereotypes and racial meanings shift in different cultural and local contexts reveals how racial formations are not fixed but contingent upon cultural context, as proposed by CRT and AsianCrit scholars (Omi & Winant, 2015). As a Chinese woman academic, Ivy recognized that a central part of her existence in Canadian academia involves navigating contradictory expectations, being simultaneously read as too passive and too aggressive, and refuses to be implicit by calling out the competing narratives and impossible standards.

Participant May offered a reconceptualization of what is often misinterpreted as stereotypical Asian women behaviour in Western settings:

As a junior researcher and also female visible minority, a lot of time we are conscious about who we are, what we say, and how we will be perceived by colleagues, especially leaders and senior faculty members. I have tried hard to disrupt the discourse regarding being "the good listener," being polite, way too polite. I talk a lot, and I think I'm a loud person. I have always taken opportunities to speak up when there are opportunities. But also you have to know the context. A lot of times you do not know enough context. Sometimes we choose to listen more. It's not because we are "good listeners." It is because we want to get to know more information and then we can contribute our thoughtful responses, not just make a superficial comment. [...] Asian scholars need to be seen as valuable contributors who have their own ways to respond.

May's consciousness and resistance indicate a bifurcated consciousness. Marginalized individuals often have to examine themselves through the dominant group's stereotypical lens and carefully try to maintain their own sense of identity (Smith, 1999, 2005; Meer, 2019). Through this double consciousness, she challenged the white gaze by reframing behaviours that are read through racialized assumptions, and reclaiming agency by asserting the right to act in specific ways without being devalued or exoticized.

### ***Traversing Work and Family***

The experiences of Chinese women faculty in navigating their professional roles and

family responsibilities reveal a complex intersection of racialized expectations, gender norms, and institutional structures. Building on earlier analysis of how racialization and gender and cultural norms have resulted in professional constraints, extra workload, and emotional burdens on Chinese women, this section examines how these challenges extend into their lives and shape their experiences within and beyond academia. For Chinese women scholars, domestic caretaking duties and institutional expectations are intertwined and create additional complexities in their career and personal life. Whether prioritizing family at certain career stages, stepping back from leadership roles, or choosing to be child-free, their decisions often represent strategic responses to multilayered systems of power.

May deliberated on how institutional expectations of care labour disproportionately burden racialized women faculty and create significant personal costs:

Some people think being caring naturally comes from being a female faculty member. Sometimes we are doing far more. That also costs us. For myself, like there are medical conditions I've been going through. So your health, mental, physical health, and your family life can also suffer. You spend less time with your kids. And with a little one, when you see the crying face, how you feel? So you constantly battle. Then you wonder yourself, work, family, how do you balance? [...] As a mother, like all those things, like when you got pregnant, when you are on maternity leave, and when you come back to work, there're visible and invisible challenges. But also, people could make judgmental comments. When you share your motherhood stories, some people may consider that as excuses. [...] There're moments of pressure regarding being a mother and being quotation mark "productive," judged by certain colonized higher education standards.

Gendered expectations of nurturing in HEIs converge with childcaring responsibilities in the family to create impossible standards for racialized women. The physical and mental consequences of these intersectional pressures May articulated attest to affect theory's emphasis on how social structures manifest in bodily emotional experiences (Ahmed, 2010,2014; Slocum, 2009). May explicitly named the colonial construct of academic productivity metrics that fail to accommodate women's needs or recognize the uneven playing field created. Not only is women's carework systematically undervalued both in higher education and in the family, maternal responsibilities also become reasons to question

the professional commitment of mothers in academia. This longstanding discrimination reveals how academic institutions are structured around a colonial patriarchal norm that privileges the white male ideal. Such social-institutional structures impose caregiving responsibilities on women and at the same time, penalize them for fulfilling those duties.

Facing bullying and exploitation in her academic job and diminished time with family, Diane eventually made the painful choice to leave academia:

My daughter, she was like maybe 14 or 13 at the time. She said, mommy, you're very busy. I hardly see you. If I knew that you have a day off, I would not see my friends. I would rather hang out with you. That's when I started to tear up and I thought I have to make a choice. Maybe faculty, it's not for me.

Diane's decision to leave her academic position exposes the culminative effect of institutional marginalization, lack of support, and heavy workload. These conditions exploited and devalued her intellectual and emotional labour, and created an untenable situation for her personal wellbeing and family relationships. She was forced to choose between professional success and family responsibilities, which points to institutional failures to address systemic inequity and continued marginalization of racialized women.

The dichotomy between academic career and family constructed by institutional discrimination and exploitation has impacted several Chinese women academics that joined this study. Xin, who is the only woman in her department, shared that she had to delay family planning in response to institutional penalties for motherhood:

I've long been concerned about it. Currently, I don't have children, and my concerns is whether getting pregnant and having a child before tenure will affect my career progress. Because, after all, male colleagues in the same field don't have this concern. [...] In our faculty, there was a white professor who had two children over the past [X] years. So she took two years of maternity leave. And this caused some gaps in her research output, it slowed down her productivity. She told me that she feels misunderstood. The dean directly asked her, "Why haven't you had any publications in the past three years?" She thought, "Don't you know? I've been on mat leave for these years!" But the dean is a man, and he never considered this, and didn't think the question was inappropriate. Well, she could remind him her situation and explain why, but explaining doesn't change the dean's assessment of your performance. [...] That's why I've been postponing my plans to have children again and again. I think I'll consider it after I get tenure.

Xin keenly observed that in a male-dominant institutional context, the norms, evaluation standards, and leadership perspectives consistently favour men, and fail to value maternal labour. This is further layered with the marginalization of Chinese academics and racial stereotypes that expect exceptional performance from them. The motherhood penalties for her white woman colleague convinced her that she might anticipate more severe consequences given her intersectional positioning. Having experienced heightened pressure and difficulties in establishing academic eligibility, she decided to avoid any appearance of divided attention from academic. This means postponing family plan as a form of self-protection.

Further exemplifying the forced binary choice, Ping delineated the conundrum women academics confront as workplace dynamics intersected with gendered expectations:

In terms of leadership, the current situation is that there are still very few women. [...] I used to hold [a mid-level admin role], and I was also in a [research leadership] position, which kept me extremely busy. Eventually, I felt that, first, my health was starting to suffer, and second, my child was entering adolescence. Although I wanted to be dean or take on other leadership roles, I felt my child is more important. So, I told the dean I'm stepping down. But men rarely give up positions for family; doing so affects all future promotion opportunities. [...] This really reflects gendered differences. It's a very real issue. Women often face challenges related to childcare and family responsibilities during their career, and in their value systems, those things are often more important. Take myself for example; if I didn't have a family, didn't have a child. Like, many women in our field who are doing very well, that's often their situation. [...] I think a general pattern is that women feel a greater sense of responsibility toward family than men, and they truly have to do more, physically, academically, to compete and keep up.

Ping's stepping down from leadership positions offers a pertinent example of how academic workload, leadership responsibilities, and family obligations intersect for women academics. It also shed light on the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions as a result of intersecting exploitation. The competing systems of various demands place heavy burdens on women, resulting in embodied exhaustion and career stagnation. She observed that successful women colleagues usually do not have families or children. This reveals how institutional structures tend to reward those who conform to white masculine norms, and the extraordinary effort required of women scholars to navigate patriarchal systems.

Rui decided to remain in a teaching position rather than pursue a research-focused position due to demonstrates how women's are often circumscribed by family considerations:

I don't have many plans for my career. It's more about focusing on my child now. In the future, if there's like a research-intensive tenure-track position, I would still consider it. But I'd have to balance things, because my child is still young. So I definitely wouldn't consider it right now. Maybe in ten years or so, if I have more free time, maybe then...

Like Ping, Rui recognized the discrepancies and incompatibilities between institutional expectations and childcaring needs and redirected her professional ambitions to family. This narrative further illuminated how institutional and family responsibilities, particularly motherhood, constrain the career advancement of Chinese women faculty.

Fei also discussed systemic challenges faced by women faculty as they navigate professional and family responsibilities:

I've seen colleagues, struggling with maintaining their relationship and thinking about childbearing, raising little kids, meanwhile having to consider their research, teaching. [...] I know like the society, the whole system, the policies, are not female-friendly. As mothers, you have to be the principal caregiver. But then when you're not productive in your research, you're penalized. You're not promoted. So a systemic change needs to happen before we can give justice to female academics or any female professionals. It doesn't only exist in the academy, it's everywhere. I've seen women struggling. Do I have a child first or later? How would that impact my life? [...] As of faculty member, a lot of women have to wait until they're tenured to have children [...] And then still, a lot of family pressure for us. To stay in a marriage, to produce babies...

Fei emphasized that it is impossible to meet the conflicting demands placed on women faculty, particularly those already face multiple forms of marginalization and exploitation. More importantly, she framed this impossibility as a consequence of structural injustice and called for systematic change. This critical consciousness is grounded in her lived experiences as a Chinese woman in academia. As she rightfully suggested, Asian women faculty often struggle to satisfy both institutional and social expectations, as well stronger gender norms about family responsibilities. These intersecting forces need to be addressed structurally.

Systemic perspective is hard-won for Chinese women who are constantly conditioned to embrace neoliberal values and dominant narratives. Qian, for instance, believed that women's

gendered labour in the family should not be given institutional considerations:

Qian: If I have a child, it will be even harder for me to find time to research. [...] I saw in a paper that women researchers' productivity drops after they have children. It's not the university's fault; the school didn't force you to have children. [...] If I had a child, I'd need to take at least a year off. It's not even about what the university do, it's about being a woman and whether you're willing to lose that time. When I was young, I wanted to get married and have children, but until now, I haven't. I gave that up, but nothing to do with my university. [...] This isn't something the school can change.

Researcher: Maybe the academy should collectively consider the fact that women have responsibilities outside of academic research and change...

Qian: But men wouldn't wait for you to have children before they publish their research.

Researcher: Well, they don't need to wait. What I'm saying is, society as a whole, including universities, should provide more support for women, maybe consider creating evaluation standards based on women's situations and needs. Men should also contribute to domestic and care works....

Qian: Men should participate, yes. But this isn't any university's problem, right? I don't think it is. This is something society needs to address. For example, increasing parental leave time, right? Equal parental leave for men and women. But this isn't something one or two universities can solve. I don't have anything to complain about my university.

Researcher: Indeed, the rules of academia aren't set by just one or two universities, but change has to start somewhere. To begin with, the academic productivity expectations don't seem very fair to women...

Qian: Yes, that's true. But it's not just academia. No job is really friendly to women. There is not a single field that's truly... There's no way around it.

Researcher: Maybe academia has a responsibility to set an example. This job is very demanding for women, and on top of that, they may have to, want to take care of family.

Qian: Yes. How do you balance that? How? If you're willing to have children, you have to spend time and energy on it. You chose this for yourself. It's your choice.

Qian recognized family responsibility disproportionately affects women and viewed it a broad social issue, but refused to consider why institutional evaluation systems fail to account for these responsibilities. Rather than questioning why academic career require extraordinary sacrifices from women, Qian presented her decision not to get married or have children as voluntary and personal. Such understanding can be considered structural but limited. It reflects how the neoliberal academic values that emphasize individual responsibility and competition and encourage adaptation rather than structural change can be internalized by those disadvantaged by these systems. Moreover, Qian's narrative indicated a fatalism, viewing gender inequality as universal and immutable rather than an issue that need to and can be addressed. This fatalism can be seen as a result of Qian's intersectional experience as a

Chinese woman navigating Western institutions. The gender inequality she witnessed in both Canadian and Chinese contexts leads to skepticism about the possibility of meaningful change in any professional environment and acceptance of the status quo.

Early career women academics, including Nuo, Qian, and Xin, disclosed their anxiety about the “biological clock” and the academic clock. This underscores the temporal pressures and structural inequities that shape Chinese women academics’ career and life choices:

There is never a good time. If you’re waiting for tenure, well, when are you going to get tenure anyway? You’d be at least 36. Are you sure you can have children naturally? When I was trying for a child, I was already [X] years, and I wasn’t sure if I could still have a child. I was honestly very anxious. [...] I really wanted a child, so I decided... I understand, not everyone has the privilege to make that choice. It really is a privilege. It’s ridiculous, but reproduction is a privilege. Being able to have children and keep your job, I’m sorry about that, but that is a privilege. It shouldn’t be, but it is.

Nuo challenges the institutional silence about women faculty’s family life, expecting them to compartmentalize their domestic lives and appear unaffected by personal concerns and caregiving work. Under increasing age anxiety about fertility, she eventually rejected the false promise of the ideal academic progression. This illustrates the affective consequences of the work-family tension and competing timelines as a racialized woman in Canadian higher education. For Chinese women who already face exclusion, the perfect academic timeline is almost impossible to achieve. In this case, prioritizing family plan can be considered a form of resistance. Nuo then expressed gratitude for the dean, who offered guidance and created a space for Nuo to feel heard and understood:

Because she’s also a woman and a mother, she gave me a lot of advice. She helped me think about how to balance my physical needs and work responsibilities. She told me that if I needed to, it was totally okay to start my mat leave a bit earlier, and explained how to apply for it and what the process would look like. She was really supportive throughout it, and I felt that she genuinely understood me [...] like there was someone who truly understood, instead of saying, “You are weak. Why do you need to rest?”

Nuo’s experience proves the importance of women’s representation in leadership positions.

Having a leader who recognized the validity of women’s needs provided her with useful information about institutional policies and resources. It reassured her that utilizing these

provisions was allowed and legitimate, and gave her permission to prioritize her wellbeing.

For Chinese women faculty who face exclusion, this leadership support was invaluable.

May also appreciated her supportive peer network, and emphasized the gap between interpersonal support and formal institutional policies and accommodation:

I did get to know those colleagues who're also mothers of young children, and we stay connected. I think that is a positive effect. I have my circle full of assist scholars I can count on. I can't ask for otherwise. And within my own area, I have a supportive group, both female and male professors are very supportive. I think the support is implicit, not efficiently recognized, [...] it's all informal. [...] Within the university, there are always guidelines and forms. You can apply to be on maternity leave. In order to come back to work, I had to fill another forms. And I have to figure out all those and follow protocols.

The informal support May received indicates how the invisible labour women and early career scholars do coping with challenges while helping others like them becomes crucial to sustained one another in the absence of institutional support. In contrast, bureaucratic institutional policies and processes only created additional burdens. The active cultivation of supportive networks among mothers in academia therefore represent a strategic response to institutional constrains. This further attests to the need for structural change and institutional transformation to accommodate women's intersecting identities and responsibilities.

Tian offered an important critical perspective that disrupts normative assumptions about motherhood. She underscored that motherhood is not what all women desire and supporting women academics requires efforts that go beyond considering their childcaring labour:

[A friend and myself] we're both voluntarily child free. So we don't have kids. We don't plan to have kids, and it's not for reasons that we feel like we're making sacrifices. We simply do not ever want to be mothers. And so we're trying to also have that out there in the literature because nobody ever looks at it. [...] For me personally, it's not something that I'm like, okay, do I want a career or do I want kids? I just don't even want kids. [...] The only time it will come up with when my parents pressure us to have kids. Then I use the tenure track as an excuse and be like, oh, we'll talk about it after tenure.

Tian intentionally challenges the assumption that motherhood is a shared goal for all women, one that is often delayed or sacrificed for career advancement. By going beyond the work-family binary, she reclaims her agency and underscores the heterogeneity among women

academics. In this sense, her views disrupt essentialist assumptions about Chinese and Asian women as family-oriented and maternal. The way Tian responded to parental pressure about having children revealed another dimension of how professional and family expectations intersect. The demanding academic work, often thought as an obstacle to family building, was strategically used as a shield against gender normative pressures. This reiterates how Chinese women faculty navigate institutional stress as well as cultural and familial pressures, which often include expectations rooted in Chinese cultural values and broader gendered norms.

### **Navigating Racialization and In-betweenness**

Chinese faculty members navigate racialization, migration, diaspora, and national and cultural affiliations in Canadian HE. They frequently experienced racialization during faculty meetings, where cultural conformity is needed for professional inclusion. Facing racial exclusion and cultural differences, they often confront structural barriers to networking and building collegial relationships in predominantly white academic spaces. As their socio-cultural in-betweenness consistently cause professional disadvantages, they have to develop various coping strategies such as self-distancing, conformity, and selective affiliation.

Narratives documented in this section reflect persistent patterns of exclusion that require Chinese academics to negotiate their cultural and professional belonging against white institutional expectations. These indicate the nuances of transcultural/national subjectivities and the structural conditions that shape such identities and experiences.

### ***Can the Subaltern Speak: Silence and the Silenced***

Participants brought to light the politics of speaking and being heard as a major challenge in their trans-cultural/national experiences. The institutional setting of faculty meetings becomes an arena where racial and gender hierarchies and cultural differences become visible through patterns of engagement, voices, and (in)visibility. These dynamics

often bring out their marginalized status and cultural otherness through subtle yet persistent mechanisms of exclusion. Cheng illuminates how faculty meetings are sites where whiteness and masculinity confer authority and privilege and render minority voices peripheral:

I saw a very distinct pattern during faculty meetings. [...] It was obvious that there were a few older white men in the department who just seemed so... at home with themselves, confidently, passionately voicing their opinions, talking non-stop, hijacking the meeting. Sometimes the meeting agenda couldn't even be met because those old white men just go on and on about random things. Meanwhile, the female and racial minority faculty rarely spoke, maybe partly because we tend to be quieter. But I could sense that when someone, a minority, started speaking, some of the white men stop paying attention immediately, like, "Whatever, say what you want, it doesn't concern me." And I think it's a real issue. [...] And the thing is, I feel like it's hard to solve. Minorities tend to be too polite, like we are just guests at the table. And it's not like they're being overtly disrespectful. It's more like, maybe subconsciously, they just do...

The "older white men" that were "at home" during faculty meetings convey entitlement and unquestioned belonging. The embodied comfort and ease with occupying institutional space and attention is a contrast to racialized and women academics' unease and invisibility (Ahmed, 2012, 2017). Cheng further observed a dismissal from those occupying dominant positions when minority faculty tried to engage and contribute. This represents a form of aggression that invalidate minority groups' knowledge and reinforce their status as inferior outsiders. For Chinese faculty members like Cheng, feeling like "guests at the table" powerfully captures the essence of conditional inclusion in academic spaces and the perpetual foreigner stereotype.

Leah observed that speaking rights are unequally distributed along racial lines, as her department meetings were consistently dominated by white faculty members:

Leah: In our department meetings, there are always a few people who, no matter the topic, they *have to* speak up, and not just once, but at length. And honestly, it often feels like out of everything they say, maybe only one out of ten sentences actually has any relevance. [...] And it's not just white men, there're some white women like that too.  
 Researcher: Ah, them white folks! [Both laugh] So in these meetings, minority faculty members, like Asians or Chinese, don't often speak up?  
 Leah: Yes, that's exactly how it is. In our whole department, [...] there're four Asian faculty members, one of them never shows up, so that just leaves two other Asian, one older man and one younger woman, and me. And I don't think I've ever spoken up in a meeting, as far as I can remember. I usually just nod and smile. And the older Chinese

professor doesn't really speak up either. The only time he talks is when he needs to give updates on what his committee have been doing. Then he just gives a quick rundown.

Akin to Cheng, Leah also described the visual and vocal dominance of whiteness and the spatial and racial dynamics of institutional meetings that are shaped by white dominance. Their visceral knowledges expose entrenched "institutional whiteness" (Ahmed 2012), where the socio-cultural architecture of academic spaces reinforces racial hierarchies. These settings create an affective atmosphere that communicates belonging and exclusion, where Chinese academics must navigate complex decisions about voice, visibility, and professional identity. The consistent pattern of Asian faculty's silence suggests not merely individual communication preferences but a structural pattern of marginalization. Notably, Leah's awareness about her own silence demotes a strategic disengagement contradicting the common stereotype of silence as merely cultural deference but instead suggests an active choice of self-protection in response to unwelcoming environments.

Rui offered reflection on her reluctance to voice out during large faculty meetings due to differences between her cultural and personal communication style and that preferred in Canadian academic environments:

In a faculty meeting with like 50 or 60 people, even when there's something you could say, you just choose not to. Unless it's something I need to report, otherwise, I rarely say anything. This can affect how others see you. Management may think you are not actively participating. [...] I'm not the type who likes to brag, jump into every conversation. [...] So a lot of the time, my participation appears low. And because of that, if you don't actively put yourself out there, you get passed over. I don't think that's good for one's career. [...] So if I can give advice, I'd say for younger folks like you, try to speak up more, offer suggestions, volunteer for things. [...] As for me, people definitely think I'm a hard worker; I get things done and do my job well. I show up on campus, and I take care of everything I'm responsible for. There's nothing to nitpick. But am I super involved? Not really. [...] If you have a clear career plan, you want to become a director or move up in some way, then it's better to be more actively involved.

Rui's recognition about the adverse professional consequences of invisibility underlines a paradoxical double bind for Chinese academics, whose voices and presence are often devalued and excluded but simultaneously required. Western institutional norms around

participation and visibility thus function as racialized gatekeeping mechanisms that disregard the racial-gender dynamics, institutional hinderances, communication styles, and cultural backgrounds of Chinese faculty. In parallel to Leah's description of her and her Asian colleagues' participation patterns, Rui adopted a minimalist engagement strategy as a way to manage her (in)visibility. The careful calculation about when to speak and when to remain silent reveal the self-regulation and self-presentation work Chinese academics do in response to institutional expectations of (in)visibility and voice (Carter-Sowell et al., 2019; Hune, 1998). Meanwhile, Rui kindly offered pragmatic advice to me, recognizing that institutions demand racialized faculty to adapt to and accommodate to white norms. This narrative thus denotes the political nature of visibility and cultural differences.

Adding nuance to the power structures that decide what behaviours are recognized and rewarded, Sophie reiterated her deep sense of self-alienation and inauthenticity performing self-promotion required by academic professional advancement:

Being a first-generation university graduate and a first-generation, like working in this kind of industry, where, like, I don't have the cultural capital or the confidence working in these kinds of elite spaces. I guess it's not tied to being Chinese specifically, but also, because, you know, my family's working class and they are immigrants, I don't think I developed the kind of like, skills or confidence being in these like, You know, very elite, very like exclusive kinds of places where you're expected to, you know, speak up, be very vocal, be very assertive. Like these aren't kinds of practices that I'm used to or comfortable with. And so it's like every time I'm in a social event. I always feel like I'm pretending or I'm not myself. Like I'm not allowed to be myself.

Sophie's performative and affective labour is shaped by the intersection of transnational experiences, cultural identity, classism and elitism. Marginalized academics, especially Chinese women from working-class immigrant backgrounds, tend to experience academia as unfamiliar and exclusive. This creates unbelonging and dissonance that add nuances to understanding the silence of Chinese academics. Sophie's visceral knowledge of academic spaces as elite, exclusive, and unaccepting of her authentic self spotlights the fact that Canadian academia remains to be structured around colonial norms and expectations that

reflect the cultural practices of whiteness and privileged social classes (Bourdieu, 2011; Puwar, 1994). Sophie clearly voiced that the tension and emotional labour involved in performativity and authenticity is connected to class-based racialized forms of cultural capital. However, this remains largely absent in discussions of diversity and inclusion in HE. The silence reproduces the burden carried by Chinese academics, the pain of knowing that belonging is contingent upon self-betrayal, self-disappearance, and carefully managed (in)visibility. Navigating these elite white spaces, Chinese faculty members must demonstrate professional competence while experiencing feelings of discomfort intensified by racial, cultural, and class marginalization.

Xin drew attention to how linguistic hegemony intersects with cultural differences and racialized expectations in professional communications. This leads to multiple barriers for transnational Chinese academics to participate in Anglocentric academic discourses:

One hundred percent, I've experienced exactly same. In large meetings, Chinese people are often the quiet ones in the room. So others tend to describe us as good listeners. We tend to listen more and speak less. And sometimes, you didn't quite catch something, like, because of language barriers. You want to ask for clarification, but can't find the right moment to jump in and say, "Excuse me, what did you just say? Could you repeat that?" You end up hesitating, am I interrupting? Will I come across as not understanding English? Will people think my English isn't good? You start overthinking it, this whole internal struggle, and by the time made up your mind, the topic has already moved on.

Xin was concerned about being perceived as lacking English proficiency. The concern illustrates the influence of entrenched linguistic racism in Canadian academia. Where non-native speakers are perpetually positioned as linguistically deficient. The internal struggle Xin described reveal the intense emotional and cognitive labour transnational academics have to perform. The faculty meeting thus becomes an affective field where immigrant minority faculty navigate competing cultural-institutional norms and the implicit assumption about their inferior outsider status. This tricky navigation intensifies their emotional taxation. In this sense, the stereotype about Chinese academics as good listeners is deployed to mask systemic exclusion and reproduce unequal power relations.

Moreover, Xin considered the cultural politics of small talk in academia. The seemingly casual conversations often function to in/exclude different bodies:

A difference between Chinese and Westerners is that Chinese people often don't know much about the big issues Westerners are paying attention to. For example, the US presidential election, unless you're someone who actively follows politics, you might not know much about it. [...] And this is both a national and a cultural difference. [...] In China, since childhood, we're discouraged from being politically interested. [...] Nowadays, people try to avoid talking about politics, afraid of triggering censored words, getting their accounts blocked. For us, politics is something to be avoided. But Westerners are very open in discussing politics. [...] Small talk is part of the culture here. [...] Instead of jumping straight into serious discussion, they start with a bit of small talk, crack a joke, make everyone feel relaxed before getting to the points. Chinese people might not like small talks and think they drag on too long, but actually they're really important. If we never join in and just sit on the sidelines, over time, others will start seeing you as an outsider. That's not good for your working relationships.

Political socialization intersects with cultural background and causes additional obstacles for transnational Chinese academics. Xin astutely observed that conversations in Canadian academic settings often revolved around Western politics, and participation requires specific knowledge that Chinese immigrant scholars do not tend to possess. These norms and rules determine what kind of cultural capital is valued, and what bodies belong to the academic community. This experience reveals how cultural hegemony and social-political norms shape marginalization that extend beyond language proficiency or communication styles.

Several participants expressed that they prioritize meaningful contribution over vocal presence when it comes to communication in academic and professional settings. Observing the gap between their approaches and the norm in Canadian higher education, they opted for limited or selective engagement. For most of them, this choice is a careful reconciliation between institutional expectations and individual values that reflects different cultural valuations of speech and silence in professional contexts. For some, such as Brian, what appears to be passive non-participation may actually be turned into strategic engagement:

Chinese people tend to be more reserved during faculty meetings. And white faculty, both white men and women, are more outgoing and willing to speak up. [...] For me personally, if I have something to say, I will. But if I don't have anything to contribute, I won't speak just for the sake of speaking. In a sense, if someone rarely speaks, then

when he does, people assume he have an important point to make, so they pay attention.

Brian considered his approach as a purposeful strategy that harnesses silence to garner attention and maximize impact. This shows that individuals may exercise agency within structural constraints and refuse to acquiesce or self-modify based on Western norms. However, it is important to recognize that Brian has long been working in faculty leadership positions, which may afford him greater legitimacy and freedom. Such privileges are not equally accessible to racialized women and junior faculty.

Participants also called attention to the politics of speaking and hearing, which is shaped by colonial institutional structures and often result in exclusion and extra workload for racialized individuals. Rui drew on her experiences as a graduate student to exemplify how cultural differences and intersectional disadvantages are misinterpreted as deficiency:

When I was a student, I took a course that involved lots of discussions. I couldn't get a word in. [...] I think this is partly me, but also a common issue among Asians. [...] So, the instructor told the department, "She doesn't understand. She can't speak English." [...] Actually, that instructor [who reported me to the department], she was on my committee when I graduated. She told me, "Your ideas were quite good. You just need to speak up more. Back then, when you were in my class, you didn't say much, so I thought you didn't understand. But now I see you did."

Rather than understanding racialized students' silence as structural disadvantages or cultural variation, the instructor concluded it a lack of comprehension and competence as a direct result of epistemic hegemony and lack of cultural understandings. This demonstrates how Western academia normalizes certain forms of communication and performance, interprets difference as deficiency, and systematically disadvantages racialized immigrant individuals. Echoing this, Sophie brought to light the persistent deficit framing of communicative styles that deviate from Western norms, a pattern she experienced firsthand both as a student and later as a faculty member, particularly in relation to how Chinese individuals are perceived:

Instructors, and colleagues, they respond to Chinese students as if they are not, you know, they don't have critical independent thoughts of their own to share. But it's actually just like really hard to do this because, it's a skill, and something that you have to be... like have a lot of, years of experience just being comfortable speaking up.

May's narrative further demonstrates the continued hegemony of Western academic norms that require racialized bodies to aspire, conform to, and perform whiteness:

As a graduate student, [...] I encountered cultural [differences], and my silence, unable to speak. [...] I wrote papers, I read my readings, hundreds of pages, several times, and understood what was going on, but I didn't get the chance to express my ideas in classroom settings. So I took the initiative. I went to see my professor, "I was an excellent undergraduate student, received a scholarship [...]. But I can't find an opportunity to express my ideas." And then luckily that professor has been to China. Knowing Chinese culture, [...] he basically told me like, something in Chinese we'll say, 不入虎穴焉得虎子 (If you don't enter the tiger's den, you won't catch the tiger's cub.) "You've come all the way here, and if you want to achieve something, you have to take risks and push yourself." [...] And then the next class, he directly gave me opportunity, "how you think about this?" So I took the opportunity. And then moving forward, I just seek all those opportunities to speak up.

May's story appears to suggest successful cultural adaptation to overcome learning barriers, but a closer analysis reveals the underlying expectation that racialized academics must adhere to Western norms. Although the professor showed a degree of cultural understanding, his solution was not to accommodate diverse ways of knowing and communicating. This reinforced the logic of conditional inclusion where belonging and the right of having a voice is granted only to those who assimilate. As Chinese academics' legitimacy and comprehensibility are continuously measured against white Eurocentric standards, their presence in Canadian institutions becomes simultaneously hypervisible, as racialized bodies marked by difference, and inaudible, as their voices are filtered through white institutional norms. The affective and racialized labour of fitting in is thus naturalized, rendering the burden of adjustment invisible to those who benefit from institutional whiteness, and maintaining assimilation as the condition of inclusion.

### ***Networking Difficulties***

Networking and relationship-building are crucial components of academia life and career advancement for many faculty members. For Chinese academics, these experiences are often complicated by gendered racialized exclusion and cultural differences. This section explores the obstacles Chinese academics face when trying to build professional networks

and collegial relationships in Canadian higher education. Interview data reveal that for Chinese academics, racialization, social hierarchies, disparate socio-culture customs, language differences, and institutional whiteness create various forms of exclusion and a persistent sense of otherness. These networking difficulties represent deeper manifestations of cultural hegemony that require Chinese academics to navigate complex intersections of professional identity, racial, gender, and class disadvantages, and social-cultural belonging.

Some faced linguistic and cultural barriers to bonding with colleagues. Qian, for example, described her distant relationships with Canadian colleagues:

When they [colleagues] speak slang and I don't understand, no idea what they're laughing about, I really feel alienated. [...] In those moments, I realize I'm not part of their circle. I'm not one of them... I'm different. [...] I hate having to use English all the time. [...] Looking back at my past [x] years [in Canada], with every local I've met, there's always been this kind of distance. We're just nodding acquaintances. Sure, I've had some collaborations, just a few, that's it. We don't really talk much beyond that, especially not about personal life. I'm not interested, and they never ask me about mine.

Deeper connections with Canadian colleagues have been difficult for Qian despite their years of physical proximity in shared academic spaces. As she described, social integration often feels superficial and limited to transactional collaborations rather than meaningful bonds. The emotional intensity, such as using the word hate, reveals the affective dimension of transnational experience that is ignored by higher education institutions. For Qian, English represented more than just a communication tool but also a power structure that demands conformity and assimilation. This emotional response to language goes beyond difficulty with a non-native tongue and expresses resistance to linguistic colonization. Qian's disengagement thus became a strategic withdrawal from emotional investment in relationships where her cultural linguistic identities are left marginal. In other words, Qian establish boundaries that protect her from the emotional labour of continuous cultural translation and performance, rather than continuing to pursue interactions where her differences are marked.

Leah further illuminates the subtle yet profound ways cultural differences, or rather, cultural hegemony, shape Chinese faculty members' persistent outsider status:

The gap is still quite large. For example, our chair and a few white women faculty, they all seem really at ease. They often go [...] to events together. I'm not very interested, cuz I don't really know the culture and art. They invited me once or twice. I politely declined. After that, they didn't invite me again. On the one hand, I feel relieved, but on the other, I wonder if they think I'm a bit antisocial or something. [...] It reminds me of an experience during a department gathering, everyone was socializing, and they started talking about a recent hockey game. Oh, they were so excited about it! I couldn't understand a word, except for "hockey." I had no idea what they were talking about.

Leah contrasted her uneasiness with white colleagues who are "really at ease" with each other. The disconnection she felt unveils how knowledge about white Canadian cultural is needed for social inclusion, and how Western cultural fluency is valued in academic and professional settings. Even when Leah challenged assimilation expectations that place the cultural adaptation obligation on racialized faculty, her concerns about being perceived as an outsider persisted. The emotional load, the desire for authentic self-expression and concerns about the costs of non-conformity becomes evident in Leah's uneasiness:

Deep down, I feel a bit uneasy. I wonder if I'm socializing too little, if I'm too invisible. What if, when it comes to my mid-term review, the senior people are sitting down to evaluate me and they say, "Who is she?" "What has she done?" They don't even know [anything about me]. What do I do then?

The hockey anecdote at the department gathering illustrates how seemingly casual social interactions serve as sites of racialized exclusion. Being unable to participate in the conversation about hockey positions Leah as culturally and socially incompetent and an outsider. Such moments Leah, Qian, and many others who joined this study experienced epitomize the "spaces invaders" where racialized bodies are marked as out of place often not through explicit exclusion but through cultural practices that naturalize the white middle-class male elite as the unstated norm (Ahmed, 2012; Puwar, 2004). This social event, ostensibly inclusive and collegial, actually functions as a microcosm of the larger dynamics that reinforce racial and gender hierarchies within academic spaces.

Resonating with these narratives, Kwan offers crucial insight into how specific cultural knowledge serves as currency in professional networking contexts and operates in tandem with gendered expectations and linguistic racism as invisible barriers to professional networking beyond the more obvious challenges for Chinese academics:

If you speak [English] with the same accent, you are more interested in sports, then you'll be accepted. For us, the value, the culture, are very different... I can't open my mouth and talk to them about football or hockey. [...] I'm not keen on it. And then, for men in Canada, this is one of the very important topics. Men love sports, that's the opening topic. One of my colleagues, also Chinese, he told me it's even easier to speak to Canadian women than men. With men, it's not easy at all.

Western cultural capital works as social gatekeeping, which (re)produces the insider/outsider boundary and marks racialized immigrant bodies forever foreign. Crucially, this insight conveyed the intersectionality of race and gender in Chinese academics' cultural institutional belonging and professional networking. Chinese men are both racialized (Asianized) and feminized, portrayed as nerdy, passive, and lacking what Western society perceives as masculinity (Okimoto, 1999; Zhang, 2010). This helps us comprehend how colonialism and patriarchy intertwine to reinforce multiple systems of dominance and exclusion for Chinese individuals, and that the structural construct of otherness extends beyond the binary of women/men or Chinese/Western cultural difference.

Disconnection from the academic community often brings about a sense of isolation. Fei poignantly described her "spiritual loneliness" due to challenges in finding commonality and genuine acceptance from colleagues, which captures the complex exclusion and its affective implications Chinese academics experienced in predominantly white Canadian institutions:

I realize that faculty members, they were in separate groups by religion. There's even a part of the office building called the Catholic Corner. But then, because I don't belong to any of these groups, it's hard for me. [...] They're friendly to you. They'd greet you warmly, chat with you, but they'd never invite you to their house. The difference, being nice doesn't mean accepting you. [...] That's the challenge, you know. You get this spiritual loneliness. You're in the crowd, but you don't share a lot of things. You're not really taken in as a true member. You're being tested, observed, you're being assessed.

The unique barriers to belonging she faced indicate the intersected of racialized identity and

cultural differences. The Euro-Christian traditions and cultural imperialism entrenched in Canadian academia continue to organize social and professional relations and exclude transcultural/national individuals. Although the surface-level interactions with colleagues was collegial and friendly, deeper forms of social integration remained inaccessible for Fei, leaving her feeling like an outsider who was always under scrutiny, whose presence in white institutional spaces is provisional. These social formations reproduce whiteness and perpetuate the otherness and foreignness of Chinese faculty members who are already marginalize (Museus & Iftikar, 2013).

Adding a crucial dimension to understanding the challenges for Chinese academics, Sophie, who identifies as a first-generation university graduate and child of working-class immigrant family, reiterated that social class, cultural capital, and diaspora are the main contributors to her exclusion in academic networking:

I think for me, the networking part is one of the most awful aspects of the job. I really hate going to conferences and things like that, because they feel like really unnatural forms of social interaction for me. But I know that it's important for me professionally. I think it has to do with, again, that kind of cultural capital, like not feeling comfortable in these really elite spaces, not really feeling comfortable fully owning that identity as a professor. It's just something that I still kind of grapple with.

This links racialization and transculturality with Bourdieu's (1984) concept of habitus, which denotes the embodied dispositions that signal class belonging and cause (dis)comfort in particular social fields. These forces create persistent feelings of otherness and alienation. When racialized immigrant bodies cross racial and class boundaries into academic spaces, they intuitively sense the distinct presence of white dominance and elitism and feel excluded. Whiteness and elitism, therefore, can be seen as the hidden curriculum in academia that set the implicit requirements for professional advancement that extend beyond formal performance metrics. Such a hidden curriculum perpetuates cultural, racial, and class-based exclusion that may not be overcome regardless of Chinese academics' professional achievements and profoundly influence their affective experiences in their institutional lives.

Sophie's struggle with impostor syndrome calls for networking difficulties to be understood through an intersectional lens that recognizes how racism, classism, and cultural capital and identity shape belonging and social capital in academic spaces.

For Xin, networking difficulties feels more about race than cultural-linguistic barriers:

Building professional network is a pain for many Asian scholars. Especially in a setting where the language isn't your own. Honestly, even if your first language is English, it's not easy if you're Asian. You need a strong network to support your academic position. And holding a leadership role often depend on networking. [...] As a junior faculty, when I attend academic conferences, trying to strike up conversations or collaboration opportunities usually doesn't go well. People seemed very cold. First of all, just by looking at me, my name, it's obvious I'm Asian. And their first impression is, "Oh, I don't know her." That creates instant distance. So they're not interested in you or your research. If I meet other Asian scholars, they're usually more interested in my work. But with non-Asian scholars, it's very difficult to establish a connection. [...] But between white academics, it's always so easy to build relationships. They either already know each other or naturally get along. Especially between two white men. Even if they've just met, they can start chatting, go to a bar together or whatever. They bond easily.

Her observation that the reading of Chinese bodies creates instant ineligibility and exclusion and that networking can be difficult for Asian individuals even without language barriers points to how professional networking is fundamentally racialized in Western academia. In other words, phenotypical racial difference is the primary lens through which Asian bodies are seen, regardless of their nationality, or linguistic or professional capabilities. Further, Xin described different treatments for differently racialized groups. This underscores the unequal distribution of social capital in predominately white academia and how white racial homophily operates as an invisible yet powerful force in academic institutional membership. The affective dimensions of this experience, the sensation of coldness, distance, distrust, and disinterest from colleagues, echoes Ahmed's (2012) description of the atmosphere of whiteness that creates comfort for some bodies while alienating others.

Xin's experiences were shared by Tian, who experienced frequent rejection and discrimination in her networking attempts in academic and professional settings:

I am bad at networking just regardless. I always find it very challenging if I just go out and do it by myself. Like if I cold-call or try to talk to people at conferences, thinking

that we have shared interest given the topic, I always just feel like the vibes the other party usually are giving me is that, um, inferior, and that they don't even want to talk to me. [...] I don't know. So like that hasn't, has never been successful.

Through her affective reading, Tian insightfully grasped the intersecting power dynamics that came to light through subtle cues and “vibes” that communicate exclusion. The consistent feeling of rejection and of being viewed as inferior suggests how affective intensities circulates in academic spaces in ways that disproportionately impact racialized faculty members. Although Tian self-doubted that socializing difficulties may partially due to her personal shortcoming, her experience must be situated in the broader context of racialization in academia and other participants' narratives about how racialization influence networking.

Several participants talked about the pivotal role networking and socialization play in academic career advancement, sense of belonging, and wellbeing (Heffernan, 2020; Mudrak et al, 2018). Xin stated that networking difficulties greatly limit her academic collaboration and leadership opportunities. The seemingly informal interpersonal exclusion thus directly impacts career advancement, and create structural barriers for Chinese faculty members. She continued to reflect on the extensive emotional and professional labour required to overcome these barriers:

I have a few collaborators now who are white. Once we became familiar with each other, they started to realize, “Oh, you're a good researcher, very diligent.” Only then do they acknowledge my capabilities, like, you have good research skills, great work ethics, and punctual on delivery. But it takes three, four, sometimes five years for them to truly recognize me. You have to earn it. If it's a first meeting, there's no way they'll trust you. [...] All of my non-Chinese collaborators are people I've cultivated relationships with very intentionally and carefully, spending years writing papers with dedication, doing research independently, showing them the credibility of my work, so that they eventually lower their guard. That kind of trust is really, really, really hard to come by. [...] When Chinese women meet each other, they can become familiar very quickly. Similarly, white women connect with each other almost instantly. That's just how it is. But you know, even if a white man and a white woman meet for the first time, their connection is still much faster than a white man meeting a Chinese woman. So it's first gender, then race. These two barriers are just too difficult for us to overcome.

Xin's strenuous efforts to demonstrate exceptional diligence, productivity, and work ethics reflects the extra labour racialized faculty members perform to prove professional

worth and gain professional recognition. Chinese academics are often pressed to embody the model minority stereotype to overcome racial barriers, even as this reinforces existing structures of whiteness that marginalize them. The extensive time and hard work she invested in building basic trust add to the intellectual and affective load of being a marginalized racialized faculty member, which is unacknowledged/unknown to higher education institutions and her white counterparts. Further, Xin's observation about different relationship-building along racial and gender lines exposes how racism and gender-based discrimination work as interlocking systems of exclusion for Chinese academics. This experiential knowledge adds critical nuance to understanding how intersectional marginalization operates in academic spaces.

Nuo described her academic circle as predominantly Chinese, and expressed her willingness to make extra effort to connect with white academics:

Most of my collaborators are Chinese. [...] You have to admit, if you don't have the same background growing up, their references, their jokes, you don't get them. [...] you just lack that sense, and you don't have a way to build that connection. [...] Actually, I have thought about this. I feel like I should branch out a bit, like, not just stick with Chinese people in my little circle. [...] It might be a bit more difficult, because... For me, building connections with a Chinese woman is certainly faster than with a white man. We're similar. We've shared experience. It's really just more natural and easier. But that doesn't mean it [with a white man] can't work. It just takes a bit more effort. You might have to, like you have to go over there, and put in more effort to approach him. You might need to spend more effort and thought doing some background research about him, like okay, what is this person interested in, what research he's working on, maybe you have some project that could align with his. [...] It is going to be a little bit harder. It will be. It's always going to be. But if it is always going to be, and then if you want to do something, make sure that you try harder.

Nuo's reflection reveals both solidarity with Chinese individuals and an internalized pressure to "branch out" beyond her intragroup networks. This internalization points to the persistent expectation that Chinese faculty members will assimilate into predominantly white academic networks although positioned as perpetual outsiders. The strategic assessment of the additional effort required to build connections with white men academics demonstrates extraordinary academic survival strategies and calculated approaches that racialized faculty

develop to navigate their marginalization. The feelings of affinity and ease socializing and collaborating with Chinese academics and expectation of challenges and extra, intentional efforts connecting with white researchers Nuo and Xin shared reflect Chinese women's in-betweenness in Canadian academia and how feelings circulate between bodies in ways that create attachments or distances along racial, gender, and cultural lines (Ahmed, 2004).

Beyond collegial interactions, Chinese faculty often have difficulties establishing meaningful relationships in Canadian HEIs. Several participants, including Leah, Zhe, Fei, and Qian, identified this difficulty. Rui further described the nuanced differences she felt between her relationships with Chinese and white colleagues:

Of course, there's a difference between [my relationships with] Chinese and white colleagues. Professionally, if you're co-teaching a course, you become acquainted, since there's a lot to communicate. In that case, I don't really feel major barriers because it's all about getting the work done. But when it comes to personal relationships, I definitely feel a big difference. With my Chinese colleague, we are friends; we often text or call each other promptly. If I have something to discuss with her, I'll just pick up the phone and call. But with others, I'll usually write emails, keep it strictly professional. [...] The feeling isn't the same. Often, my other colleagues work together for a few years and naturally become close friends. As for me, I do have some friends, but not many.

Although the task-oriented, professional interactions between Rui and colleagues proceed well, deeper social connections remain elusive. This experience is common among Chinese faculty members in this study, whose relationship with colleagues limited to surface-level politeness, who feel like strangers after years of working in Canadian HEIs. The affective ease in Rui's casual, amicable, prompt communication with the Chinese coworker is opposite to the formal, distant, deliberated ways she approaches white colleagues. These subtle differences reflect the interlocking systems of racial cultural hierarchies, and the persistence of exclusion in Canadian academia (Cho et al., 2013).

Chinese academics' institutional networking and collegial relationships are shaped by various structures of marginalization. These networking challenges are experienced as subtle exclusion, cultural barriers, racialized positioning and normative whiteness. In response to

hostile institutional environments, some participants actively seek to expand their networks beyond racial-cultural boundaries, ready to perform additional affective and intellectual labour. Others build connections with Chinese and otherwise racialized individuals based on shared experiences of marginalization. These collective struggles accentuate how affect and power intersect to create unique barriers that require continuous negotiation and resilience.

### ***Socio-cultural In-betweenness***

Chinese academics in Canadian higher education institutions frequently find themselves existing in a liminal space as “outsiders-within” (Collins, 2000). In addition to their unique racialization (Asianization) that marks their bodies as forever foreign, they also feel neither fully integrated into the Canadian society nor aligned completely with their Chinese cultural origins. Such a positioning can be understood as a socio-cultural-racial in-betweenness (Ang, 2003; He, 2006), which leads to unique challenges and opportunities within and beyond academic contexts. Chinese academics in Canada often have to perform whiteness. This means paying careful attention and assimilating to cultural practices that their white Canadian colleagues take for granted. May identified the implicit demands of cultural performance in professional contexts:

When you go for job interviews, there're things you have to pay attention to. Like as easy as Canadian colleagues think about going for dinner, what are the customs and things you need to do, like, those are tiny little things they do not think about. You just go for a dinner. But I use chopsticks, when I go for dinner, I'd use forks and knives. That is something I need to be mindful about. So, I think there are many, many challenges, career-wise and also cultural traditions.

The seemingly neutral professional activities, like job interviews and work dinners, are in fact structured by racialized norms that code certain cultural practices as professional and others as inappropriate. In-between Western institutional expectations and their Chinese habitus, Chinese academics ability to assimilate to white customs determine their professional opportunities. May's heightened consciousness about her socio-cultural outsider position, thus illustrates entrenched institutional whiteness that racialized, especially immigrant faculty

must navigate. This precarious outsider-within means that their otherness is always under scrutiny, and different behaviour will be interpreted as inferiority. This further reveals the invisible labour required of Chinese academics to constantly perform the cultural expectations that privilege whiteness.

The ways in which socio-cultural differences affect professional advancement is a significant theme in Chinese academics' experiences in Canadian institutions. Kwan underlined how the hierarchy of differences unfold in high-stakes professional contexts:

Chinese people often do not do so well in the interview. [...] But they [white men] can speak so well that even if they're not good in it, they can cover it up. Once we interviewed candidates for a teaching position in this university. One person performed very very well. Then we hired him, and he was not capable of what he said he was! So the thing is that for those who can speak well, these people are getting jobs, becoming leaders. [...] Chinese people, many are very capable, but might not speak that well.

Like May, Kwan drew attention to how interviews and performance assessment are culturally coded in ways that privilege Western norms of self-presentation and devalue Chinese cultural dispositions. Such institutionalized cultural expectations create an affective structure where certain performances (in this case, displays of confidence regardless of competence) become valuable currency in professional contexts.

For many Chinese scholars, the accumulation of negative experiences around their differences and unbelonging in academia leads to avoidance and social withdrawal. Brian accounted his independence and minimalist approach to professional relationships:

I actually don't interact much with my colleagues. Professors are generally quite independent. If we are co-authoring a paper together, then of course, we'll have a lot to discuss. But otherwise, interactions are usually quite minimal, just saying "hi" in passing, maybe having a work meal together occasionally, but not much beyond that. There's not really a need to socialize outside of work.

Brian's limited interactions stress a pattern of strategic disengagement, a pragmatic adaptation to exclusionary white spaces where meaningful connections are fraught with additional challenges for Chinese academics. While this approach can be interpreted as resignation or passivity, it may simultaneously serve practical purposes in preserving

emotional energy, maintaining professional dignity, and redirecting effort toward more productive professional activities. Rather than viewing this as a deficit or failure to integrate, it is necessary to also understand it as a reasoned response to unwelcoming institutional environments and unrewarding networking attempts.

Participants Zhe, Rui, Kwan, and Guo, described having little to no engagement with their respective institutions and co-faculty. Some participants reframed this experience as a positive form of autonomy that shields them from complicated institutional politics, as seen in Guo's and Kwan's comments:

I feel like there aren't really any colleague relationships. So, there's no so-called office politics either. My friends are really envious, "Wow, that's so nice. You don't have to deal with conflicts of interests. You can just focus on teaching your courses." (Guo)

[My job] mainly depends on individual work. [...] Some of us are given protected time to do research and teaching. So that actually saved us quite a lot from all the university politics, [...] all the administrative problems that you will face, to be honest. (Kwan)

For Guo and Kwan, their marginal positions may shield them from institutional demands and politics, so that they can focus on professional and academic tasks. However, Leah found it challenging to maintain the delicate balance of institutional integration and finding a safe comfortable position in her department due to limited contact:

It doesn't have to be deep connections [with my colleagues], but I do want to better understand how to feel more at ease in the department. Because right now, it feels like... I can't quite figure things out. Our department is quite big. I know there're some politics or factions... I don't want to be part of any small group. I just hope I don't accidentally get on anyone's wrong side.

Unlike participants who use their isolation as an advantage and protection from scrutiny, Leah expressed a longing for greater institutional legibility and comfort. The challenge of deciphering norms and power dynamics that structure workplace relations and career opportunities for Leah has been heightened by cultural differences and exclusion from informal networks where institutional knowledge is often shared. She is conscious about the risks in navigating departmental relations and politics from a marginalized position. For those

who already lack racial privileges or institutional protection, even minor missteps might have serious consequences. Leah's concerns and caution suggest that disengagement may come with professional costs for Chinese academics, and offers useful nuances for us to understand ideas about strategic withdrawal and comfortable invisibility.

Vivian's experience as an adjunct instructor reveals the lack of institutional engagement for early-career and women academics:

I think I definitely spend a lot more time thinking about the course and class material itself, rather than the greater institutional policies and things like that. [...] I would say, just because I'm teaching at the same institution where I did my program, [...] a lot of my professors are now my colleagues. So, I think that's where most of my relationships are, as opposed to making new ones. I guess I'm not very involved otherwise. I mean, ... I get emails. There are definitely opportunities for things like town halls and other ways to be more involved. But I think, being an adjunct, I'm not fully diving into being a faculty member. [...] I'm just not very involved in the social aspect of it.

Vivian's precarious employment status intersected with racialized positioning and restricted her participation in academic communities and institutional activities. The acknowledgment of opportunities for involvement that she didn't pursue demonstrates what it is like maneuvering through institutions that were not created with her needs in mind. This professional liminality takes on particular meanings for racialized faculty members, constituting a self-protective tactic of retreat and disengagement that can ultimately limit professional opportunities and reinforce marginalization.

For some Chinese academics, their socio-cultural in-betweenness has resulted in isolation and professional challenges. But for others, their liminal positioning also facilitated connection and community formation. Many participants described gravitating toward individuals with shared linguistic, cultural, or lived experiences. This creates the "third spaces" (Bhabha 1994) for hybrid identities to find recognition and validation.

I tend to socialize with Chinese communities. I really enjoy chatting in Cantonese. If that's not an option, I'd connect with someone who speaks Chinese mandarin. If that's also not there, maybe with other Asians. And if not, then with other immigrants, like those from Africa or other countries, because immigrants share a common experience of moving from one country to another, which I find really interesting. In general, my

closest connections are with [people from my hometown], then with mainland Chinese. [...] I prefer making friends with people whose backgrounds are closer to mine.

Brain's description illuminates what Zhou and Lee (2007) term ethnic affinity, where cultural-linguistic proximity creates pathways for affects of closeness and connection in otherwise alienating institutional spaces. The multiple vectors of identity, background, language, and diasporic experiences, create various levels of social comfort.

This pattern of seeking cultural-linguistic familiarity was echoed by many, such as Amy:

If there's a social event, like an alumni gathering, whenever I come across other East Asians or Mandarin speakers, we naturally end up chatting more. We have similar backgrounds, so it feels easier, more comfortable. Back when I was in grad school, there weren't any other Mandarin speakers, but I got along better with students from Korea. Academics who share Asian cultural backgrounds and commonly experience marginality in predominantly white institutional spaces are "naturally" drawn to each other. This instant connection is brought about by institutional structures that lump them into the same forever foreign, outsider-within position. Such a sense of commonality and solidarity provide the comfort and ease that help them navigate hostile institutional structures, and can be seen as a response to racial marginalization. This means the in-between position has the potential to facilitate pan-ethnic alliances and micro-communities

Extending this analysis of affinity among the marginalized, Diane stressed how socializing with those who share her cultural background, even only to a limited extent, provides mutual recognition, emotional comfort, and cultural validation in spaces where racialized faculty often experience marginalization:

I went to do a doctoral seminar and I met Chinese students there. I think they really liked my presence because...I always appreciate the [Mandarin] language so much. And I asked them to teach me a few words. And they asked me to teach them some Cantonese. And they told me a lot about their life in China and this trip to Canada [...] I just feel like we embrace everyone's language.

For Diane and the Chinese students she connected with, language serves as both cultural marker and a bridge that helped them navigate in-between spaces, as their reciprocal amicable exchanges affirmed linguistic diversity within an academic setting that privileges

English and white cultural norms. The positive feelings that flowed freely in this interaction, as Diane vividly recounted, points to an affective relief for minoritized individuals from the intense labour required navigating the institution and various forms of exclusion. Narratives like this demonstrate how Chinese academics' experience of in-betweenness, although often cause disconnection, can also create belonging and community. Such moments constitute embodied counterspaces in the academy (Luedke, 2023) that transcend, to a certain extent, institutional whiteness and provide racialized academics with affirmation and empowerment.

As inspiring as Chinese faculty members' strategic navigation of marginality and in-betweenness can be, the creation of "third spaces" as counterspaces is limited by the macro socio-structural barriers, and cannot be overcome through individual adaptation alone. As May poignantly contemplated, in-betweenness often lead to uncertainty about belonging:

With the context of hybrid identity, when we go back to our mother tongue, Mandarin Chinese, and then you still feel like, Do I really belong? And a lot of times people feel that I'm not really Canadian, according to Canadian colleagues. I'm not really Chinese, according to those people I know in mainland China. So who am I?

In-betweenness can create bridges, as in Amy, Brian, and Dianes case, but it may also be experienced as walls. The unique racialization of transnational Chinese individuals working living and knowing in colonial white contexts that see them as perpetual foreigners (Museus, 2014) made their belonging particularly challenging. Having made adjustment and adaptation to Western norms, they often find themselves neither fully accepted in their adopted country nor completely at home in their country of origin. The third space of cultural hybridity, therefore, often remains conceptual, a space that is potentially creative but also ambivalent due to structural limits.

Further, the experiences of transnational Chinese academics are divergent, as evidenced by participants whose relationship to Chinese identity follows a different trajectory. Eric's experiences as a second-generation Canadian of Chinese diaspora heritage complicate the understanding of intra-ethnic affinity among Chinese/Asian academics:

Researcher: Are there a lot of Asian or Chinese colleagues in your faculty?

Eric: Yeah, there are. I mean, it's good. I don't particularly affiliate myself. I don't interact with them a lot since they're in different departments. But we're friendly. I don't speak Chinese, so I don't have a direct connection with any of them. [...] It's more about common experiences. I don't share the same experiences as other Asian faculty members, so I can't really relate.

Lacking shared experience and Chinese language proficiency creates cultural-linguistic barriers for Eric to identify with Chinese colleagues. This indicates the “translocational positionality” of diasporic subjects (Anthias 2020), where multiple factors, including language, migration, and socialization, shape one's sense of belonging. Eric disrupts assumptions about natural similarity and connections based on ethnicity, and further elaborates on his experiences with in-betweenness:

The most microaggressions I experience actually come from other Chinese people. They assume that I speak the language and they try to talk with me. [...] people come up to me and say, “Oh, you don't speak Chinese yet?” Yeah... so I don't. I haven't directly experienced aggression as a faculty member at [my University] in my role, other than sometimes awkward comments. I don't see it [being Chinese] as a hindrance.

Intra-ethnic othering demonstrates how diaspora and transnational movement shape in-between identities that are more nuanced than ethnic origin or immigration status (Bhabha, 1994). As racialization is continuously (re)constructed in different contexts, individual racial-cultural identity also varies due to factors such as linguistic background, cultural socialization, and family history. As a result, academics of Chinese heritage experience racialized exclusion differently. Eric's experience reveals how racialization and ethnic identity intersect with socio-cultural and political forces. For him, being a second-generation Chinese Canadian man in academia may have shield him largely from explicit racism. But on the other hand, his distance from Chinese cultural linguistic traditions means exclusion from Chinese communities. nuance foregrounds how.

Leah corroborated Eric that shared ethno-racial origin does not guarantee rapport, as her relationship with the only other Chinese woman in her faculty remained distant:

I think maybe she wasn't really interested in having conversations based on us being

both Chinese. Maybe it's because she grew up here, born and raised in Canada, and from what I can tell, she hasn't spent much time in China. So, I felt she wasn't willing to connect over that [ethnic] common background. [...] As colleagues and Chinese women around same age, we didn't really grow closer. Actually, I'm closer to a [racialized] male colleague who joined the department the same time as I did.

Leah and her Chinese woman colleague's differences in lived experience creates distinct identity formations and limited commonalities. Her affiliation with another colleague suggests that feelings of connection are often results of shared institutional positioning and common professional experiences, instead of shared identity categories such as gender or race. Transnational academic spaces are thus characterized by complex webs of affinity and belonging where connections can form across different identity markers.

Ivy offered insights into the complexities of in-betweenness from the perspective of a scholar in humanities whose academic interests focus on East Asian studies. With a distinct form of racialized experience different from both white colleagues and first-generation Asian immigrants, she found it challenging to form affiliation, although Chinese/Asian individuals are well-represented in her institution:

I'm second generation, but I'm one of the few second and later generation Asian [North Americans], right? At [my] university, you know, we have a million Chinese and Asian, teaching engineering, math, accounting, whatever. Like this is a very Asian campus. But not very many [later generation] Chinese Canadians or Americans or anything like that.

The complexity of Ivy's cultural positioning becomes particularly evident in her navigation of East Asian and North American socio-cultural structures teaching about East Asian culture:

I'm not very good at being the person who's higher in the hierarchy. [...] They don't teach you that when you're learning [East Asian culture]; they teach you how to be humble. So, I'm pretty bad at being superior, and I feel incredibly awkward and uncomfortable doing it. [...] Sometimes, it comes out, like when I invite [an East Asian] colleague to give a talk, [...] the [Asian] students are all running after him, bowing all the time [...] And I'm just like, oh my God, [...] I just can't deal with this right now!

On one hand, Ivy felt that the Canadian context often perceived her as "too loud, too pushy, too Chinese" and excludes her because of her race. On the other, she described an intense sense of dissonance with certain Asian cultural practices, particularly social hierarchies of

class, age, and status. Her in-betweenness is evident in her acceptance of the East Asian value of humility and acculturation to North American idea of equality. When her professional authority and seniority is embedded in an Asian context, she feels tension and a heightened awareness of cultural contradictions. Further, her intense discomfort with the embodied performances of hierarchy and visceral urge to avoid such awkwardness illustrate how in-betweenness generate powerful affective responses.

In other situations, Ivy was able to draw on her hybrid identity to navigate the emotional labour of managing contradictory cultural expectations. For instance, she would pretend not to understand certain Chinese references when interacting with Chinese academics who employed them to signify cultural capital and superiority:

The “dropping the Tsinghua Beida [two top Chinese universities] reference game,” in which you’re trying to establish where you are in the Chinese hierarchy, trying to figure out if we’re both elite or not. There’s a certain sense of elite privilege, etc. [...] I hate that game. And I feel superbly awkward doing it. I don’t want to insert myself in that hierarchy whatsoever. [...] I just played dumb. [...] because of that, my Chineseness is sometimes left ambiguous, deliberately so.

Ivy deliberately creates ambiguity about her Chineseness by deploying or concealing certain cultural knowledge to resist conformity. This exemplifies a fluid cultural belonging comparable to “flexible citizenship” (Ong, 1999). From an intersectional perspective, rejecting elitist academic hierarchies represents Ivy’s resistance to multiple systems of stratification, both academic hierarchies and status markers. It is evident that transnational/cultural Chinese academics must navigate not only institutional racism but also complex relationships with heritage communities, producing unique forms of in-betweenness and labour. In other words, while Ivy, as a transnational subject, was strategic in refusing fixed cultural identities imposed by both dominant and minoritized communities, her awareness of the “game” and deliberate pretense “playing” it still constitute extra work and entail a level of affective coping.

Many narratives bring to light the challenges of cultural in-betweenness that often result

in their exclusion, yet some participants felt their transnational identity formation empowering. These perspectives reframe in-betweenness as a space of possibility and cultural synthesis, as eloquently expressed by Fei:

So when we come to the West, we have to realize the cultural differences and see, what are the merits, you know, what are the good things in the Western society. And we try to mingle with them and learn from them. So, you learn the good and discard the bad, and then you become a better person. You're not just giving up on your own culture. [...] It's not your home culture, not your host culture, but the comfortable space you created with your interlocutor, you know, social network that you feel comfortable with, right? You don't have to be either or. You can be both.

Fei's selective cultural integration and translation suggests a consciousness that is fostered by navigating cultural borders and the outsider-within positionality (Collins, 1986, 1999; Perales, 2013). She experiences in-betweenness as a unique position to access different cultural resources for self-improvement. The "having it both ways" (Haraway, 1988) approach illustrates a transcultural identity that moves beyond essentialist cultural identities and challenges the binary thinking that often positions Asian academics as either strangers on Western lands or assimilated to white norms (Kawai, 2005; Museus, 2013). Fei's ideal, to create a "comfortable space" for transnational/cultural academics through conversations, underscores the transformative potential of in-betweenness. It is important to recognize the systemic constraints that limit such possibilities, especially as institutional structures exhaust marginalized individuals' emotional and social resources, as existing literature and this study demonstrated.

Reclaiming in-betweenness through active cultural integration is resonated among Amy and Hao. Amy narrated her affiliations to both Chinese and Western cultural traditions without experiencing them as contradictory:

I like their [Western] approach, for example, in terms of education, they adopt an encouraging, positive style, [...] whereas the Chinese approach can be negative and suppressive. I enjoy environments where there's more independence, autonomy, and freedom to express oneself. [...] As for traditional Chinese cultural values, I still strongly identify with them too. [...] Living here, with Chinese culture as the foundation, I also bring in my own experiences. I'm also very interested in their

[Western] history, their religion. I think both sides have their pros and cons. Personally, I sometimes prefer the more open and free Western style.

Amy crafts a hybrid identity that aligns with Western paradigms and preserve Chinese cultural foundations, building on her personal values and lived experiences. Mirroring Fei, she experiences in-betweenness as liberating. Their perspectives add nuances to the understanding of conditional belonging and cultural alienation. Yet this approach may not be equally accessible to all Chinese academics who occupy diverse positionalities. As academics in social science, Fei and Amy tend to possess the knowledge and institutional privileges needed to construct flexible identity. Others that lack such resources will likely encounter greater challenges as their liminality is defined by structural exclusion and institutional barriers (Henry & Kobayashi, 2017; Settles et al., 2019, 2021).

This section has delineated the nuances of Chinese faculty members' transcultural/national experiences in Canadian academy. Their in-betweenness, while often challenging and constraining socially, professionally, and emotionally, can also become a site of creative agency and cultural innovation that construct fluid belonging and build communities. These insights attest to Chinese academics' unique positions in Canadian academia. From their unique standpoints, participants critically examined different cultural traditions and build knowledge and sociality at the margin. Essentialist ideas about cultural differences often position Asia and the West as fundamentally incompatible (Chen, 2010; Iftikar & Museus, 2018). To avoid simplification and dichotomy, this study foregrounded Chinese academics' agency and diversity by exploring possibilities to transform liminality into a productive space of boundary crossing, self making, and community building. However, as promising as discussions about flexible belonging, fluid identity, and cultural hybridity are, these ideas often fall under individual adaptations instead of structural transformation. It is crucial to acknowledge that in a context where whiteness maintains systemic power and privilege, where racialized and culturally diverse individuals face

persistent pressures to assimilate to dominant Western cultural and institutional frameworks (Anthias, 2001, 2020; Delgado & Stefancic, 2023; Hall, 2021), the potential of in-betweenness often cannot be realized. With this critical intersectional awareness, this study has tried to discern the power structures and socio-cultural forces transcultural/national Chinese academics navigate, resist, and reconcile, and explore how these dynamics manifest in their affective experiences, as further illustrated in the following chapter.

Chinese faculty members' embodied, linguistic, and socio-cultural differences are marked as inferior deviations from whiteness, and mobilized to discredit their professional legitimacy. They confront dismissal, alienation, and exclusion from career advancement opportunities and collegial networks, which severely affect early-career and women academics. Chinese women academics experience execrated aggression, like bullying and exploitation from institutions, colleagues, and students, as well as lack of support and systemic devaluation of feminized care labour. Surviving in Canadian institutions entrenched in colonialism and patriarchy means Chinese faculty members must conform to whiteness and androcentric norms. However, performing white middleclass masculinity often clashes with their lived experiences and cultural and familial upbringing, causing extra affective burden and a troubling sense of inauthenticity and self-betrayal. The next chapter probes into the emotional aftermath of navigating racialization and in-betweenness.

## Chapter 6: Feeling the institution: An Affective Archive

In previous chapters, the affective dimension of Chinese faculty members' institutional experiences has been a distinct theme, particularly about confronting (micro)aggression, discrimination, and exclusion. These bodily and emotional forces deposit an affective residue in the racialized body, transforming racism from abstract structures into embodied sensational experiences in their academic and personal lives. In other words, the accumulation of the affect from being wronged creates "sticky" emotions that adhere to racialized bodies navigating institutional spaces (Ahmed, 2004). This invites the question how Chinese academics stick themselves to, or detach from, Canadian tertiary institutions, and what affective structures emerged in the process. This chapter approaches affect as the embodiment of social structures (Penz & Sauer, 2019) and explore Chinese faculty members' affective patterns and strategies. By this exploratory work, I hope to create what Cvetkovich (2012) describes as "archives of feelings" that also document social and institutional power relations.

I begin by zooming in on moments when Chinese bodies encounter the patriarchal colonial academic institution, probing into the affective intensities produced by structural dynamics. I then examine the affects that stick Chinese bodies to academia despite challenges and inequities, and the affective infrastructures they develop to process racialized injury and manage affective dissonance, maintain institutions' happy equal façade, and secure their affiliation to these institutions. Detailing the affective push-pull, their persistent attachments, and affective labour they perform which constitutes an additional, invisible burden unfamiliar to their white colleagues, I aim to reveal how such affective structures epitomize what Berlant (2011) identified as cruel optimism, an attachment to professional ideals that undermines personal flourishing. I also try to establish that such personal affective realities and creations are both products and producers of the social: as individual affective experiences are shaped by social forces, they simultaneously create, maintain, or disrupt those very structures.

### **Affect Aliens' Embodied Knowledges**

Shaped profoundly by whiteness, academic spaces are affectively charged sites where domination and marginalization operate not only through formal policies but through affective economies that shape how racialized faculty experience their professional environments (Lehmann et al., 2019; Penz & Sauer, 2019). The affective economies distribute comfort, safety, belonging, and affective weight unevenly across different bodies (Ahmed, 2004, 2012; Hemmings, 2005). For Chinese faculty members, these affective dynamics frequently manifest as embodied responses to institutional constraints. Besides the various forms affective responses to racial injury and marginalization discussed in previous chapters, participants articulated complex, multifaceted emotional landscapes that reveal the tensions between personal affective attachments to academia and structural challenges. Feeling how they feel, Chinese faculty become “affect aliens” (Ahmed 2010), bodies that disrupt institutional comfort and happiness through their presence, and bodies that incarnate structural and institutional powers through their emotional and embedded knowledge.

The circulation of emotions in institutions thus creates an affective disparity where certain bodies absorb more institutional tensions and become sites of intensified feeling and affective labour, while others maintain ease and neutrality. The common, recurring themes in Chinese faculty's narratives, feeling stressed, constrained, precarious, and alienated, emphasize the bodily intensities of structural relations (Bialostok & Aronson, 2016) and suggest how affective burdens become normalized in their academic existence. This section examines how structural violence manifests in visceral bodily responses, creating public feelings that connect individual experiences to broader social structures (Anzaldúa, 2015; Cvetkovich, 2012).

### ***Stuck and Suffocated***

The affective experiences of racialized faculty members in Canadian academia often

reveal moments of impasse. As Ahmed (2012, 2017), Berlant (2011, 2020) and Cvetkovich (2012) have conceptualized, impasse, is a space and time of suspended agency, situations where movement is inhibited, where one feels stressed, despair, stuck, and trapped, often by societal structures that represent promises of the good life. This section explores the affective dimensions of stuckness and suffocation experienced by Chinese academics navigating white Canadian institutions. To begin, Diane's powerful account of her emotional and physical reactions to institutional resistance illustrates the embodied dimension of this impasse:

I felt anger. I felt frustration. I felt some sadness. And I felt suffocated. I felt like, I felt like I couldn't breathe. I want to do this anti-racism, anti-oppression work as students need it, you know, they crave it. [...] I just felt like it's just being like, nope, [Diane], nope, nope, you can't do, you can't do it. So I felt small. I felt... she [director] was trying to make me feel small. I never was fearful of her [...] I was not scared. But emotionally, sometimes I was a wreck. I was exhausted. [...] Work-life balance wasn't there. You know, like physically, because I also sat a lot and I worked a lot, my body felt broken, my sleep was disturbed. I'm a very good sleeper. So that's a big sign, right?

The flow of intense emotions, anger, frustration, sadness, and suffocation captures racialized faculty members' affective knowledge working in Western academia. The contrast between Diane's commitment to anti-racism and institutional resistance illuminates the labour racialized academics have to perform doing diversity work in white institutions (Ahmed, 2012). Institutional constraints and inertia undercut the racialized bodies' agency and maintain white dominance. The persistent institutional barriers exemplify what Ahmed (2012, 2017) describes as "hitting your head against a brick wall." When racialized academics' efforts to transform institutions are frequently suppressed and rejected, they are stuck in an impasse, immobile, disempowered (Berlant, 2011). Diane's broken sleep, physical deterioration, and emotional fatigue embody how institutional power operates through affect. Her repeated emphasis on feeling small and static what Ahmed (2007b) conceptualizes as the "phenomenology of whiteness," an orientation in space that constrains the movements and presence of racialized bodies. This spatial dynamic not only shapes which bodies are included or excluded but also dictates what racialized bodies can do, where they can go, and how they

move, or cannot move, in institutional spaces.

The experience of “stuckness” is further illuminated through Tian’s disappointment when her expectations for an equity-oriented academic environment collided with reality:

At this school, I don’t know... like, right now, I’m at the stage where I’m very unhappy. I just feel like, I’m in the wrong place. [...] Before I joined, I thought the school is very pro-EDI. And my research has a really big lens on EDI. I thought I would be able to do all these things and have people that share this value. [...] But certain faculty members are just so anti-change, anti any EDI initiatives, like it’s just a struggle. [...] During faculty meetings, there’s always heated pushbacks when EDI was brought up. [...] And then there’s a top-down issue. [...] If those professors in the classrooms are saying things like, well, they forced this on me, I have to teach EDI, even though that’s not true, the students are going to be angry for them. [...] I’m being very ideological, that, well, if we just keep talking about it, raise awareness, and do all of this, things are going to change. But I also know from a practical perspective, when nothing radical happens, they’re not going to change. [...] They’re just going to ignore what we are saying here.

Impasse is evident in Tian’s profound sense of being “in the wrong place” and growing awareness of the futility of institutional EDI efforts, pointing to what Cvetkovich (2012) describes as the “spatial connotations of being at a ‘dead end’ or ‘no exit’” that characterize the material and sensory nature of depression as political affect” (p. 20). Their initial attachment to the institution through the cluster of promises of EDI commitment and academic agency then turned into disillusionment and displacement. Parallel to Ahmed’s (2017) concept of “the feminist killjoy” that problematizes institutional EDI rhetoric, Tian’s EDI advocacy and Diane’s attempts to introduce anti-racism work disrupted institutional comfort and generates resistance from leadership, colleagues, and students. Crucially, participants often pointed out that their impasse is structurally produced by institutional architectures designed to resist change (Cvetkovich, 2012). Thus, the experience of impasse can function as political knowledge, and further attests to the epistemological potential for the personal and affective to shed light on the structural.

In Sophie’s account, suffocation has another dimension. The precarity of early-career status and the intimidating tenure system cause intense stress and anxiety, which in turn suppress marginalized voice and agency to question institutional racism:

The tenure track is really scary and stressful, and I'm worried about, you know, they say that you're supposed to express your opinion and, people will be respectful of that, and they won't... [...] It's so scary that... like my survival technique now is just to not speak up. I don't want to draw attention. I just want to be able to keep my job, keep doing the research that I do, and hopefully if I do get tenure, then I can start to just breathe a little bit easier. But I've been told that, it's impossible to change the structures of these institutions. I guess institutional racism and racial discrimination will always be there. They have preceded my entry into this job and this institution. Even if I do speak up, nothing is going to change that, or really change in a grand, sustainable way. And so, the best thing to do, even though it feels bad and against one's principles, is just to like, lay low and remember what's important. [...] I think it comes from witnessing how minorities are treated by colleagues, how life in academia can be made really easy for some but incredibly difficult for others. I've seen how that plays out. [...] I've seen fellow minority colleagues experience really troubling situations. I've witnessed racially charged aggressions, and it's been scary to watch. Seeing that has made me adopt more of a quiet, keep-my-head-down survival strategy.

Systemic racism and tenure evaluation create conditions where political engagement feel impossible or self-destructive, where racialized faculty must often choose between survival and speaking out, a choiceless choice that exacerbates feelings of impasse. In their lecture a decade after publishing *Cruel Optimism*, Berlant (2020) reiterated that “cruel optimism is an affective structure that points to being stuck or suffocated in the exact same place where individuals or groups have also attached their optimism for flourishing” (21:03). The striking similarity between these narratives and the language used about stuckness and suffocation encapsulate the very conditions of breathability and mobility for racialized bodies within academic spaces and the cruel construction of Chinese academics' attachment to white institutions. Institutional racism has an affective weight, manifesting through various bodily constriction, that reveals how institutional power operates not only through formal policies but through creating affective conditions that make certain actions feel impossible, certain futures unimaginable, and certain forms of resistance unsustainable.

Narratives about suffocation reveal tensions between resignation and resistance. Tian was torn between ideological optimism and practical knowledge about institutional inertia; Sophie adopted a survival strategy of giving up the optimistic attachment to unattainable institutional equity and deferred affective ease until achieving career security; and Diane left

her academic position. Yet these responses should be considered as strategic reorientation instead of defeat. Sharpe (2016) conceptualizes “aspiration” both as the struggle for breath and as hope for alternatives, foregrounding the embodied act of aspiration in “keeping and putting breath back in the Black body in hostile weather” (p. 113). Diane redirected her energies toward anti-racist activism while remaining an active member in her community of academics and practitioners. Sophie and Tian continued doing research that they value and practicing equitable, culturally responsive pedagogies in their classrooms despite institutional constraints. Their participation in this study also constitutes an act of affective resistance. They told me that their commitment to anti-oppressive research objectives and wish to support me as a racialized woman and new researcher was the reason that they consented to participate. This aligns with Cvetkovich’s (2012) assertion that feeling bad and bad feelings can be the starting point for doing something, demonstrating how affect, though constrained by societal and institutional conditions, nevertheless finds ways to animate bodies.

### ***Stress and Precarity***

Alongside institutional racism, the stress and precarity due to the neoliberal transformation of higher education and the recent rise of racism and xenophobic anti-China policies in Canada is a prominent theme in Chinese faculty members’ affective experiences. Neoliberalization produces distinctive affective loads for Chinese faculty members as they navigate both academic productivity expectations and the additional labour of racialized existence in predominantly white institutions. The majority of the participants in research-focused positions articulated their stress, exhaustion, and sense of precarity about the institutional expectations and tenure-track mechanism. Ping, for example, recounted the affective experiences of academic labour and how they may shift across career stages:

Honestly, sometimes I feel so tired. It’s exhausting. I think feeling tired is probably the most noticeable thing I’ve experienced, especially with aging. You really start to feel that the workload in this profession is quite heavy. [...] But in the early stages of your career, exhaustion is not the main thing. I think for new faculty, it’s more about pressure.

You're worried; can I get tenure? Can I secure funding?

Ping made visible the physical and mental burnout that characterizes Chinese individuals' long-term academic survival and signifies the gradual deterioration of bodies under systems that are both competitive and exclusionary. Her early-career concerns about legitimacy and security echo Sophie's tenure-track anxiety, but even after securing tenure, the stress and exhaustion does not stop. The prolonged affective labour shows how institutional power and neoliberalism work through long-term demands that slowly drain emotional and physical energy, creating persist senses of precarity and stress. This chronic affective burden reflects what Berlant (2011) calls "slow death," the gradual wearing down of marginalized bodies whose existence and labour remain undervalued in institutional structures.

Ping's observations deeply resonated with other early-career and teaching-focused participants, such as May, who described the stress created by institution expectations and scrutiny: "You do feel the pressure, peer pressure, colleague pressure [sigh]. In the department, you are expected to blah, blah, blah. Say, getting published, right? And also common service like attending *all* the meetings... I just try my best..." Similarly, Ursula described her faculty job as "labour intensive," physically and mentally draining:

It's overwhelming. It's just... work is always busy, and there's so much to do. I feel I have no time or opportunity to reflect, you know, to calm down and think. Sometimes I have this anxiety, about coping with everything. Like, I am so stressed out when due dates and deadlines just pile up.

The relentlessness of academic tasks that left Ursula little space to rest and catch her breath can be interpreted as a form of *breathlessness*, an affective condition marked by constant insufficiency, emotional exhaustion, and anxiety produced by the accelerated temporal regimes of neoliberal academia. Pondering on this quote, I am reminded that our interview took place in a narrow window between Ursula's academic commitments. Halfway into the interview, Ursula asked if I would mind her eating. When I said "no, of course, please", she took a few quick bites of French fries. Having just talked about our mutual fondness for good

Chinese food, the moment revealed how the weight of institutional demands compressed her space of wellness and human pleasure. It was in that fleeting, intimate pause, between labour and survival, that the embodied toll of the academic profession became crystalized.

Brian also described how institutional hierarchy and neoliberal ethos produce persistent pressure and sense of precarity that run throughout his career:

The most difficult and painful stage was when I started as an assistant professor. At the beginning, they expected me to do excellent research and teach well. If either wasn't good enough, I wouldn't be given tenure. The pressure was immense, especially because my wife didn't have a job, and our children were little. [...] It was extremely stressful because everything was new, new country, new job, completely new life. With a young family and no job security, the pressure was really intense. [...] After I got tenure, the pressure decreased. Now, the pressure I feel isn't coming from the university; it's pressure I put on myself. [...] Till today, I feel depressed when my paper gets rejected, and helpless about if I could secure funding.

The interlayered pressure Brian described, including professional demands, migration adjustment, family responsibilities, shows how multiple systems of power create compound vulnerabilities and insecurity for racialized academics. Despite these challenges, Chinese academics must make exceptional achievement, manage institutional scrutiny and lack of support, and cope with stress on their own. Most revealing is Brian's emotional vulnerability as an established scholar in leadership roles under the high expectation about academic productivity, and the stress he characterized as self-inflicted. The ceaseless stress demonstrates the perpetual urge Chinese academics feel to overachieve to secure their status, and how career advancement does not alleviate the affective weight of conditional belonging.

The precarity racialized academics feel is often intensified by racism and the changing political climate in the Canadian context. Reflecting on her academic journey, Olivia expressed feelings of being "overstressed" and "overtaxed", as well as a deep concern about rising xenophobia and racist aggression:

I feel overstressed and overtaxed. I do feel like, in general, we're all being asked to do more and more all the time. But I also feel grateful, right? Because I'm lucky to have a good job that's stable and in which I have a lot of autonomy, especially as a post-tenure professor. But I'm also quite worried. I think the nature of academia is changing quite a

lot. [...] When my master's students ask about going on to a PhD, I make sure they're strongly aware that most Canadian PhDs don't get jobs in academia. They need to know going in that this is the situation. I feel that public support for higher education is really dropping. Government funding for higher education is also really dropping. And I do think that the current political climate, closing borders and xenophobia, is absolutely a factor. To me, it seems like, at least in the area where I am, although the general atmosphere is quite tolerant, I'm seeing a lot more expressions of racism and anti-immigrant sentiment than I did when I first got here [X] years ago.

Olivia's stress and burnout demonstrate how racialized bodies absorb institutional pressure.

This affective state, resonating with the experiences of many participants in this study, suggests that stress functions as a structural condition disproportionately distributed to certain groups of academics. The intensification of labour she referenced reflects the corporatization of universities under neoliberal logics that reconfigures intellectual labour into quantifiable outputs under market-driven metrics and reinforces inequity (Brown 2015). Further, her stress is intensified by a sense of uncertainty and hostility as Olivia witnessed the neoliberal attack on education and the rise of racism and xenophobia. The intersection of neoliberal capitalism and changing political climate she pointed out thus brings to light the coloniality of academic structures that particularly impacts racialized faculty (Dei, 2019).

Olivia's embodied and emotional consequences of the neoliberal transformation of higher education (Cvetkovich, 2011; Giroux, 2014) are compounded by the rise of racism and xenophobia in the socio-political environment. She is wary of such trends not just as a professor who feels the responsibility to prepare students for adverse realities, but also as a racialized academic who has been navigating conditional inclusion, who understands these challenges through lived and embodied experience. Situated at the margin, racialized bodies are the first to feel the spaces narrowing for their precarious existence. Akin to Olivia's concerns about the political environment, Jiao described how witnessing the rise of Sinophobia in Canadian society and academia, particularly the new STRAC policies that disproportionately targeted Chinese academics, created increased sense of uncertainty and vulnerability about the future of her academic career:

There is always some kind of constraint, and you navigate. And if it goes to the point that you think the resistance is too much, you'll think about changing. Because as I said, we're living in an ever-changing environment. Leadership is changing, national policies are changing. Provincial policies and procedures... they're more stringent than the federal level policies with regard to, how easy Chinese scholars in Canada can engage global research collaborations. This is just one example. So when you think about those things, you never know what kind of workplace that you will be in and what kind of changes that you will be witnessing in that specific workplace, right?

Stress and precarity have largely become normalized and institutionalized as a mode of governance in contemporary academic life (Battiste et al, 2021; Childress, 2020). For Chinese academics, especially those in early career stages, precarity becomes a day-to-day affective condition, a key part in how they experience their institutional lives. The tenuous nature of academic employment has aggravated implications on their professional existence and racialized vulnerability. Hao voiced concerns about anti-immigrant policies and sentiments, affecting international student enrollment, which can end his academic career:

It's concerning that if the Conservative Party comes into power and further tightens immigration policies, the number of international students will decline more. There's already a cap on study permits. Next year, they plan to reduce the number by another 10%, following a cut of around 30%. This poses a long-term challenge for faculty members. If there aren't enough students, our contracts will not be renewed, and I'll have to seek employment elsewhere, possibly outside the education sector altogether.

Hao's concern reveals how geopolitical tensions and xenophobic immigration policies impact marginalized bodies through various institutional mechanisms, and how the uncertain existence and livelihood of racialized early-career academics are deepened. Zhe also expressed the worrisome recent changes in immigration and education policy and reiterated the affective dimensions of contingent employment:

I'd use the word precarious to describe this state of instability, because you never know if your contract will be renewed. I may remain in part-time positions for years, which inevitably creates stress and anxiety. Even with strong resilience, it's difficult not to be affected.

While the neoliberalization of higher education often leads to high level of pressure for faculty members (Lawrence & Rezai-Rashti, 2021), Chinese faculty members experience intensified stress and precarity in the neoliberal, colonial, Sinophobic Canadian academy.

## *Unbelonging*

The common and chronic condition of feeling stressed, exhausted, and insecure among Chinese faculty members encapsulates the unfair institutional structures that burden marginalized bodies, and the affective labour of racialized academics that remains largely unacknowledged in formal institutional discourses. For Chinese faculty members, these emotional and embodied intensities of institutional injustice greatly affect their sense of belonging in the academic community. Negotiating belonging becomes another form of invisible labour that is constructed by racialized institutional power dynamics and shape the everyday experiences of Chinese faculty members in Canadian higher education. My exploration of how Chinese academics navigate the complex terrain of belonging starts with their encounters with subtle yet persistent hinderances to full inclusion:

I honestly don't feel like an insider or I'm one of them [laughter]. After all, their [white Canadian colleagues] perception of an Asian, Chinese person naturally creates a kind of distance, a barrier. On the surface, everyone is very polite. [...] People are generally friendly. But if you ask whether I can really be part of the core decision-making circle? No, I cannot. I don't think that's possible. So yeah, that's the reality. As for belonging... I haven't really felt that anyone is unhappy with me or that I've been ostracized. So far, I haven't experienced aggressive discrimination, or targeted or anything like that. In that sense, I'd say the collegial environment around me is pretty good. [...] Everyone just minds their own business. So yeah, it's alright. (Xin)

Xin experienced the institutional environment as both collegial and distant, providing permission for her existence and surface-level politeness yet denying substantive inclusion, shows how belonging for Chinese faculty in Canadian academia remains liminal and precarious. In other words, the conditional inclusion for Chinese women created conditional belonging that perpetually marked them as invaders, out of place in spaces historically reserved for white bodies. With the awareness that full belonging in the academic community may never be achievable, Xin adjusted to this condition by normalizing her othering and finding ways to inhabit the periphery space. This guarded optimism illustrates how racialized faculty develop affective strategies that allow them to persist despite structural exclusions.

The constant, careful negotiation of belonging for Chinese faculty is constantly performed in the everyday of institutional life. The following account from Leah described how she constantly feels like “walking on eggshell” and spends much time and effort deliberating each decision she has to make at work, unable to feel at ease:

I still feel like a newcomer. I’m extremely cautious; I think twice and thrice, even for small things. I think this is somewhat related to my identity as an Asian woman. [...] This year a woman joined our faculty. I get the sense that she’s not as cautious as I am. She’s local, and really, really carefree. There was this interesting incident I want to share with you. When she got our job offer, all the faculty members sent her greeting emails, you know, like “Congratulations on joining our faculty, we look forward to meeting you.” When I received those emails as a new hire, I replied carefully and politely to each person. But she only replied with an emoji, a thumbs-up. And I remember thinking, wow, she’s so light-hearted. She didn’t seem to feel any pressure at all!

This reflection delineates the affective economy of institutional spaces (Ahmed, 2012), where different bodies are differently positioned and affectively oriented, where the privilege of ease comes with inhabiting institutional spaces designed for and by whiteness. Leah’s comparison between her caution and hypervigilance and colleague’s relaxation reveals the uneven distribution of comfort and belonging in the academy, taken-for-granted to some bodies but not available to others. This disparity attests to how racialized faculty experience intensified awareness of being constantly scrutinized and judged. As a result, some bodies can feel like a newcomer through their embodied precarity and vigilance despite their established positions, while others may navigate a new environment effortlessly.

Leah’s story illustrates how, for Chinese faculty members, inclusion requires ongoing affective labour. Because of their “forever foreign” positioning in societal and institutional structures, they may be forever striving for but never quite achieving full belonging. The quest for institutional legitimacy then turns into yet another form of invisible labour placed on racialized bodies. This reveals the ways in which colonial logics continue to operate in Canadian academia and reinforce differential belonging and structural inequities. Echoing Leah’s experience, Ursula explained that (un)belonging for Chinese faculty is not only

shaped by interpersonal relationships but is more significantly influenced by institutional structures, leadership representation, and the political climate:

I don't feel I belong. My department is small, so it's easy to become close with some colleagues. But in terms of belonging, after all, while the collegial relationship is good, there isn't necessarily much interaction with the institution. Students are all white, so there's even less connection with them. And especially leadership, the culture here in [this province] is so local-centered. Many of the higher-ups at my school are locals who have connections with the local government. They have their own identity and their own traditions. So, to some extent, this explains why I feel disconnected, like I don't belong.

(Un)belonging operates as a form of affect, an orientation that directs bodies toward or away from certain spaces and objects, shaped by historical and institutional forces that determine which bodies can move, speak, and occupy space at ease and which bodies encounter constant friction (Ahmed, 2006b). Ursula's positive relationships with colleagues and disconnection from the institution contain affective insights about the limitations of interpersonal solutions to structural issues. The obvious nativism (Chang, 1999) in her institution reflects how white dominance perpetuates insider/outsider boundaries that restrict meaningful inclusion of racialized bodies. As a result, they are oriented to move away, to distant and detach from institutional life. The affective ease of institutional belonging is thus naturalized through white hegemony, making whiteness at home while others remain peripheral, excluded, and marginalized (Ahmed, 2012, 2017).

For racialized faculty, the affective experience of institutional alienation can manifest not only as a sense of distance but as an orientation to distant oneself, when the institution becomes a threat to their psychological and professional well-being. As Sophie expressed earlier, witnessing how racialized faculty was treated has generated fear and anxiety, leading to unbelonging in its extreme sense: disengagement as a survival mechanism:

I wonder if I would just want to distance myself from my department as much as possible, just for my own safety. I feel so unsafe in my department, and maybe if I get tenure, I'll have a little more freedom to make different choices about how I use my time, maybe contributing to other parts of the university. I might be interested in taking leadership roles in areas that are more inclusive, ones with a vision that I actually align with. But right now, I can't wait to detach as soon as I get tenure—if I do get tenure.

Sophie's inability to extend her body comfortably into her departmental space reveals how institutional spaces become uninhabitable for racialized bodies through processes of exclusion and disorientation (Ahmed, 2012, 2017). The conditional language Sophie used about her tenure underscores a precarious belonging, as institutional acceptance is perpetually uncertain. Threat and insecurity thus generate impactful affective effects orienting racialized bodies to disassociate and sever ties. As Ahmed (2017) described, breakage happens when the those seeking justice and equity are worn down, creating a feminist snap, a moment of rupture, a sudden break that reveals the accumulated pressures of systemic oppression. This snap, although seemingly passive, serves as a form of resistance against the status quo.

Chinese faculty's unbelonging extends beyond institutional contexts into broader questions of national and cultural citizenship that reveal the enduring power of racialization in shaping affective possibilities. Qian voiced her emotional relationship to place:

I don't feel I belong here; even now, after many years in Canada, getting PR [Permanent Residency], I still don't. When I'm in my hometown, [a Chinese City], I feel a strong belonging. It's only the moment I get on the plane [to go home] that I finally feel at ease.

Qian's non-belonging constitutes an affective displacement that persists despite her immigration status or professional accomplishments, revealing the implicitly exclusionary nature of Canadian nationhood that keeps racialized others from full belonging. The contrast Qian draws between her affective experience in Canada versus her hometown in China demonstrates the deep affective entanglement between body and place that allows for an ease of being when unconditional acceptance is granted. Cheng, who experienced loneliness and "cold vibes" from colleagues, recounted the intimate geographies of spatial alignment, comfort, and survival of his life in Canada:

Researcher: Looking back at your former workplace and the campus environment, was there a particular place that you liked? Somewhere you felt relaxed or happy.

Cheng: My home, I think. I remember it was really cold outside, and I turned the heater in my room up to 27 degrees—I remember that very clearly. [...] And while I was in [Canadian City X], I kind of created a fake [Asian] ecosystem for myself...

Researcher: Sounds like you really missed [Asia].

Cheng: I think... when things didn't feel like they were going well, I'd just start thinking about the past, you know?

Rather than identifying any institutional spaces as places of comfort, Cheng's orientation toward his home reveals a strategy of self-preservation by finding alternative spaces of ease and belonging when institutional environment feels unwelcoming. Recreating the warmth and affective familiarity, Cheng's nostalgia for places where he belongs stood in stark contrast to the coldness and alienation he encountered in Canada. Qian's homesickness and Cheng's nostalgia both illustrate an orientation to self-distant in the absence of institutional belonging. This then necessitates alternative affective retreats that help ease the emotional toll of navigating hostile institutional contexts.

### **Attaching to the Good Academic Life**

Having explored the challenges Chinese faculty members faced in Canadian higher education, it becomes important to analyze how and why, through what affective infrastructures Chinese academics become attached to and remain invested in academic careers. Although many participants expressed feelings excluded and marginalized, their narratives also revealed deeper attachment to academia. Such attachments often provide counterbalances to their experiences of alienation and sustained their commitment to the difficult academic life. This section therefore turns to understand why Chinese academics remain oriented toward and attached to Canadian academia. Drawing on Ahmed's (2006b, 2010) concepts of orientation and sticky affects, and Berlant's (2011) notion of cruel optimism and the promise of the good life, this section examines the complex ways in which they orient toward academia despite affective burdens and structural obstacles.

### ***Autonomy and Agency***

A primary theme emerging from participants' narratives is the significant value placed on academic autonomy and freedom to pursue one's intellectual interests, often unavailable in other professional contexts. For Chinese academics, the academy becomes a space promising

intellectual freedom and self-determination, which sticks Chinese scholars to challenging academic jobs. This represents what Ahmed (2006b) terms as “orientation device” that aligns bodies with certain spaces, objects, and futures. Eric’s reflection offers a compelling entry point into understanding how professional autonomy can foster attachment and belonging:

University is a place with a lot of freedom and autonomy. I really appreciate that. [...] What other job lets you spend 40% of your time doing whatever you want? And I just have to prove it by a narrative later. Like, that’s pretty unique. In government jobs, you constantly have to prove yourself, and there’s not a lot of autonomy. So, in that sense, I feel a stronger sense of belonging here compared to other workplaces.

The autonomy Eric immensely values serves as an affective anchor that creates an optimistic attachment to academia, directing him toward the desire object of the good academic life despite existing structures of exclusion (Berlant, 2011). The contrast he made to the constant scrutiny in government work reveals how academia’s relative freedom allows space for self-determination that is especially meaningful for Chinese scholars navigating white institutional spaces. The freedom to pursue one’s own direction and interest, albeit still following institutional pathways designed by and for dominant groups, is perceived more desirable than alternatives that can be even more exclusionary and restrictive.

Corresponding to Eric’s emphasis on autonomy, Fei articulated how professional independence is intertwined affectively with her intellectual passion and internal motivation:

The good thing about being a professor: I get my independence [...] There’s a lot of autonomy. If I get really busy, it’s normally because of my own research. And I’m an internally driven person. [...] I’m very happy with it because doing research was my dream when I was in China. [...] I love to challenge myself. And I always have an urge to learn, to explore something new. And so that kind of life [my previous job] looked perfect for others, but was, for me, kind of boring. It’s not intellectually stimulating.

Affect exists in embodied practices, in bodies’ orientations toward particular objects, and at times, the attachment to attachments per se (Cvetkovich, 2012). Fei’s account illuminates the way aspirational longing, the attachment to the perception of academia as a source of intellectual agency and stimulation, shapes one’s orientation toward particular institutional spaces and professional identities. Her identification as self-motivated and intellectually

curious reveals how the promise of happiness (Ahmed, 2010) through the independent and unhindered pursuit of knowledge oriented and that sustained her attachment with academia. The juxtaposition between her current academic position and previous employment thus highlights how higher education institutions, although constraining and excluding, still invested racialized academics with the potential for fulfillment.

Brian's account echoed the value of intellectual pursuit and autonomy as the main motivation of his academic career choice:

I used to work in industry. By personality, I like to think and ask questions. However, in [previous profession], there was a playbook. I had to follow it for every procedure. I wasn't very happy with that because I prefer solving problems in different ways. [...] At that time, I wanted to pursue a [master's], thinking with my background combined with a [master's degree], it would be a strong combination for my career in the industry. Then, in my [master's], I found myself very interested in the field. I told my professor [...] and he said, "Why don't you do a PhD?" That got me thinking. I wasn't very happy at work, so I decided to take a risk and pursue a PhD. My goal was to become a professor. I feel that my personality is actually quite suited for faculty work.

Feeling restricted by the prescriptive industrial protocols that restrict creativity and autonomy, Brian experienced a form of affective dissonance and desired spaces where his intellect could find expression. The academy emerged for him not merely as a workplace alternative but a better object of attachment, a space promising intellectual autonomy (Berlant, 2011). Brian's belief about his personality being "suited for faculty work" points to the affective dimension of identity and belonging, how identification with institutional spaces is experienced as intrinsic to who he is and what he wants. Through this affective logic, the orientation toward academia becomes naturalized via the ideal of finding and following one's passion.

Amy also self-assessed as "better suited for academia," a compatibility so important for her autonomy and authenticity that she happily sacrifices financial gains:

I had worked as a practitioner before, and the salary was quite high [...] In general, practitioners earn more than those in academia. But personally, I feel that my disposition is more suited to doing research. I prefer having some flexibility in my work hours. Research requires flexibility, and I like having autonomy. I want to spend my time on something I truly enjoy doing. [...] Even though I now earn less than I did before, I feel more satisfied with my job now. [...] I think, based on my personality and strengths, I'm

better suited for academia. [...] I don't expect academia to pay as much. If money were my main concern, I'd just go back to being a practitioner.

While perceptions about higher education is socially constructed and influenced by socio-cultural, neoliberal structures (Ahmed, 2014; Cottom, 2017), the recurring language of disposition, personality, and suitability across these narratives reveals the affective power of the idealism of education and intellectual pursuit, orienting Chinese individuals toward academic jobs. Firmly convinced that their attachment to academia as positive, intrinsic, and essential to their individual being, thus, participants are more likely to accommodate expectations and conform to existing norms than to change their pattern of attachment to academia as an object of desire that promises positive feelings and meaningfulness.

Wei's narrative further proves how the sense of agency to pursue one's intellectual passion on one's own terms and tempo serves as a "sticky affect" (Ahmed, 2010), a positive feeling that draws and adheres bodies to academia:

When I went into practice, it wasn't very satisfying. I had a lot of questions about why we were doing certain [things] the way we were doing, and no one had answers. That's why I went back to study and research. [...] And then, because I wasn't satisfied after the master's, because I still couldn't answer my research question, I went into PhD to do a little bit more. And now, over [decades] later. I'm finally answering the question that I set out to answer. [...] And the other thing is that I didn't like the lifestyle, going to work at nine and coming home at five o'clock. [...] I didn't like the structured format.

The dissatisfaction Wei experienced in professional practice stemmed from her intellectual curiosity and desire for meaningful work, as well as discomfort with the rigidity and repetition of the daily schedule. Disorientation from normative professional temporalities means the reorientation and attachment to academia that allows more flexibility, and a sense of autonomy. For Wei, her intellectual pursuit entails agency and freedom that commercial jobs rarely accommodate. She further underscored the depth of attachment to autonomy by recounting the motivation of her mid-career transition, when she left her previous institution that continuously undervalued her in an unwavering quest for agency and empowerment to serve another academic institution:

Leaving a position after more than [x] years to another location and not knowing if it's going to go well, and you're leaving a place where you have job security, tenure and all that. But in the end, that's not why we take on a job, right? It really is about the sense of agency and empowerment that we have to make changes that we like to see.

The emphasis on agency, autonomy, and flexibility across these narratives reveals what Berlant (2011) identifies as a common fantasy of the “good life” in academia, one that promises fulfillment and escape from rigid professional structures. Kwan articulated how the alignment of his interest and capability with his job gave him joy and content: “I’m happy to go to work, quite excited, very contented with what I’m doing. It’s better you’re interested in your work, and competent at your work.” Rui and Guo cited flexibility of work schedule as the major contributor to their professional satisfaction. It becomes evident that for Chinese academics, the desire for autonomy, intellectual freedom, and meaningful labour takes on additional significance, as agency and fulfilment are hard to come by in the neoliberal capitalist era, particularly for racialized individuals in the Western context. However, as this study has demonstrated, this promise of flexibility contradicts the intensifying neoliberal demands for productivity and increased job insecurity that disproportionately burden racialized faculty. The narratives of individual passion and tendency may also obscure how institutional structures shape which bodies and dispositions are deemed suitable for intellectual labour and which ones are not.

Sophie reflected on her attachment to intellectual work that became the primary principle of her life trajectory, orienting her professional choices despite great uncertainty:

I knew I wanted to be in academia from a very early stage in my undergraduate, and I never had any plan B because I just loved my subject matter so much. [...] And luckily things worked out, because I know how hard it is to pursue a career in academia. So, I feel very fortunate. I am so glad to be in this industry. I think it's like the best job ever.

Situating Sophie's perception of academia as “the best job ever” in her earlier accounts of marginalization, stress, and fear, it is evident that her commitment to academia is due to her emotional attachment to academia and intellectual passion, instead of positive workplace

experiences. In other words, the accumulated aspirational investment in academia is central to her sense of self that it turned into the very source of endurance. Such endurance thus epitomizes what Berlant (2011) termed as “cruel optimism,” an attachment to the good academic life that threatens the flourishing of Chinese individuals, especially women.

For some Chinese academics navigating predominantly white institutions, the promise of intellectual fulfillment was broken by systematic marginalization and injustice, unable to sustain optimistic attachments. Diane, sharing her trajectory from passionate intellectual curiosity to professional disillusionment, presented a critical counternarrative that shows how structural inequities can erode deeply held passion and commitment:

I was always interested in [my social science field]. Why are people the way they are? Why am I sad? Why am I angry? Why do my parents not talk to me? So I have all these whys [...] I kept being drawn to it, drawn to it. [...] And then I realized I love research and I pursued a doctorate because I wanted to be a professor. That was my dream for 10 years. And now that's no longer my dream. [...] What, I would say, pushed me out of the profession? I saw injustice. I saw discrimination.

Injustice and discrimination revealed to Diane that the optimistic attachment to academia can be cruel for a Chinese woman, as the proximity to the object of her desire has become the source of her diminishment, instead of bringing her closer to the promised good life (Berlant, 2011). Diane's decision to leave her academic job then exemplifies an affective snap, a reorientation of bodies that refuse to accommodate institutional violence (Ahmed, 2017). This rupture proves affect's animating potential, moving bodies into alternative knowledge production and world-building, breaking the impasse on individual and possibly social levels.

### ***Meaning and Purpose***

Beyond the sense of autonomy and freedom that orientate and stick Chinese bodies to academia, the majority of participants articulated a profound sense of meaning and purpose they derive from scholarly roles. The stickiness of these positive affects attached to research and teaching as meaningful, worthy endeavours, drew them toward academia and sustains their commitment despite the marginalization they experienced. The notion also constructs

academia as different from other employment, and turns it into a calling with deeper moral and social value. This section examines how the idea that academic work is meaningful (often considered more meaningful than other professions) reinforces Chinese academics' affective investment in academia. Their narratives showed that this sense of purpose is particularly significant and creates attachment that persists, even as the neoliberalization of higher education increasingly challenges the ideal of meaningful academic work.

Jiao stated that working as a faculty member is “always challenging, all the time” in many respects, but also highlighted altruistic values in contributing to social good as a primary motivation that oriented her to academic careers over personal gains:

I really enjoy interaction with students in my courses and also students I supervise. And I enjoy the fact that we're well supported to be creative and innovative in terms of research, that we think can contribute to the society in Canada or like beyond the nation state concept. [...] It's not about personal gains, right? It's more about what are the core values and whether you can do and say, what you believe is good for people, and to advocate for equity in the society.

The emphasis on individual creativity and ability to impact students and society allow Chinese academics to claim agency and imagine their work as transcending institutional or national contexts and socially meaningful. The positive emotions socially associated with researching, teaching, and mentoring are “sticky affects” (Ahmed, 2010) that are inseparable from Jiao's personal identity and professional choice. This rationale is echoed by many participants. For instance, Eric reflected on how the perceived meaningfulness of academic work overrides economic considerations:

I want to change the world. I can make way more [money] in private practice if I choose to do that. But [working in academia], I feel a sense of purpose. I feel inspired by what students are doing. [...] I don't know if that's an Asian thing or not; maybe it isn't. But for me, the work needs to have meaning. It's about purpose and meaning.

The idealistic value system and passion for facilitating social change, as shared by Eric and many other participants, need to be contextualized in discourses about education circulated and valorized by prevailing cultural, social, and particularly neoliberal values. These values

consistently imbue academia with a sense of purpose and meaning and positive affects, and frame teaching and scholarly work as noble callings entailing personal sacrifice (Gill, 2016). The promise of meaning and widely accepted transformative potential of education form and reinforce optimistic attachments to academic spaces. In the noble pursuit of purpose and progressive social change, Chinese academics' desires and agency are inevitably confined in existing social structures that offer limited ways to fulfillment.

In addition to the meaning derived from societal impact, participants voiced sense of joy, excitement, and fulfillment about academic achievements, which create powerful affective attachments to academic work. Ping lays bare the affective appeal of certain moments and possibilities in academia:

In this position you get positive feedback, when you produce research results, when your students graduate and do well in their career. These give you a strong sense of fulfillment. In terms of satisfaction, this career really delivers. And I feel excited, like, when you get a big research grant or publish an impressive paper, you feel super happy. As I reach a certain age, I don't get thrilled as before. But still, when you get new funding or when something you try works out, there's definitely a moment of real happiness. That's really the best part of doing research. Innovation itself brings a strong dopamine hit, or whatever you want to call it. If you enjoy it, that feeling is actually better than any other type of reward. It's very powerful; it triggers a strong emotional response. Those moments in life are what make you feel like this job is truly rewarding.

These affective experiences Ping described exemplify "the promise of happiness" (Ahmed, 2010), where research accomplishments, creativity, student success, become invested with affective value through their association with positive feelings, creating sticky attachments that bind Chinese academics to their academic identities and ideals. Particularly noteworthy is Ping's passion about innovation and assertion that these emotional rewards unique to academia are more desirable than other types of incentives, echoing Eric's and Amy's zealous attachment to meaningful creative academic labour and deprioritization of financial interests. Berlant (2011) explained the conflict between desire objects and the flourishing of subjects as cruel optimism, where subjects can remain invested in structures that do not serve their interests. The attachment continues as the longing for optimism per se overtakes self-interest.

This applies to when Chinese academics experience academia as both a place of stress, exhaustion, and marginalization, and a source of joy, meaning, and sense of self.

Nuo's account exemplifies the affective appeal of academia, and how the positive affects associated with academic work becomes the object of attachment:

I feel both stressed and excited. When you are conducting your research, you will visualize where to publish your paper, what results your project will get, and you feel very excited, even a little bit of joy in the process. Yeah, joy. I'll choose the word joy. You know, it's hard, like raising a child. It's very hard work. It's very strenuous, physically and mentally. But there is joy.

The contradictory affective experiences, stress and excitement, difficulty and joy, attests to the ambivalence that is central to cruel optimism (Berlant, 2011). For Chinese academics navigating Canadian academia, the emotional complexity also reflects the paradoxical nature of their institutional positioning. Academia promises happiness (Ahmed, 2010) that is however hard to obtain for racialized individuals and women as they confront structural exclusion. Nuo's act of visualization epitomizes the futuristic nature of the good academic life, tantalizingly within reach yet perpetually beyond grasp. These projections create affective attachments to imaginative ideals, orienting Chinese academics toward continued investment in academic labour despite its difficulties.

Supporting this, Zhe underscored the emotional rewards of teaching and how they strengthen his affective attachments to academia: "Of course, teaching is exciting because I can use what I learned to help students. Watching them making progress is quite fulfilling. I feel like this is a kind of spiritual and emotional reward for teachers." Similarly, Vivian described teaching as where her passion lies:

Teaching was something that I've always been interested in [...] something that I want to do and enjoy doing. [...] I think it has a lot of benefits for me individually like, of course, I think it's beneficial for students, to be able to have a teacher that enjoy teaching [...] I remember the impact that some teachers have had on me growing up and so that has been something that's really influential, so I think that's something that, maybe not consciously, I was like, I want to teach. [...] I enjoy the aspect of teaching that, I think is also learning for me. I learned so much from teaching, and... the thing that I love about teaching is not the like spewing knowledge to students and reciting. But really more

kind of the critical thinking aspect of it, and [...] trying to tie it into the real-life aspects and you know, keeps your own research and everything fresh too.

Fostering student development and building reciprocal learning relationship become a much valued mutual process of growth. Positive affects circulate between faculty and students, thus creating a sense of shared purpose that strengthens attachment to academic spaces. For Chinese academics, teaching constitutes the happy object that is not merely professional but deeply personal, providing sense of satisfaction and self-growth that orient them toward continued investment in academic careers. I will return to the idea of self-improvement and individual entrepreneurialism in the next section on affective reorientation.

### *Academia Exceptionalism*

Participants frequently described academia as relatively more inclusive, less discriminatory, and more meritocratic, when compared with other professional environments. This perception contributes significantly to their orientation toward academic careers despite the existence of exclusion. Many believed that academic institutions protected them from the discrimination they might face in other professional contexts. Kwan, for instance, made a clear distinction between the university environment and the “outside world”:

I think discrimination, for me, I look at it as more outside. University is the ivory tower. In a way it protects us from the outside. But once you go to the outside world, and you face different kinds of people, then discrimination will be more obvious.

Framing the university as an ivory tower that protects Chinese academics from external discrimination, Kwan’s use of the common metaphor reveals how academia is socially and culturally constructed as safer alternatives than other contexts. This view was echoed by Olivia, who also drew a line between academia and other contexts, and attributed relative safety and inclusion to higher education spaces:

I don’t feel that I’ve experienced that directly in any kind of way, the stereotyping, that happens more at a social, you know, has happened more at a social level, and less in the university, I should say, more in the outer, so-called real world.

Both the narratives portrayed the university to be a sanctuary where discrimination is less

prevalent. Although they both talked about discrimination they experienced in their universities during the interview, and although they showed critical awareness that university is a part of the social, their affective attachment to the idea of academia being unique and more progressive than “the outside world” was also steadfast.

Several participants commented that overt discrimination is less common (or impossible) in academic settings, although they also believed that this does not necessarily mean the absence of racism. Even so, they shared the opinion that academia feels safer for them than other environments and therefore preferable. Such perspectives add complexity to understanding how bodies are oriented, as the superficial inclusivity of academia becomes an attraction and a site of ambivalence.

Surely, it's impossible to encounter [discrimination] in face-to-face situations, because, besides that people [in academia] are more open-minded or leans left, they're also more rational. They know doing these things would negatively affect themselves. Maybe in private, they have some dark thoughts, like, [...] I just don't like Asians. That's possible. Maybe they would rant online, but they wouldn't do any of these things in front of you. [...] On the one hand, the university environment is more inclusive and open. On the other hand, it might also be related to the fact that people in universities tend to have higher levels of education, and that's positively correlated with tolerance, I guess. (Leah)

Leah attached educational attainment with progressive values and open-mindedness, aligning to the education idealism, while also acknowledging, from a more pragmatic perspective, that academics recognize that overt discriminatory behaviours would have negative professional consequences. This layered explanation suggests that Chinese academics may orient toward academia not only for its presumed ideological inclusivity but also for its institutional constraints against overt discrimination.

Qian believed that education cultivates not necessarily less discrimination but more sophisticated means of managing its expression comparing to other contexts:

The higher the education level, the less direct discrimination you see. [...] But I don't believe at all that higher education has eliminated racism. Not at all. The people you interact with [in academia] may try harder to hide their feelings. But if you work in a restaurant, you encounter all kinds of people. [...] Customers may show all kinds of bad attitudes. But at school, it's just students and professors. No one dares to say anything

[discriminative]; so you can't know what they're really thinking.

These perspectives demonstrate how Chinese academics maintain attachment to academia as a space of relative safety even though the inclusion remains partial and the management of discrimination has its limitations. Participants' awareness of this suggests that they consciously navigate spaces where discrimination, while present, takes forms they find more manageable compared to other professional contexts. The appeal of academia then, is not based on naive assumptions about the absence of discrimination, but rather on sophisticated calculations about where and how racial prejudice manifests across different spaces.

For many participants, the idea that academia offers a more meritocratic environment compared to other professional sectors works to direct them toward academic careers despite their awareness of persistent challenges. This orientation is reinforced through the promise of recognition and secure status, even as such recognition often requires extraordinary labour and academic job security is dwindling. Nuo's exemplified this view:

To be honest, universities are still a bit better. In academia, even if you don't have any connections, as long as you're talented enough, and you work yourself to death, you can still survive. But if you try to make it in, like an investment bank, that's just impossible and unbearable. They don't care about EDI or whatever.

The comparison between academia and other professions that are perceived to be less inclusive suggests a careful evaluation of different institutional spaces and selection based on which spaces offer the most navigable forms of exclusion. The belief that survival is contingent on exceptional talent and intense, metaphorically suicidal labour attests to the contradictory nature of academia's appeal, in that the good life is both possible and unattainable. The willingness to perform extraordinary productivity and self-sacrifice thus reveals the cruel affective structure imposed on Chinese faculty by colonialism and neoliberal capitalism, facilitated through the myth of meritocracy and model minority, compelling Chinese academics to internalize and perpetuate the very systems that exploit them.

Whereas the perception of academia as more desirable than other professional settings

emerged strongly in participants' narratives, some also experienced academia's contradictions and limitations. Tian articulated her initial idealistic attraction to academia that was connected to anti-capitalist sentiments:

Ever since I started my master's, I was like, I want to go into academia. I like research. that's what I want to do. And again, the whole anti-capitalist stuff, like I don't want to go into industry. Industry is just like, so exploitative. I don't want to do that.

The orientation away from industry, which Tian opposed as sites of exploitation and alienation, fostered an orientation toward academia in search of a utopia of relative freedom from capitalist imperatives. Such utopian affective attachment to academic activities is again deeply rooted in the belief that scholarly work offers meaningful alternatives to the profit-driven ethos of corporate environments, and sacrifice to the cause does not count as exploitation. However, the idealists' utopian dream is also prone to be disrupted through their increased lived and affective knowledge about the dark side of the academe:

I think it was after my comps in my PhD, I had a really bad mental health crisis where it's that existential issue again, where I started seeing the negative things within academia too. I assume I'm a very ideological person. I think that people should pursue knowledge for knowledge's sake, and we should all make the world a better place. But then encountering some academics who do the work they do for status or whatever external things, that made me really question ...

Disillusionment occurs when optimistic attachments to academia confront institutional realities. This moment of crisis reflects how Chinese academics' optimism is met with the disappointment of racialized exclusions and the neoliberalization of HE. Despite this disillusionment, however, Tian's still believes academia to be relatively more bearable than explicitly profit-driven professions. This complex affective pattern requires great affective labour to maintain attachment to academia and sustain personal and professional identities with awareness of institutional limitations and inequitable societal and institutional structures. In the following section, I further discuss the affective labour and strategies Chinese academics perform to reconcile the contradictions of academic life.

### **Affective Reorientation**

This section turns to how Chinese scholars reconcile contradictory realities of the academic life through the concept of affective reorientation, the active emotional, cognitive, and embodied practices through which they navigate institutional racism while maintaining their academic and professional pursuits. Drawing from Ahmed's (2006b, 2010) theorization of orientation as both spatial and affective, I conceptualize reorientation as the active labour of redirecting one's efforts, attention, hopes, and desires within institutional spaces that were not designed with racialized bodies in mind. As Ahmed notes, "orientations shape not only how we inhabit space, but how we apprehend this world of shared inhabitance" (2006b, p. 3). For Chinese academics in predominantly white Canadian institutions, reorientation represents the labour of finding sustainable ways to inhabit academic spaces despite experiences of alienation and exclusion, or ways to sustain one's existence in relation to academia.

#### ***The Managed Heart: Emotional self-regulation***

Managing emotions while experiencing racial aggression, both directly and indirectly, is an important form of affective labour (Hochschild, 2012) Chinese faculty members undertake. It is also a crucial mechanism through which they reclaim affective agency, albeit limited, and reorient themselves toward their professional commitments despite hostile encounters. Emotions are not merely private mental states but social and cultural practices that shape how bodies navigate institutional spaces (Ahmed, 2010). In other words, the emotional self-regulation constitutes an affective practice through which marginalized subjects maintain their orientation toward objects of desire, in this case, an academic career, despite experiences that might otherwise disorient them. Tian's approach to cope with aggression and intimidation from student reveals such hard, complex emotional work:

One time I was discussing EDI in my class. Afterwards, a student came to me. He was this close to my face [gesture vicinity with her hand] and just yelled at me for about 10 minutes. He called me being irresponsible, brainwashing young generation with my ideology, how like every class, I bring my own political views to the classroom when

I'm not supposed to. [...] It was like, very uncomfortable. [...] I was like, "oh, I understand like this is, you know, emotionally charged, but do you want to come to my office hour? I think this is an important conversation. Thank you for sharing your thoughts and feelings about this with me. I have a class starting. Would you want to come to my office?" [Researcher: That's a very intense moment. How did it make you feel? Did you feel threatened or worried about your own safety?] Oh, absolutely, yeah. I think at the time I wasn't really, like consciously, I wasn't thinking about my safety, but physiologically I could feel it like fight or flight response. So my heart started pounding really fast. And I felt my whole self was just like shaking. But I had to maintain that facade, right? Like you are the professor, you have to do that. And so, I was still trying to approach it as, okay, look, this is a learning opportunity to engage in conversations, like let's see what I can do. But he wasn't willing to engage, so he left the room. And I had to start my next section right away. And I could feel myself shaking still.

Tian's account points to emotional self-regulation as onerous affective labour and a reorientation tactic. Despite fear and discomfort, she made conscious effort to display professionally appropriate emotions as a professor. This potently exemplifies how racialized faculty members internalize institutional expectations of professionalism, and suppress their visceral reactions in order to maintain the smooth functioning of the institution. By framing the hostile, threatening, deeply troubling interaction as a teachable moment, Tian reoriented herself toward pedagogical skills and professional norms, and avoided focusing on the racialized and gendered nature of the encounter. This performance of professionalism is a strategy to maintain her academic identity and institutional attachment. As previous chapters have shown, challenges of Chinese academics' authority are common in white institutional spaces, and demonstrating emotional control becomes necessary to show professional legitimacy. Consequently, Chinese faculty must rapidly process and compartmentalize trauma and emotional turbulence caused by racial aggressions to fulfill their institutional duties. This process constitutes a survival strategy in predominantly white higher education systems and a form of invisible labour that depletes Chinese academics' emotional resources and energy.

May also recounted encountering disrespect and racial aggression from a student, further illustrating how racialized faculty reorient themselves through disciplined emotional performances that preserve their academic commitments despite emotional costs:

What hurts most is when you can see that people from similar linguistic and cultural backgrounds did not show respect. [...] I was sad. I was shocked, astonished... I guess there were mixed feelings altogether. That's the reason why I was speechless. I didn't know what to say. I paused, I don't know for how many seconds. And then responded professionally, valuing and honoring student choice and voice. "There are many sections of the same course. Please feel free to make a switch. You can choose any sections." [...] At the moment it did affect you emotionally. But in higher education, majority of time visible minorities have faced higher expectations from students. And they have already put themselves under higher expectations. So those are extra, extra, extra loads, both emotional, intellectual, and also personal. We try not to blend personal with professional. But that personal feeling will always be there, even though you try your best to maintain your professionalism, as a professor, as an instructor in the classroom setting or on campus. I think it affects a lot...

A moment of disorientation happens when bodies encounter obstacles that disrupt their navigation of institutional spaces. May's visceral reactions, feeling speechless and having to take a pause before replying, expose the disorientating effect of racial aggression, and the emotional toll placed on racialized academics to process racial injury while maintaining professionalism. This pause also represents a critical juncture in the emotional labour of self-regulation and affective reorientation. May had to take a moment to reorient herself, to redirect her emotional response back toward her professional role and institutional expectations. The tension between May's internal emotional reality of pain and sadness and outward professional performance is only reconciled, May voiced, required her to carry "extra, extra, extra loads" emotionally. This affective undercurrent, invisible to the institution and dominant discourses, reveals the cumulative weight of affective labour required for racialized faculty to maintain academic attachments.

Beyond emotional self-management at racialized encounters, participants reported constantly exercising self-regulatory strategy that allows them to sustain their attachment to academia despite affective dissonance that poses ongoing threatens to their existence and wellbeing. Jiao undertook reorientation by selectively focusing on aspects of academic work that remain personally meaningful to navigate institutional pressure:

Overall, I enjoy the work, but it has nothing to do with stress level, workload. It's basically about the fact that I think I can do what I believe is right. [...] the managerial

style of running in universities now, people only look at numbers, journal impact factor [...] If we don't wanna be stressed out by the system, then we need to know what are the core values and what we can do, what we can advocate in our workplace based on that.

Jiao acknowledges institutional constraints, but chose to reorient her attention away from hinderances and toward the purpose and meaning of academic work. In this way, she is able to preserve her investment in academia and avoid burnout, and at the same time navigate institutional structures while maintaining critical awareness of their limitations. This value-centred approach represents active adaptation and a willing compromise to neoliberal academic governance. Most importantly, it illustrates the affective labour Chinese academics perform in finding ways to inhabit institutional space while creating possibility for greater justice through advocacy within institutional limits. As neoliberal logics increasingly shape higher education, this selective orientation becomes important for those working at the margin to sustaining professional commitment to academia.

Deliberately containing their emotional responses to inequity and aggression is a common affective reorientation strategy among participants, and is often presented as a way to preserve their own emotional wellbeing and maintain professional focus. Eric's response to microaggression is an example of strategic disengagement from challenging interactions:

Authority or credibility, when people ask about these characteristics or make comments about me being young, I typically just nod and smile as it is more telling about their prejudgment, and nothing I can do to change it. I'd rather change their mind through my actions. Sometimes I will say, "not as young as you think", but that is presumptive on my end too, so I typically just let it slide. It is hard to navigate these microaggressions.

Refusing to investment emotional bandwidth in reacting to racial aggressions constitutes a key affective reorientation and self-preservation strategy for those who exist in hostile environments and often encounter exclusion. Further, Eric chooses to respond with politeness and diplomacy to avoid confrontation and protect his professional standing and relationships. This approach is echoed by other participants who often had to weigh the risk of emotional and professional costs against the need to assert themselves and challenge racial stereotypes

in professional environments. Chinese academics' carefully measured reactions and emotional recalibration work further suggests the additional efforts Chinese academics exert to establish credibility in higher education.

The affective labour preserving optimistic attachments to institutions and societies that are structurally inequitable and racist is hard work. Participants experience affective impasses where the weight of racism becomes unbearable. Coping with various professional, political, and life-related stressors, Chinese academics often have to choose to minimize emotional investments to maintain personal and professional functionality. Nuo's narrative demonstrates specific approaches to emotional management under hostile conditions during the pandemic:

I did get really angry [at racist incidents]. [...] But afterwards, you have to self-adjust, go on with your life, do what you need to do, and remind yourself, it's their fault. [...] I was quite on edge. But then I tried to tell myself, most people aren't like that. You're okay. Being Chinese is not a fault. Living and studying in another country as a Chinese person is not a fault. [...] If you choose to continue living in this place, then your life still has to go on. You know, wait it out. Things will change.

Nuo repeatedly phrased self-adjustment as an imperative for Chinese academics existing in Western institutions, underscoring the cruciality for racialized academics to perform emotional work. Self-adjustment means deliberately realigning their emotional states with institutional norms shaped by the dominant groups. In the face of discrimination and affective challenges, Chinese faculty members have to hide their feelings and demonstrate self-control and professional commitment (Steen-Johnsen et al., 2025; Hochschild, 2012). Nuo's emotional distress during periods of exacerbated discrimination, shared by many participants, reflects broader social and political conditions of emotions (Cvetkovich, 2012). Albeit the public nature of such feelings, the labour to cultivate resilience and emotional stability is individual, arduous, sensational work. Racialized individuals have to undertake this labour through self-counseling, claiming self-worth within systems that deny it, and the careful retention of hope and optimistic attachment to academia.

Amy also adopted emotional self-regulation strategy through deliberate disengagement

with painful realities to relieve stress and reorient to the desired safe space of normal life:

Of course, it [anti-Asian racism] had impact, but it's important not letting myself be too affected. [...] I decided to stop checking news, because seeing it just made me feel bad. Yes, I knew it was happening, but I didn't want to keep absorbing the same negativity. [...] In the beginning, I would read news from time to time. But after a while, I realized it was affecting my work and my mood. Life still had to go on. And back then we were all stuck at home, it was already stressful [...] So to ease stress, I stopped reading news. A lot of the time, you hear stories like someone getting pushed or yelled at. In my own experience, those things were very rare. [...] I feel like if I keep reading the news, it's like reliving the bad experiences. So if I avoid the news, life actually feels quite peaceful, like the calm ordinary days.

Overwhelmed by news about heightened anti-Asian racism, Amy tried to reclaim her affective agency through the purposeful regulation of emotional exposure to maintain a sense of normalcy. This disengagement, though necessary for affective self-protection, also reflects the dilemma racialized individuals face, as they have to choose between political engagement that is emotionally consuming and basic functioning that entails disavowing racial injury. Marginalized subjects often have to develop survival strategies to navigate public feelings that threaten their wellbeing (Cvetkovich, 2012). Comparable to Amy, Zhe fostered “emotional immunity,” while Xin described a “numbness” to discrimination they witnessed. Guo adopted radical individualism and pragmatism that preemptively suppress negative emotions, which allowed him to bypass any racial injury and limit negative impact:

I'm not someone who gets worried or upset over things I can't control. [...] When I heard about [anti-Asian racism] incidents, of course, I cautious myself. I'd be more mindful going out [...] but it's not something you can completely avoid. I try to approach it with a calm mindset. [...] you just take it as it is. Many people feel angry, well, you can't really do much about them, can you? [...] Anger and panic don't solve problems.

This pragmatic affective stance provides a sense of self-efficacy by managing expectations within constraining circumstances and recognizing, or accepting, the existence of racial discrimination as unchangeable. While approaches alike may be necessary for individual survival, they can lead to a diminished capacity to register emotional responses to discrimination that may ultimately constrain political awareness.

Emotional regulation also takes the form of diverting attention from personal distress

through empathic concern for others. Nuo, having experienced the immense emotional turmoil and professional challenges starting her career at the inception of a global pandemic, extended such empathic redirection to her institution and students:

Was there any emotional support? Honestly, back then, everything just suddenly happened [...] and everyone was caught off guard. [...] I guess the university was just scrambling to get by too. So, they didn't provide us any support, but I think it's fine. It was tough for everyone. But... I don't know if they've given our PhD students any kind of emotional support. They really need it. I mean, I can't even imagine what it's like for them; suddenly isolated, can't see their professors, their families, and still expected to finish their studies. How are they supposed to manage that? I don't know if the uni offered them any (support). But us professors, we are okay to figure it out ourselves.

Instead of demanding institutional support, Nuo took on herself the emotional management work of transforming negative feelings into more manageable emotional states: extending understanding toward the university that failed to support her and channeling personal distress into concern for students. This affective recalibration, adjusting emotional expectations to align with institutional limitations, exposes both the internalization of a racialized hierarchy of acceptable emotions and the actual affective labour they perform that sustains institutions during crises (Hochschild, 2012; Steen-Johnsen et al., 2024). This attachment to academic professional identity and norms becomes cruel as racialized academics' self-sufficiency remains unrecognized and exploited, creating harmful effects.

In retrospect to her encounters with racism, Leah viewed perpetrators as objects of compassion, redirecting emotional responses through alternative emotional frameworks:

I've experienced racial discrimination. [...] But honestly, things like that don't affect me at all. I actually feel sorry for people like that. [...] I think that says a lot about how unhappy they must be in their own life. They need some outlet, and this is how they choose to let it out. So aside from feeling a bit of pity for them, I don't have any strong emotional reaction. I don't feel angry or other negative feelings about this.

Leah's compassion represents an affective inversion that transforms positions of vulnerability into stances of emotional sovereignty that asserts control over one's affective responses, which reconfigures the traditional power dynamics of racial encounters. Much like Leah, Cheng expressed empathy experiencing discrimination from another racialized person "I

actually felt sorry for him. He complained about being treated unfairly due to his race, and then he did this to me, not to someone white.” Similarly, Amy assessed racial aggression by contextualizing and interpreting racist incidents through sociopolitical lenses:

Yeah, for sure I’ve experienced [racial aggression]. People would say things openly targeting Asians. Especially during the pandemic. It definitely happened. [...] Even before, like during economic downturn [...] A lot of people lost their jobs and blamed immigrants, “You people took our jobs” that kind of thing. I’ve experienced that, but at the same time, you kind of understand where it’s coming from. Like, these people might have been struggling, and they’re looking for someone to blame. They see you, and you’re an easy target for them to vent out. [...] So, I just ignore them and move on.

Distancing oneself and racial injury through frameworks of empathy and understanding compassion, Chinese academics asserted emotional control as a form of resistance to racism’s impact, exercising a form of power reclamation.

### ***Denial and Reframing***

Another form of affective reorientation participants commonly exercise is the conscious minimization or rejection of identity-based explanations for institutional experiences through self-regulation emerges through reframing and denial. In refusing to acknowledge racism, sexism, nativism, and other forms of injustice, Chinese faculty members reorient themselves away from potentially painful recognition of discrimination toward good feelings. This helps them secure institutional attachment and focus on professional advancement as a source of legitimacy and protection. Ping’s perspective offers a compelling illustration of this reorientation strategy:

You need to adjust your attitude, be objective and professional. [...] Don’t think, “I’m a woman, so you’re treating me this way.” That way of thinking is not helpful. [...] If others challenge you, what you need is professionalism and fairness. [...] Women shouldn’t back down. Instead, think of it like, whatever, this is just how things are. Who cares! Just do what needs to be done. Over time, you’ll realize that gender isn’t an issue. I believe we shouldn’t make gender such a big deal. What’s most important is once you can access resources and opportunities, just use them [...] If you really have a strong mind, you’ll realize that it doesn’t matter how you look like, whether you’re tall or short. Nobody really cares. It’s crucial that you prove, in every possible way, that you’re a professional and deserve respect. Your coworkers will stop seeing you as a woman or labeling you by your gender. Instead, they should see you as a professor.

Actively downplaying gendered and racialized dimensions of academic experience allowed Ping to reorient herself toward a desired professional recognition that, to her, transcend all identity categories and embodied differences. The belief that professional achievements can offset the effects of systemic sexism and racism is shared by many participants. It provides affective comfort that enables their attachment to academic institutions and redirect their affective energy away from structural injustice and toward individual navigation of existing structures not designed for their flourishing. The promise that discrimination does not matter if you are strong enough becomes an optimistic object Chinese academics are dearly attached to (Berlant, 2011). This affective pattern thus constitutes a survival strategy, and also leads racialized subjects to internalize dominant discourses of neutrality and meritocracy.

In the same vein, the deliberate interpretation of potentially discriminatory experiences through positive cognitive reframing further allows Chinese faculty to maintain attachments to academic spaces by reinterpreting potentially hostile encounters in positive ways that preserve institutional trust and professional status. As Amy explained:

As a Chinese woman, since I came to [this university], I didn't really feel anything...I know some people have had bad experiences, but for me, I found it quite supportive. I think it has a lot to do with individual perception. Personally, I don't like to assume negative intentions. I tend to view things from a more positive, constructive perspective. [...] Different people interpret the same situation differently. Some might think it's discrimination, others might see it as feedback or guidance. I prefer to interpret things positively and assume good intentions from others. So maybe because of this mindset, I haven't felt much discrimination. If there are, like someone clearly looks down on me, repeatedly and maliciously, then I'll distance myself from that person. I won't let myself stay in a situation where I feel defeated or hurt. If someone insists on treating me that way, there's not much I can do. I'll just spend my time with people who appreciate me.

Amy created a safe affective distance from potential injury and maintained professional engagement by rejecting to see the reality of structural racism. Instead, racial discrimination is framed as individual, interpretive. The transformation of affective experience through cognitive reframing allowed Amy to not only display appropriate emotions but also cultivate internal emotional peace and comfort (Hochschild, 2012). Therefore, she is able to experience

her institution as supportive and positive, despite acknowledging potential discrimination. This selective interpretation, maintaining academic attachments through self-crafted orienting devices (Ahmed, 2006), further reveals how affective reorientation, viewed as individual agency, is nonetheless deeply shaped by structural constraints.

Taking the denial approach further, Brian's emotional regulation uses scientific rationality as a shield against acknowledging the implications of racialized experiences and maintains ambiguity about structural racism to stay attached to institutional narratives:

Brian: Passive aggressive kind of discrimination does exist. But face-to-face [overt] discrimination, there is no way that would happen.

Researcher: Have you experienced any passive aggressiveness?

Brian: Yes, but I don't have data to say whether it was because I am Chinese [...] There can be many different reasons. Someone's passive aggressiveness toward me might be because I didn't do something well, or I did too well. It could also be because I am Chinese and they are not, or because I am male and they are female. It could even be because I like tea and they like coffee. There're too many possible explanations. [...] You see, because we're professors, we do research, we have to look at why. We can't just say... Correlation and causality are different. I don't have data to say, with statistical significance, that someone was passive-aggressive toward me because I am Chinese.

By repeatedly talking about data and statistical significance, Brian successfully adopted academic language as a strategy to manage the dissonance of being a racialized body in white academic spaces. Such denial strategies reveal a clear pattern of interpreting racism and sexism as individual rather than structural, which obscures the systematic nature of racial and patriarchal domination. Ping's belief that merit prevails gender-based discrimination, Amy's dismissal of anti-Asian racism as isolated incidents, Brian's insistence on statistical evidence, and similar narratives shared by participants demonstrate a tendency of reducing systemic oppression to personal interactions, which functions to depoliticize racialized experiences and maintain existing power structures (Omi & Winant, 2015; Bonilla-Silva, 2021) and deflect attention from the organizational and systemic mechanisms that reproduce racial inequality in academic institutions.

Sophie described her internal struggle to validate her affective knowledge about

structural racism sheds further light on the power of institutional EDI discourses:

I haven't been the victim of like a direct incident of like racism or harassment, but I've seen it happen. And then that's the weird thing. I think sometimes I like, gaslight myself into thinking, oh, maybe it's just all in my head. Maybe I'm making it up. Maybe, you know, this isn't like a bad place and I'm just crazy or like I'm overthinking things. But I don't think I am. I'm not scared for no reason. It has to be from something.

Embedded in institutional spaces where diversity and neutrality are celebrated and the affective knowledges of the marginalized are delegitimized, Sophie found it hard not to internalize colourblindness. The self-gaslighting reveals a keen desire to hold onto academia's promise of safety, happiness, and fairness, despite contrary evidence, as well the personal costs of affective reorientation to enable continued engagement with academic life. Dismissing one's perceptions and aligning with institutional norms might seem easier, yet it often produces a sense of self-betrayal. Sophie's epistemic negotiation struggling to validate her marginalized knowledge within an environment that systematically undermines racialized perceptions thus highlights the exhausting affective work of reorientation and the uneven, racialized distribution of emotional labor in academia. Though Sophie eventually recognized her feelings as legitimate sources of knowledge about power, creating a self-affirming counternarrative to institutional silence, this recognition was made more taxing by the pervasive affective economies of denial and avoidance that circulate academia.

Another common approach participants use is comparative reframing. They view Canada more positively by comparing it to places perceived as more discriminatory, such as China, United States. Comparing their experiences against worse alternatives reduces negative feelings about their situation and strengthens their attachment to Canadian academia. Leah, Cheng, and Brian, all adopted the comparative reframing approach to inform their practical decision-making and affective self-management:

I actually considered a job offer in the U.S., but when I went for the campus visit, I realized I couldn't do it. I couldn't imagine living there at all. [...] The place was extremely conservative. During my entire visit, I barely saw any Chinese or East Asian faces among the students. There weren't any East Asian faculty members either. I just

felt that if I had to live in that kind of environment, I would definitely feel uncomfortable. So I gave it up. (Leah)

The lack of diversity at the institution Leah interviewed at in the U.S. dissuaded her from accepting the job. Cheng also reflected on the difference between Canada and the U.S.:

I found Canada promising. One of the reasons I wanted to come here was the higher level of acceptance for cultural and ethnic diversity there. And having spent time there, I did feel that it is more tolerating than the U.S. It might be because there's a high proportion of new immigrants, so people are able to have their own space, their own stage, in a sense. [...] So after careful comparison, I chose Canada, where my Chinese identity could be preserved.

Likewise, Brain talked about the diverse population in Canada comparing the experience to China and other Asian regions:

I think Canada, compared to Asia, is more conscious of multiculturalism. If you compare it to, China, for instance, imagine a non-native becoming a leader in a Chinese company, there would likely be a stronger reaction to that. In contrast, Canada, as an immigration country, although still mostly white, has a more diverse population, and people here are more accustomed to people from different racial and cultural backgrounds. Every place has its own challenges. But in comparison, I think Canada has relatively fewer issues. Canada is more diverse than many places I have been in the world. (Brain)

These comparative assessments by Leah, Cheng and Brain demonstrate an affective geography, in which preferences and attachments to places are shaped by levels of racial tolerance and relative to more overtly discriminatory and unjust contexts. Leah's rejection of a faculty position in a space that she considered as lacking diversity, Cheng's preference of Canada over the U.S., and Brain's belief in Canada being more racially and culturally accepting than Asia and elsewhere, illustrate the affective structure they draw on to realistically maximize their career opportunities and emotionally reconcile their choices. Undoubtedly, their convictions hold truth based on lived experiences and knowledge about various national and cultural contexts. Yet, the comparison also leads to the normalization of racism as an inevitable global phenomenon rather than something that can be meaningfully addressed. Such comparison minimizes and deflects attention from existing forms of inequity in Canada and Canadian academia and serves to maintain the status quo.

Chinese women academics in this study frequently used comparative reframing that portrays Canada as a refuge from gendered discrimination relative to China. The below excerpts reveal a complex affective dynamic wherein attachment to Canadian academic institutions is maintained despite experiences of marginalization. As Qian explained:

Canada is definitely better than China, because in China, discrimination against women is just blatant. Canada, at least, is not the same. I really feel grateful for this country's policies, like your résumé doesn't have your photo on it, unlike in China. [...] And there's no age anxiety. However old you are, you can apply for a job, and that's totally fine—that's already great. I really think the way they do it here is very good. In China, there's still that hurdle at age 35, right? [...] Even though I really want to go back to China, I also know that after being away for [X] years, I can't go back. [...] I actually got an offer from a university in China, and in the end I gave it up. [...] I'm very aware of what things are like back there; the "up or out" system, the constant pressure to crank out publications. I just don't think I'm suited for that.

Xin also believes that Canada, and Western contexts in general, are more supportive of women's freedom and career opportunities:

I think Western societies are much more open and progressive. They never ask you such personal questions like, Are you married? When do you plan to have children? [which women often get when interviewing for a job in China.] This is why I prefer it here. [...] Policies here are more women-friendly. [...] Chinese tradition does not support women in pursuing higher education. There are a lot of negative perceptions about female PhDs, dehumanizing things like, "female PhDs are unmarriageable like aliens." I grew up hearing a lot of it. [...] Also, I'm aware in China, there is an official "up or out" policy. [...] I know some people in China who, during their midterm review, were advised to leave because they hadn't secured funding or published enough papers. [...] The competition is very intense. But in Canada, I think it's better.

Nuo contrasted her experience and observations in North America and China:

In China, some of my colleagues in academia have had different experiences. When they had children, the school didn't extend their tenure clock. [...] They don't support you, and if you have a child, they might just fire you. [...] But here in North America, they support you in raising children. This is politically correct. They are required to support you. Technically, at least, they must. Regardless of what they think or want. For example, when it comes to my tenure clock, they must extend it for me. They must grant me maternity leave. Because if they don't, you can fight it. You can even sue them, in both Canada and the U.S.

These narratives demonstrate a pattern of comparative reorientation. Racialized immigrant women academics' attachment to Canadian institutions is rooted in careful, practical deliberation, which I find valid and relatable as a woman who grew up in China and is now

studying in a Canadian higher education institution. In contrast to overt sexism, oppressive social structures, toxic competitiveness, and harsh, exploitative professional environments in China, the promise of happiness and fairness Canada offers, and the institutional discourses of gender and racial inclusivity, feel all the more welcoming, liberating, and favourable. Meanwhile, it is also evident in this pragmatic comparison that the world has failed to offer better objects for racialized women to attach to. We choose to settle in places that are relatively more livable, but nowhere can we escape marginalization.

The affective investment in Canadian academia through comparative farming also reveals how racialized individuals can internalize dominant narratives of Western superiority. The gratitude and appreciation for Canada and celebration of Western openness align with the colonial tradition that positions the West as civilized and progressive and demands thankfulness from those who have been oppressed, enslaved, or colonized (Burroughs, 2020). Such beliefs position racialized subjects as beneficiaries of Western liberalism, condition them to praise the very systems that marginalize them, and ultimately reproduce existing racial and cultural hierarchies and systems of oppression. Therefore, while such reframing and reorientation may offer affective relief and temporary, personal solutions, they also perpetuate marginalization and reinforce the very structures that necessitate such affective maneuvering.

### ***Resilience and entrepreneurialism***

A common strategy for managing racialized and gendered marginalization involves participants' adoption of the neoliberal logic to continuously self-adapt, self-optimize, and self-repair in response to structural inequities. Pollack and Rossiter (2010) and Bröckling (2015) define the perpetual self-management and adaptation required under neoliberalism as "entrepreneurial subjectivity." This is seen in participants accounts of self-growth and resilience, in which experiences of exclusion and discrimination are often reframed as

opportunities for personal development and character building (Gill & Orgad, 2018). Zhe, Leah, and May, for example, celebrated personal growth and resilience in academia and perceived structural inequities as resources and opportunities. Zhe remarked:

It's helpful for my personal growth, it's been. I'd say, this experience has really strengthened my resilience. Through teaching, I've improved my language skills, pedagogy, and my competencies as a person. It also enhanced my ability to adapt and persist in a multicultural society. I feel more capable of navigating challenges, and even when difficulties arise, I now believe in my ability to overcome them.

Leah considers navigating challenges as opportunities for personal growth:

I don't take it [aggression] personally. I don't feel, oh, they're discriminating against me! and I don't get upset or angry about it. [...] I feel like I'm constantly growing and learning. Because it is a new job, you really learn a lot. I feel like it's all having a positive impact on me. It's definitely helping me become more composed, more mature, more capable of coping with team dynamics. I do think it's a process that brings growth. So... I guess you could say I enjoy it?

May shares the view that difficulties facilitate resilience, learning, and growth:

Working in this context, being who I am, Of course, I encountered many, many, many challenges. But I see challenges also as opportunities, for conversations about diversity, and about being different is okay, being different is a resource. [...] Challenges and difficulties will be opportunities. It depends how you view it. Resilience. Resilience is also important. [...] Nothing is easy. But it is also a learning journey. It is zig and zag. It's never a linear way forward. And I think a lot of times I work in circles. But I value circles. even though I walk in circles, I draw different circles. But then moving forward in a certain way cannot be defined by traditional standards in academic settings.

In these accounts, constant self-improvement becomes more than a survival strategy, it is also a source of fulfillment. The satisfaction derived from personal growth and overcoming challenges demonstrate the affective dimensions of entrepreneurial subjectivity and cruel optimism's seductive power (Berlant, 2011). Subjects become attached to the illusion of betterment and the feeling of optimism per se. This neoliberal subjectivity thus transforms institutional obligations into personal responsibility (Gill & Orgad, 2018; Joseph, 2013), producing docile, adaptive subjects continuously working on themselves to remain viable within competitive institutional environments, validating their values that are not recognized by normative academic expectations, and preparing for future crises as they are inevitable in the colonial capitalist system. The resilience discourse, shaped by neoliberal governmentality

(Gill & Orgad, 2018; Joseph, 2013), naturalizes the labour required of racialized subjects to maintain positive orientations toward conditions that may be fundamentally unsustainable.

Therefore, through this affective entrepreneurialism, subjects become responsible not only for overcoming obstacles but for finding meaning and value in their marginalization.

Amy and Nuo spoke further to the attachment to meritocratic ideals by viewing racial aggression as opportunities to improve pedagogical skills:

Some students do criticize me. “Oh, her English is bad!” [...] I don’t really see this as discrimination, because maybe they just don’t understand what I’m saying, and feeling frustrated, so they complain. I’ve encountered this, but I see it as feedback. For me, it’s an opportunity to think about how I can improve my presentation. [...] I try to write things clearly in my slides and give lots of examples to help them understand. [...] So I think, when I hear these kinds of complaints or comments, I respond by using different methods to improve my teaching, so that language doesn’t become a barrier. (Amy)

If students think my class is boring, I’ll just try to find ways to make it more engaging, right? [...] There are always some negative comments, but there are positive ones too. It really depends on how you interpret or attribute those comments. Personally, I rarely attribute things to me being a woman or Asian. If someone says my class is boring, maybe it is a bit boring. So, I’ll look into that and try to improve. (Nuo)

Consistent with narratives about self-growth, this approach also provides individual solutions to social, institutional, and structural problems. Neoliberal institutions promise racialized individuals advancement and benefit through self-improvement, but maintain structures of marginalization. Further, what improvement looks like is defined by institutional norms. Entrepreneurial subjectivity thus works as an affective management strategy that enables individual survival while obscuring structural issues and precluding collective resistance. This further points to the endless labour required to maintain entrepreneurial subjectivity in the face of oppression. Celebrating resilience and personal growth transforms the systematic wearing down of racialized bodies into narratives of empowerment and self-actualization. When racialized individuals respond to marginalization by adaptation and conformity to established norms, they risk becoming complicit in academic capitalism that absorbs energy that might be invested in collective organizing.

While participants tend to internalize neoliberal logics of meritocracy, they are also prone to recognize racialized exclusion. Xin's narrative reveals the double consciousness by adhering to the need to constantly prove worthiness through achievement on one hand, and observing how worth is entitled to white men:

Xin: Chinese people's silence or shyness, at its core, stems from a lack of confidence. I can see this clearly, and I feel this way myself. [...] Especially when you're still a junior faculty member or a student, you're like starting from a blank slate. [...] When I first started, meeting with colleagues, co-authors, I was silent, just listening and taking notes. I didn't share my opinions. But in recent years, this has improved. I've realized that I can speak up and voice my thoughts. This is because I made some [career] progress. In front of my peers, I'm no longer a newbie. Like in any field, you gain confidence once you have concrete achievements. For us researchers, confidence is built on our work.

Researcher: But it seems that only racialized minorities have to build their self-confidence on performance. For those from dominant groups, even if they don't necessarily have that foundation, they can still be very confident.

Xin: Yes, absolutely! They are a different species [laugh]. Where does their confidence come from? I don't know. It just seems so natural, like they are born with it. [both laugh]

Accentuating career progress and confidence reflects the neoliberal promise that achievement will eventually grant status and belonging. When I, the researcher, tried to disrupt this meritocratic entrepreneurialism by reiterating white privilege, Xin's response represents both critical consciousness and affective management. The joke and laughter accompanying the acknowledgement, relieving the tension we both felt about racial injustice, allowed us both to maintain optimistic attachment to institutions that perpetuate systemic inequality. The belief that achievements will give us the confidence that others possess naturally obscures how racialized subjects may never achieve the effortless belonging that whiteness provides as inheritance. This further underscores the cruel optimism in Chinese academics' affective (re)orientation toward Western academia.

Chinese academics' persistence and resilience constitute a form of affective reorientation that combines recognition of structural inequities with pragmatic compromise. In doing so, they simultaneously resist and reproduce institutional power. Nuo and Sophie articulated that as existing frameworks fail to address the marginalizations of racialized women academics,

they have to rely on individual endurance, while dreaming for future incremental progress:

We know we have a lot to overcome. [...] We can't rely on them or on EDI to help us. I have always known: EDI is for their own people. We are foreigners. We don't count. [...] And, as women scholars, we have to fight so many uphill battles. You have to tell yourself: you'll have to sacrifice more, endure more. But so what? You still do it, right? What else can you do? Yes, I can speak out, we absolutely should, to raise awareness. But we have to accept that society won't change overnight. [...] You can't expect society to change in that exact window that's most crucial to your life and career. [...] What we can do is just do what we can, give it our best, and keep pushing forward our careers. [...] We fight. We scramble. We stay at the table. And we hope that, by doing so, we make things a little better for those who come after us. [...] That's how it works—one person, one generation at a time, gradually paving the way. (Nuo)

Sophie also reflected on the dilemma of resistance and survival:

Somebody told me that, your existence is resistance. And that made me feel a little bit less guilty about, you know, thinking like, shouldn't I be doing more with the privilege and this position that I have? Shouldn't I be speaking out more, advocating more strongly? And I guess the reality is that, it's like really hard to do so when there are so few of you and when so few people share these kinds of perspectives and values, because they can't empathize with what it's like to be a visible minority. Hopefully things will get better as time goes by. Hopefully you'll be part of this industry in a few years' time. And, you know, make things better for younger students to come as well.

Distinct in Nuo's and Sophie's narratives is the feeling of being trapped within oppressive systems one cannot change nor escape, which leads to limited agency and subordination. As progressive change is structurally foreclosed, individual existence is reframed as collective advancement (Walcott, 2019). As I revisit the interviews, I remember feeling both encouraged and sad. I wholeheartedly support increasing the representation of racialized and women bodies in academia, and do derive inspiration, safety, and solidarity from their existence. Meanwhile, I am aware of the danger subscribing to the liberal politics of inclusion, as institutions use the presence of marginalized bodies as evidence of equality and leave structural injustice intact (Ahmed, 2010). I have also come to understand that such reorientation strategies, although individualistic, are ways to manage the affective weight of inequality we encounter and the powerlessness we feel in the face of persistent structural issues. The cruel optimism of this reorientation lies not just in attaching to institutions that are inequitable, but also in replacing collective activism with personal struggle.

The neoliberal academia entails heightened emotional and embodied labour from marginalized academics and puts extraordinary affective weight on them through various forms of exclusion and oppression. As a response, Chinese academics often have to develop various self-sustentation strategies and create their own support system that provides spiritual and emotional sustenance when formal institutions fail to accommodate their survival. Rui, Leah, Eric, and Cheng participated in workout routines and sports to heal the wear and tear of their bodies and minds caused by demanding academic work. Leah, Ursula, and Qian spoke of their strengthened Chinese identity and East Asian solidarity, and how consuming East Asian literature, news, and entertainment have brought them comfort and enjoyment. Hao, Ping, and Cheng found friendship and genuine connections among Chinese individuals, and sought academic collaboration and companionship beyond institution boundaries. These individualized approaches, consistent with other affective orientation strategies this study explored, often do not lead to collective solidarity or activism that may address structural inequity. Under the current societal and institutional structures, the marginalized have to invest immense affective labour into individual survival, unable to form coalition or collectively imagine better futures, and are inevitably complicit in reproducing oppressive systems.

Some participants chose to disengage from their institutions when frustration and disappointment about relentless marginalization and lack of support and validation felt unbearable. Wei left her previous institution that persistently resisted her equity initiatives:

Leaving a position after more than [X] years to another location, and not knowing if it's going to go well, and you're leaving a place where you have job security, tenure and all that. But in the end, that's not why we take on a job, right? It really is about the sense of agency and empowerment that we have to make a change that we like to see. So it was a risk, but I was so convinced that I could not thrive anymore in the previous location. I had to take the chance.

Tian had to withdraw from social justice-oriented teaching that she is passionate about, and expressed the emotional toll of this reorientation:

I pulled back a lot this year. I essentially am just treating it as a job. Rather than a calling. I would still give the content that I gave. But I don't really go above and beyond unless the student asks for it. On the topic of EDI, I actually took out a chunk of it [from course content]. And I don't know... Now that I'm thinking back, does that experience [students and colleagues openly resisting EDI] have something to do with my decision to take out that chunk? I think it might have. [...] I don't like the person that I am now.

Yet some who experienced intense marginalization and disillusionment in Canadian academic institutions rethought the meaning of academic work. Moments of disorientation can lead to breakage and reorientation through which bodies turn away from expected paths (Ahmed, 2006b). Diane and Cheng shared a tangible sense of relief and joy to have left university faculty positions and explore alternative forms of personal and professional fulfillment. Diane recounted her deliberation about leaving her academic position to focus on practicing and activism:

I did look at, okay, what's more fulfilling? Who do I want to be with every day, right? And I had more and more Asian [persons] reaching out to me, racialized [individuals], and [individuals] from the LGBTQ plus community, they're all amazing, right? They have so many strengths and resources. So, I'm like, I need to make a decision. [...] And this institutional oppression was too much. So I did. I had to make a decision.

When the institution failed to fulfill its promise of inclusivity and purpose, Diane turned away from her dream job as a faculty member and dedicated her labour and time to community building and social justice work and created alternative spaces of belonging beyond conventional institutional relations (Cvetkovich, 2012). Oppression, in this case, catalyzed a painful but liberating recognition that optimistic attachments can become harmful to one's wellbeing and hinder meaningful social engagement. Diane's detachment therefore represents both personal healing and political resistance to exclusionary structures.

Likewise, Cheng challenges dominant narratives about academia's societal contribution:

My career choice is impact-driven. Teaching, in my view, feels too small-scale. [...] What I wanted to do, what I'm currently doing, is industry-university collaboration, transforming research findings into products. [...] I feel that what I'm doing now provides a stronger sense of fulfillment. [...] We Chinese place too much importance on teaching. [...] But a job should be something that allows you to survive, brings you a sense of fulfillment, and enables you to achieve things [...] I believe your own feelings should come first, not how others see you. [...] I don't have to stay in a place just

because others expect something from me. I've thought this through, so I realized it's just a job, nothing to be idealized or demonized. It's just a job.

Cheng's critical reflection on how certain professional roles become invested with excessive emotional and social significance demonstrates how affective aliens allow themselves to step back from socio-culturally normative attachments and examine how they shape professional identity. His redefinition of the purpose of an academic career created more sustainable emotional relationships to professional identity and demystified relationships to labour beyond idealized narratives. This pragmatic approach, exercised as an affective survival strategy, protected him from further disappointment or burnout. The resistance to normative expectations thus externalizes and detaches from fantasies of the good academic life, freeing oneself from question culturally specific idealizations of the professoriate.

To summarize, Chinese faculty members experience unbelonging, exacerbated stress and precarity, and emotional turmoil as their racialized bodies exist in and move through the white, colonial, patriarchal spaces of Canadian HEIs. Yet, they still maintain a strong attachment to the idea of the good academic life, convinced that academia allows more autonomy and that academic jobs are more meaningful and less discrimination than other professions. To maintain this attachment, they closely regulate their emotions, deny and reframe the racial discrimination, and actively exercise individualized coping strategies such as resilience, self-preservation, and entrepreneurialism, all in effort to perform whiteness. The final chapter will further consider the onerous affective labour they perform and how it is shaped by, and in turn reinforce, neoliberal ideology and existing societal structures.

## Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusion

This study examined how Chinese faculty members encounter and navigate their unique forms of racialization in Canadian higher education institutions through their lived realities and emotions. Specifically, the study asked: How do intersecting positionalities, particularly race and gender, shape Chinese faculty members' lived and affective experiences in Canadian higher education? What challenges do Chinese faculty confront in their professional roles, and how do they respond to these challenges? What affective structures emerge among Chinese faculty, and how do these structures maintain their attachment to Canadian academia? In this final chapter, I synthesize the key research findings and provide comprehensive discussions on how Chinese academics' experiences reveal the institutional, intersectional, and affective dimensions of racialization, as well as neoliberalism in Canadian higher education. The chapter first explores the complex ways that race, affect, and institutions intersect to shape Chinese academics' subjectivity and reproduce structures of inequity. It then provides a brief reflection on the researcher's research experiences, and consideration of the study's contributions, implications, and limitations.

### **Institutional experiences, feelings, and structures**

By tracing the lived and affective experiences of Chinese faculty members, this research revealed the intersections of colonialism, patriarchy, and capitalism that reproduce structural racism and inequality in Canadian academia. Chinese academics encounter institutional whiteness, hostility from colleagues, students, and organizations of their professional belonging, as well as Eurocentric norms and culture, which systematically exclude racialized and women scholars, limit their access to resources and opportunities, and affect their career advancement and overall wellbeing. These challenges are compounded by the neoliberalization of higher education, which imposes productivity and excellence metrics that uphold white dominance. Further, recent policy changes and geopolitical tensions against

China create additional layers of precarity on Chinese academics' institutional and social-political belonging. For them, Canadian tertiary education is a site of exclusion and conditional acceptance, with various forms of social and organizational hegemonies at play, (re)defining and (re)producing their marginalization.

Chinese academics navigate unique forms of racialization that discriminate and exploit them through persistent stereotypes of “model minority,” “yellow peril,” “perpetual foreigner,” as well as being too young, too alien, unauthoritative, and unfit for leadership positions. These gendered racialized tropes create contradictory expectations that simultaneously view Chinese individuals as academically advanced yet culturally deviant, professionally valuable yet perpetually other, intellectually capable yet linguistically and communicatively inadequate. Positioned in a liminal space of marginality and in-betweenness, they continuously adapt to white elitist ways of being and knowing, and reconcile between Western neoliberal institutional expectations, such as self-promotion, productivity, and competitiveness, and heritage cultural values of humility, deference, and reticence. These contradictions create an unfair double bind that compromises their professional advancement and personal authenticity. For Chinese women academics in particular, not conforming to stereotypes of the submissive self-sacrificing caregiver can sometimes lead to punishment and backlashes.

Faced with exclusion and scrutiny, Chinese faculty members often have to fulfill the model minority myth, conform to institutional norms, maintain exceptional high performance, and endure marginalization without complaint, as a means of securing professional legitimacy within hostile institutional environments. This performance, however, comes with significant costs. It requires constant self-surveillance, adaptation and assimilation toward whiteness, and suppressing criticism and dissent about institutional inequity. More critically, model minority myth functions as a divisive mechanism that pits

Chinese academics against their Chinese and otherwise racialized peers while exploiting their labour and reinforcing systemic inequalities. Although participants demonstrated growing critical awareness of and resistance against these dynamics, the entrenchment of the model minority myth and its promise of as the only path to conditional acceptance make it difficult to escape. The model minority myth thus works as both an individual survival strategy and a structural mechanism of racial control that shapes Chinese academics' institutional lives.

Chinese faculty members' lived realities also reflect how persistent Asian and Chinese stereotypes translate into material consequences in their academic work life, including intellectual invalidation, social isolation, and career immobility. The study finds that these barriers more severely impact early-career, culturally linguistically diverse, and women scholars of Chinese descent who face additional oppression rooted in assumptions of their inferiority, submissiveness, and otherness. In particular, Chinese women faculty are further disadvantaged by the systemic devaluation of feminized care labour and service work they undertake in both professional and personal, domestic spheres. As such, institutional whiteness and racism manifest not only as numerical underrepresentation of racialized and women among faculty and leadership positions, but also embedded political logics in Canadian academic systems and broader societal spaces that privilege Western androcentric epistemologies, and Anglo English communication styles, professional identities, and behavioural patterns, while rendering alternative knowledge systems and cultural practices unintelligible and deficient.

Maintaining high-performance while facing complex exclusion entails extra emotional, intellectual, and embodied labour. Chinese faculty members described chronic stress, existential precarity, and being in exhausting states of hypervigilance as they navigate white colonial institutional environments, coping with marginalization, racial injury, and increasing institutional demands. The emotional toll, invisible to institutional considerations, manifests

across a wide spectrum from persistent feelings of alienation, frustration, and self-doubt, to acute senses of suffocation and despair when facing extreme discrimination. While the majority of Chinese faculty members persist in academia through acts of self-preservation including emotional self-regulation and bodily maintains, for some, the extra load becomes unsustainable, leading to strategic disengagement from institutional environments, and in severe cases, departure from academia altogether. The emotional experiences of Chinese academics reveal how systemic racism and marginalization operates through affective violence that erodes Chinese academics' well-being and professional belonging.

Paradoxically, Chinese academics also demonstrate profound attachment to higher education, viewing it as a site of intellectual freedom, creative agency, meaning and purpose, and potential social transformation by fostering equity and supporting student growth, which remains preferable to alternative professional contexts. This attachment, paired with their appreciation for Canada's perceived greater equity compared to other geopolitical contexts, facilitate a general willingness to take on extra affective labour, which maintains their institutional affiliation and commitment to Canadian academia despite systemic hostility. This labour takes on versatile forms, including constant emotion reorientation through denial, reframing, and minimization of racialized experiences, continuous self-improvement to meet impossible standards, and the performance of extraordinary resilience and conformity to white institutional norms. These affective structures uncover how the promise of the good academic life under the colonial neoliberal structure have worked to exploit and diminish marginalized individuals (Berlant, 2011), and how Chinese academics' emotional investments serve to maintain systems that marginalize them.

However, Chinese faculty members' attachment to academia also suggests that Canadian higher education institutions offer a sanctuary relative to alternatives, such as explicitly profit-driven corporates and more polarized hierarchical societies. Canadian academia, while

imperfect and demanding and only superficially inclusive, offers the “promise of happiness” (Ahmed 2010) that appears more attainable and more bearable. In late capitalism, most professional environments are exploitative, dehumanizing, and depriving individuals of any sense of agency. As our time failed to provide us better affective objects to attach to, Chinese individuals actively evaluate the cost of survival, and strategically orient toward academia as a more available path to self-actualization and a space where one can meaningfully contribute to social equity. Their (re)orientation toward academia stems not from naïve assumptions about the absence of inequity, but from pragmatic assessments about where their affective and intellectual labour might most effectively secure professional viability and senses of optimism and purpose. As social beings, we deeply need something to attach to, something that makes us feel that we are in the world, and that we matter (Berlant, 2022). In the absence of better alternatives, the measured optimism about the good academic life becomes the object of attachment itself. It is therefore imperative that the society provides objects for its members to attach to that can truly help them flourish.

### **Affective labour and the model neoliberal subjects**

To further understand Chinese academics’ institutional life, an intersectional look on the convergence of race, gender, and neoliberalism through affective labour is needed. Affect comes into being when individual and social bodies meet, and functions as a central mechanism of ideological control, state formation, racial discipline, and governmentality (Ahmed, 2014; Muñoz, 2000; Penz & Sauer, 2019; Rose, 1999a, 2006; Vassallo, 2021). Emotional self-regulation is a key form of affective labour. Neoliberal discourses depict emotional regulation as positive personal character and an indicator of professional competence. Neoliberal subjects are required to conform to institutionally sanctioned “emotion rules” and perform certain emotions (Hochschild, 2012; Vassallo, 2021). These rules that position certain emotional presentations and orientations as professionally

appropriate and desirable reflect dominant social norms. In the context of Canadian HE, normative emotional expectations are modeled on middle-class white masculinity, which features competitive individualism, academic productivity, resilience, self-sufficiency, and emotional distance from claims of racism and sexism (Barclay, 2021; Gill, 2016; Gill & Orgad, 2018).

Conforming to institutionalized affective norms requires racialized academics to perform white adjacency and masculinity. This means adopting emotional postures that align with whiteness through displays of positivity, aspiration, and denial of racial inequity (see also Steen-Johnsen et al., 2024 for a gender-based analysis). As Muñoz (2000) theorizes, this racialized affective performance is inherently unstable and unattainable:

Acting White has everything to do with the performance of a particular affect, the specific performance of which grounds the subject performing White affect in a normative life world. Latinas and Latinos, and other people of color, are unable to achieve this affective performativity on a regular basis. (p. 68)

Affective conformity is particularly salient for Chinese academics as they already exist under the model minority myth that promises conditional acceptance contingent upon their embodiment of “appropriate” affects that neither challenge racial hierarchies nor demand institutional accountability. Consequently, Chinese academics exhibit distinct affective patterns that reflect neoliberal fantasies and orientations. The performance aligns with market-driven values and, in turn, obscures structural inequalities. To summarize findings from this study, these patterns include: self-responsibilization (independently managing racial injuries without institutional support, regulating emotions to maintain professional function); the entrepreneurial self (Bröckling, 2015, 2018) (productivity, continuous self-improvement, extra work to achieve professional competitiveness); denial and deflection (minimizing structural barriers, comparing academia with other professions); and individual resilience (maintaining compulsory positivity, reframing systemic challenges as opportunities).

The constant emotional management required to maintain desired professional personas,

ensure the smooth operation of HEIs, and reorient oneself towards exclusionary institutional and social spaces, demands ceaseless affective labour from Chinese bodies (Barclay, 2021). This begs the question, why Chinese academics tend to actively assimilate and conform, and perform onerous affective labour? As established throughout the analysis, academia becomes particularly desirable for Chinese individuals through the convergence of several affective forces: cultural values that venerate learning and scholarly achievement, social ideals that position education as a pathway to public good and individual mobility, racialized expectations that position Chinese people as academically apt and high-achieving, and neoliberal ethos that frames continuous self-improvement as both personal responsibility and professional necessity. These forces together create the fantasy of the good academic life as a preferred site for living, being, and self-actualization for Chinese individuals.

In discussing the affective structures produced at the encounters between Chinese academics and Canadian HEIs, it is also imperative to recognize the insidious nature of neoliberal affective governmentality that uses freedom and passion as a disciplinary mechanism (Rose, 1998, 1999b; Barclay, 2021). As Chinese academics expressed, their affective investments in academic jobs are (re)generated in the academic ideals of intellectual freedom, autonomy, creativity, and purpose. The promise of freedom and flexible working arrangements indeed exemplifies neoliberal governmentality's ability in extracting (in)visible labour through affective manipulation, which is most pronounced in academic work (Gill, 2016; Penz & Sauer, 2019). This exposes how neoliberalism operates not through coercion but instead, through the cultivation of desire and attachment. These seemingly liberating affects transform marginalized academics into self-regulating subjects who see their compliance with neoliberal logics as personal choices and authentic self-expression (Gill, 2016; Barclay, 2021; McRobbie, 2016). In short, the affective infrastructures made available to racialized academics by existing neoliberal, colonial social structures function as

techniques of subjectification.

Adding to this, socially constructed narratives of passion, creativity, and meaningfulness successfully turn academic work into a cause worth sacrificing for and are closely integrated to academic workers' identity and purpose. When academics believe they are pursuing their passion and exercising creative autonomy in a vocation that becomes part of their identity, the attachment to academic profession is ever stronger, making them more willing to tolerate precarious conditions, excessive workloads, and the erosion of their wellness and welfare. This attachment to the myth of good intellectual life binds marginalized bodies to disciplinary mechanisms, helps internalize white and neoliberal standards, and transforms external job requirements into continuous voluntary self-surveillance and improvement (Barclay, 2021). Although academia's promise to offer freedom and meaning remain largely unfulfilled, the attachment persists as it provides the only available narrative of professional and moral idealism, of meaning and agency, of hope and attachment (Berlant, 2011).

The fantasy of the free, entrepreneurial subjectivity that neoliberalism and colonialism jointly produce requires academics to become responsible for their own emotional regulation and professional success (Bröckling, 2015, 2018; Juelskjær et al., 2013; McKenzie, 2017). This responsibility for self-management extends beyond productivity and conformity to encompass the affective work of maintaining professional enthusiasm, resilience, and relentless positivity, regardless of structural constraints. Chinese academics' expressions of attachment to academic ideals and self-growth, in this sense, represent the successful internalization of neoliberal affects that make precarity and self-exploitation feel normal and even enjoyable. Such passionate affective investments further reflect the racialized dimensions of neoliberal affective subject formation. For academics who experience marginalization and institutional precarity, performing persistence, toughness, and passionate attachment to academic work is a survival strategy to demonstrate their worthiness and

reconcile bad feelings due to structural injustice. The conformity to neoliberal affects, embracing individual responsibility, celebrating adaptability and resilience, and maintaining professional optimism, sustains and (re)produces subjectivities suitable to the neoliberal political order (Hook, 2003). If, as Gill (2016) argues, academics are “model neoliberal subjects,” then Chinese academics embody an intensified version of this subjectification, as they exhibit extraordinary neoliberal entrepreneurialism through model minority performance under exacerbated marginalization and oppression.

Neoliberal affective infrastructures create insidious and effective oppression techniques. This governmentality cultivates desires and attachments for marginalized individuals to adhere to the very structures that oppress them, yet experience the attachment as voluntary, authentic, and even beneficial and liberating. Penz and Sauer (2019), Rose (1999a, 1999b, 2006), and Vassallo (2021) identify affective discipline as central to neoliberal governance. It makes subjects see their struggles as personal challenges that requires individual solutions, and tests to, as well as proof of, their suitability of survival under harsh conditions, instead of structural problems demanding institutional transformation. For Chinese academics, this means their experiences of racism, marginalization, and productivity/performance stress are reframed as opportunities for personal growth, resilience building, and competitive advantage, not injustice that calls for collective action. The result is a form of subjectivity that focuses on individual survival while deprived of collective activism and advocacy, subjectivity that appears free, tough, and aspiring, but is highly constrained by internalized neoliberal principles. This creates what Gill (2016) describes as academics who are critical of but remain trapped within neoliberal demands, “too exhausted to resist and furthermore do not know what to resist or how to do so” (p. 53). The individually rational strategy of affective conformity therefore produces detrimental outcomes by foreclosing possibilities for community building, institutional critique, and structural change for collective flourishing.

## Reflections on Research

Conducting this research has proved to be both rewarding and challenging in ways I had not fully anticipated. The slow, difficult recruitment process itself was very telling about academic labour and vulnerability. And the demographics of the research participants, mostly early career, largely from social sciences, and predominantly women, illustrates the gendered, hierarchical nature of academic and affective labour and epistemic differences in recognizing the importance of studying marginalized experiences through a feminist critical qualitative lens. Several academics expressed initial interest but were unable to secure time for an interview, due to extremely busy and stressful academic work. A Chinese woman academic, after agreeing to participate in this study, wrote to me to explain that she had a difficult upsetting episode with her university, which led to emotional trauma and potential future disputes that together prevented her from talking about her experiences. A participant had to leave the room and attend to her infant child in the middle of the interview, and another had to make difficult childcaring arrangements to be able to join me on Zoom. All these further reveals to me how laborious and stressful it can be to work as a faculty member, especially for Chinese individuals and women.

I remain deeply grateful to the participants who carved time from their overloaded schedules to share their experiences with me. Many participants validated the value of the research and expressed their hope that their voices would contribute to meaningful changes. And even more of them told me they agreed to join this study to help me, as they know how difficult it is to recruit faculty members. This affirmation created both motivation and a deep sense of responsibility in me to represent their voices authentically and understand their experiences meaningfully and respectfully. As I write this study up, this responsibility can sometimes feel so important and heavy that I sit with research data for hours to deliberate.

The relational dimension of this research was particularly evident in the affective

intensities I have felt during interviews. Most participants shared their deeply personal experiences and emotions with me, with remarkable generosity, deep benevolence, and willingness to be open and vulnerable. I felt solidarity, affinity, and genuine connections with them. My breath weighed down when they talked about their pain, my heart pounded when they described the blatant discriminations they confronted, and I the warmth of their kindness when they tried to share with me advice to help me navigate Canadian academia as a Chinese woman. Some participants, however, were much more reserved and defensive of their experiences and feelings, only willing to offer impersonal opinions and generalized observations, and questioned the questions that I asked. I understand this guardedness to be caution about professional repercussions from discussing institutional discrimination. While I approach all interviews with radical openness and reciprocity, I found myself more comfortable responding to the honest, vulnerable moments with my own painful experiences of racialization and emotions.

As a Chinese woman PhD student doing research with faculty members, power imbalance can surface in my interactions with participants. In an interview, I mentioned my depression due to rising anti-Asian racism during the pandemic. The participant commented that an academic should be objective and not let biased news influence their emotions. Some views shared in the interview were positivist, profoundly individualist, and uninterested in social justice at all. These moments were disappointing, yet they reminded me the importance of approaching Chinese academics as complex individuals and not to fall into the assumptions about shared political consciousness. All the affective intensities, as I recorded in detail in my research notes, have enriched the data, especially the affective inquiry and structural analyses.

## **Contributions and Implications**

### **Theoretical Contributions**

This study advances intersectional understanding of racialization in higher education by demonstrating how racialization, gender regime, neoliberalism, and various forms of marginalization converge in producing Chinese academic subjectivity. Examining Chinese academics' lived and affective experiences and multiple kinds of labour they perform to move through institutional spaces, this research revealed how social domination functions through the cultivation of desire and attachment to maintain existing inequitable power structures. Chinese academics occupy a particularly complex position as model minorities, which promises conditional acceptance while requiring them to perform both neoliberal compliance and gendered racialized expectations while managing ongoing marginalization. The analysis shows how Chinese academics can become invested in their own exploitation and exclusion through their unique positionality in the system of racialization, or racial triangle (Xu & Lee, 2013), and through the affective structures constructed by neoliberal governmentality. This positioning reveals the inadequacy of approaches that treat these systems as separate rather than mutually constituting forces.

The study contributes to critical inquiry, mainly feminist study and intersectional theory, by showing how multiple systems of oppression, racism, patriarchy, and neoliberalism, operate together through social institutional structures, and by examining the affective mechanisms that bind subjects these structures that undermine their wellbeing. It also advances a theory of affect and power that understands affect as socially, culturally, and politically mediated and circulated. Scrutinizing how these power structures work, I contend, is equally important as understanding how they do not work. In this, the study contributes to scholarship on racialization, critical institutional studies, affective attachments, Asian experiences and identity, and the complex relationship between work, desire, and fulfillment in contemporary life within structures of racism, patriarchy, and neoliberalism.

AsianCrit has been underexplored in Canadian academic research. This study

contributes to the theoretical development of AsianCrit by expanding its application in the context of Canadian higher education and underscoring the importance to attend to the unique racialization of Asian individuals in Canada. It also explores the connections between AsianCrit tenants and feminist and affect theories by identifying the gendered, affective nature of Asianization. Informed by this theoretical framework, the study opens up new avenues for exploring how race-based hierarchies are constructed and felt, and how racism, colonialism, and neoliberal ideologies work together through racial myths, racial triangulation, and affective structures to perpetuate white hegemony and patriarchy.

### **Empirical Contributions**

Existing scholarship has largely overlooked Chinese faculty members despite their substantial presence and marginalized positions in Canadian universities and colleges. This research addresses this important gap in literature by providing in-depth accounts and analyses of their lived experiences and emotional structures in Canadian higher education institutions through an intersectional affective lens. Zooming into how Asian stereotypes affect their experiences provides insights into the mechanism and manifestations of racialization and Asianization in academia, and how intersecting systems of marginalization create institutional obstacles and affective, intellectual, and embodied labour that affect Asian academics' career trajectories, professional relationships, and institutional experiences. Further, the study underscores Chinese academics agency in challenging and critically reflecting on racialized assumptions and stereotypes, which allowed them to identify race-based (micro)aggression and exclusion and reclaim their personhood. By documenting their unique encounters with discrimination and cultural hegemony, this study reveals the inadequacy of studies that lumps racialized minorities into a monolith, and the institutional EDI initiatives that fail to address the particular challenges facing racialized academics from different backgrounds.

### **Implications for Practice and Policy**

Findings in this study have important implications for improving institutional equity. HEIs tend to adopt one-size-fits-all policies and focus on numeric representation and obscure the fact that institutional exclusion is structural, intersectional, context-specific, and affectively charged. This study suggests that institutions must address the racialized academics' emotional and embodied labour, which can begin with recognizing such labour in workload/performance considerations and providing support systems and resources. HEIs also need to recognize that the neoliberal affective structures that download responsibility to individuals to cope with increasing inequity is detrimental to individual academics and the academic community, and move beyond superficial positivity and emphasis on self-care and resilience-building toward structural changes that address the root causes of affective burdens. For academia at large, collective actions are needed to address exclusion, exploitation, and precarity. This calls for solidarity and joint actions among all racialized and marginalized groups, and collaborative creation of meaningful policy responses to unsustainable academic working conditions to address structural inequality and the harmfulness of individual accountability and competition, which reproduces loneliness and silence.

### **Implications for Academic Culture**

This study points toward the need for alternative attachment structures that do not rely on or perpetuate cruel optimism. The current narrative of academic freedom and passion around intellectual work that has justified precarious unjust conditions must be fundamentally reimagined. This research suggests possibilities for resistance by developing affective counteractions that do not depend only on self-sacrifice, self-regulation, and self-modification, while maintaining intellectual commitment at the same time. By understanding how neoliberal affects operate, academics may stop unconsciously reproducing them, and in

turn, recognize, examine, and potentially challenge these mechanisms. This can inform for academic organizing, mentorship, networking, and developing academic communities that prioritize collective wellbeing over individual entrepreneurialism.

### **Limitations and future research**

This study provided but a snapshot of Chinese academics' experiences situated in the continuously evolving academic, racial, and political climate in Canada and globally. With its primary attention on race, gender, and neoliberalism, it may very well have underexplored other intersecting identities, such as class, sexuality, disability, and immigration status. In addition, given its focus on individual experiences, it offered limited exploration of institutional policies, structures, and decision-making processes. With its many limitations, this study also opens several avenues for future research. This includes a deeper dive into institutional EDI discourses from a critical policy framework, comparative analysis across institutions approach, as well as examining how differently racialized groups navigate Western academia, and longitudinal studies of how Asian academics' positions, conditions, and affective strategies change over career trajectories. Additionally, further research is needed on developing alternative models and objects of attachment that reject neoliberal exploitation and white domination. Such study might explore academic community building and networking that fosters collective flourishing and reciprocal support, or investigate institutional transformations that facilitate collaboration and belonging rather than competition and assimilationist inclusion. This could include studying how racialized scholars build coalitions across difference that resist individualistic narratives of success, how alternative mentorship structures operate outside traditional hierarchies, or how practices emerge that centre healing, solidarity, and effect changes in institutional culture and policy.

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## Appendices

### Ethics Approval



**Date:** 19 August 2024

**To:** Prof. Goli Rezaei-Rashti

**Project ID:** 125188

**Study Title:** Exploring the Lived and Affective Experiences of Chinese Faculty Members in Canadian Higher Education: An Intersectional Feminist Study

**Short Title:** Chinese Faculty Members in Canadian Higher Education: An Intersectional Feminist Study

**Application Type:** NMREB Initial Application

**Review Type:** Delegated

**Full Board Reporting Date:** September 6 2024

**Date Approval Issued:** 19/Aug/2024 14:45

**REB Approval Expiry Date:** 19/Aug/2025

Dear Prof. Goli Rezaei-Rashti

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the WREM application form for the above mentioned study, as of the date noted above. NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the expiry date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of NMREB Continuing Ethics Review.

This research study is to be conducted by the investigator noted above. **All other required institutional approvals and mandated training must also be obtained prior to the conduct of the study.**

**Documents Approved:**

Document Name	Document Type	Document Date	Document Version
Chinese faculty in Canadian higher edu interview guide	Interview Guide	23/May/2024	1
email script for Chinese faculty in Canada	Recruitment Materials	14/Aug/2024	3
LOI and Consent- Chinese faculty in Canada	Written Consent/Assent	14/Aug/2024	3
LOI and Verbal Consent - Chinese faculty in Canada	Verbal Consent/Assent	14/Aug/2024	3

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario. Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB. The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Kelly Patterson , Research Ethics Officer on behalf of Dr. Isha DeCoito, NMREB Chair

**Note:** This correspondence includes an *electronic signature (validation and approval via an online system that is compliant with all regulations)*.

## Recruitment Email script



**Subject: Call for participation in research about Chinese faculty's experience in Canadian higher education**

Hello,

My name is ZHAO Feng Chenzi and I am a Chinese international PhD candidate at UWO faculty of Education. I am conducting a study about Chinese faculty members' experiences working in Canadian higher education institutions. It is entitled *Exploring the Lived and Affective Experiences of Chinese Faculty Members in Canadian Higher Education: An Intersectional Feminist Study*.

I would like to interview faculty members who self-identify as Chinese, who have worked in Canadian higher education institutions (universities and colleges) for at least one year in the past 10 years. If this is your experience, I would like to invite you to participate in my study. Please read the attached letter of information and consent form to learn more about the study.

If you are interested in participating in this research, please contact me by email ([REDACTED]) or by phone at [REDACTED]. Alternatively, the Principal Investigator, Dr. Goli Rezai-Rashti, can be reached at [REDACTED].

Also, if you know any other Chinese faculty members who are eligible, please forward this email and attachments to them.

Thank you very much for your kind considerations.

Best regards,  
ZHAO Feng Chenzi  
赵枫晨子

## Letter of Information



### Exploring the Lived & Affective Experiences of Chinese Faculty Members in Canadian Higher Education: An Intersectional Feminist Study

#### *Letter of Information and Consent Form – Participant*

#### **Principal Investigator**

Dr. Goli Rezai-Rashti, Professor, Faculty of Education, Western University,  
 [REDACTED]

#### **Co-Investigator**

Fengchenzi Zhao, PhD candidate, Faculty of Education, Western University,  
 [REDACTED]

My name is 赵枫晨子 ZHAO Feng Chenzi. I am a Chinese international PhD candidate in the Faculty of Education at Western University. I am currently working on a research project about Chinese faculty members' experiences working in Canadian higher education institutions. I am inviting you to participate in this research study if you identify as Chinese and have worked in a Canadian university or college as an academic staff.

Chinese individuals are associated with contradictory stereotypes. On one hand, the “model minority” myth characterizes them as hardworking, high-achieving, and universally successful, leading to the belief that they are overrepresented and immune to discrimination in North American academia. On the other hand, the persistent “yellow peril” stereotype depicts them as a threat to Western societies through economic competition and cultural influence. Consequently, despite facing exclusion and biases, there is a notable absence of scholarly research examining how the intersectional social positionalities of Chinese faculty members shape their lives and work. Chinese faculty are often overlooked in institutional Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion policies. This study seeks to address this gap by centring the lived experiences of Chinese faculty members.

The study consists of semi-structured interviews, in which a set of predetermined questions are asked to start the conversation, and topics participants see pertinent are elaborated on and discussed. I employ intersectionality and affect theory as the analytical framework to guide my research and encourage participants to share their experiences, emotions, feelings, and thoughts.

In investigating how Chinese academic staff encounter the institution of Canadian higher education, the research will be guided by these questions:

- (1) What is it like to be a Chinese faculty member in Canadian higher education?
- (2) To what extent do their social positionalities, particularly their ethnicity and gender, shape their professional, personal, and affective lives?
- (3) How do Chinese faculty members navigate and make meaning of their academic and personal life in this post pandemic neo-racist era?
- (4) In what ways do Chinese faculty members interact with organizational and governmental EDI policies in Canada?

If you want to participate in this study, you should identify as ethnically Chinese (not by nationality), and have worked in a Canadian university or college as a faculty member for at

least 1 year in the past 10 years. You also need to be able to communicate in English or Chinese (you can use both if you prefer). Participants may choose to receive a \$15 CAD gift card from Indigo or Tim Hortons after the interview.

Interviews can be in-person or online, depending on your preference and location. Each interview is expected to last for approximately one hour. Face-to-face conversations will be carried out at a place we agree on, which must be accessible to both the participant and the researcher. In the event that in-person interview is not feasible, communication through Zoom (a virtual meeting application) will be used to facilitate simultaneous dialogues. Recordings will be made by a voice recorder for in-person interviews (audio only) or Zoom for remote interviews (video and audio) for transcription after the interviews.

If you are interested in participating in the study, please respond by email (to [REDACTED]) indicating your interest and we will schedule an interview time. You will be asked to provide consent before the interview either by giving verbal consent before the interview, or by completing the written consent form below. You do not waive any legal right by signing this consent form. If you wish to provide verbal consent at the time of the interview, please e-mail [REDACTED] to confirm your interest in participating in this study and I will ask for your verbal consent to participate in this study at the beginning of the interview.

Participation in this research is confidential, voluntary and not mandatory in any way. There are no known or anticipated risks or discomforts associated with participating in this study. The interview can be stopped at any time if you experience any discomfort or fatigue. You may refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time prior to the completion and publication of the dissertation with no effect on your academic status. If you decide to withdraw, any information collected prior will not be used. No new information will be collected without your permission. The information collected will be used for research purposes only, and neither your name nor identifying information will be used in any reports, publications or presentations of the study results. Only with consent, unidentified quotes obtained during the interview may be used in the dissemination of research findings.

Assigned codes and pseudonyms will be used to replace all participants' names and the names of any places or events. Participants' demographic information will be de-identified, generalized, and aggregated to avoid identification and specification. Confidentiality will be maintained. Only representatives of The University of Western Ontario Non-Medical Research Ethics Board may require access to the study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research. Any personal information about you in a form of a hard copy will be kept for 7 years in a locked cabinet at the researcher's locked office. A list linking your assigned code for the research study with your name will be encrypted and kept in a password-protected file, separate from all other files, in the hard-drive of the researcher's laptop, which is encrypted and has personalized lock system. Only ZHAO Feng Chenzi (the researcher) and Dr. Goli Rezai-Rashti (the Principal Investigator) have access to this laptop. All the data will be securely destroyed using industry-standard shredders and data-deletion software after the retention period of 7 years.

If you have any questions about the rights of the participants or the conduct of this study, you may contact The Office of Human Research Ethics at [REDACTED] or at [REDACTED].

## Consent form



### Exploring the Lived & Affective Experiences of Chinese Faculty Members in Canadian Higher Education: An Intersectional Feminist Study

#### Consent Form

**Principal Investigator**

Dr. Goli Rezai-Rashti, Professor, Faculty of Education, Western University,  
 [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

**Co-Investigator**

Fengchenzi Zhao, PhD candidate, Faculty of Education, Western University,  
 [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and all questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

**I consent to the use of unidentified quotes obtained during the study in the dissemination of research findings.**  YES  NO

**Print Name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

My signature means that I have explained the study to the participant named above. I have answered all questions.

**Name of Person Obtaining Consent**           **FENGCHENZI ZHAO**          

**Signature of Person Obtaining Consent** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

## Verbal Consent



### Exploring the Lived & Affective Experiences of Chinese Faculty Members in Canadian Higher Education: An Intersectional Feminist Study

#### VERBAL CONSENT SCRIPT

##### Principal Investigator

Dr. Goli Rezai-Rashti, Professor, Faculty of Education, Western University,  
 [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

##### Co-Investigator

Fengchenzi Zhao, PhD candidate, Faculty of Education, Western University,  
 [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me (Zhao, Feng Chenzi) today and for your interest in participating in this study. Based on our email correspondence where you were provided a Letter of Information, you are aware that this interview is about a research study I, ZHAO Feng Chenzi am conducting that explores the experiences of Chinese faculty members in Canadian higher education institutions.

Using Yes or No as your response, can you please confirm the following:

Have you read and reviewed the Letter of Information that was sent to you electronically? *{If no, provide the participant time to review the Letter of Information}*

Do you have any questions about the study? *{Answer Questions}*

Do you consent to beginning this interview?

Do you consent to the use of unidentified quotes obtained during the study in the dissemination of research findings?

Would you like to receive a copy of the final report?

Please state your name *{allow participant time to respond}*

Thank you for your participation in this study.

My signature means that I have explained the study to the participant named above. I have answered all questions.

Name of Person Obtaining Consent FENGCHENZI ZHAO

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Interview Guide

### **Part 1 Background Questions:**

Tell me a little bit about yourself

- 1) What are your pronoun(s), nationality, and ethnic background?
- 2) Are you teaching a university or college, and which academic field?
- 3) Where did you complete your PhD? What is your area of study? (field of study, discipline, such as art and humanities, social studies, STEM, medical, law, etc. no need to be specific)
- 4) How long have you been working as a faculty member at your current institution? How long have you been in an academic position in Canada?
- 5) Had you been employed as a faculty member elsewhere, or in another country?

### **Part 2 General Working Experience**

Let's talk about your experiences working as a faculty member in Canada.

- 1) In general, how do you feel about being a faculty member?
- 2) How satisfied are you with your career here regarding workload, salary, stress level, tenure and promotion, whether your research is valued, etc.?
- 3) What supports and obstacles have you encountered? How have they influenced you, your overall wellness and emotional/mental wellbeing? Can you please provide some examples?
- 4) Can you tell me how you navigate these challenges? What strategies do you use and what resources you find helpful?
- 5) What expectations and aspirations do you have for your academic career? Do you intend to stay at your university/college, or apply for a position in another organization? What are the reasons?
- 6) When you consider your career, would you be interested in pursuing a leadership role? Please elaborate.
- 7) What recommendations do you have to help your university/college improve in supporting Chinese faculty like yourself?

### **Part 3 Intersectional Racialized Experience**

- 1) From your experience, in what ways do you think your positionality and identity shape your professional life?
- 2) Could you talk about some workplace experiences where you feel your Chinese identity played a role, and also about your emotional response to these experiences?
- 3) Could you talk about some workplace experiences where you feel your gender played a role, and how it made you feel?
- 4) Have you ever experienced/witnessed racial stereotyping, gender-based discrimination, or microaggression toward you or other Chinese individuals, on campus and beyond? If yes, how did it make you feel?
- 5) What actions did you take when you experienced/witnessed race-based or gender-based discrimination, such as reporting, making a complaint, or intervening, or perhaps let it pass? What made you do so?
- 6) Stereotypes such as “model minority” and “yellow peril” are often associated with Chinese people. What are your thoughts about these stereotypes and what are the implications for your life, career, or daily experiences in general?

- 7) How has the rise of anti-Asian racism and Sinophobia during the COVID-19 pandemic impacted your academic pursuits and personal life? I'm particularly interested to know if and how have the pandemic influenced you professionally, emotionally, and personally.
- 8) In your opinion, how common is racial discrimination in the context of higher education? How do you feel about the general belief that academia is more progressive and less discriminatory?
- 9) To what extent do you think your high educational attainments have shielded you from discrimination?

#### **Part 4 Interactions with EDI Policy**

Most Canadian universities and colleges have made official commitments to equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). I wonder how relevant EDI is to your professional experiences.

- 1) Are you aware of the EDI policies and/or anti-racist policies in your institution? Have you ever felt that your work is influenced by this policy?
- 2) Do you think EDI policies apply to you? In other words, do you feel you are perceived by your institutions as belong to equity seeking groups, or contributing to the diversity of your organization?
- 3) Do you think you should be under the considerations of EDI? Why or why not?

#### **Part 5 Interactions with Colleagues**

- 1) How racially diverse is your workplace environment, in terms of your fellow faculty members and student body? How about school leadership such as chairs, deans, presidents?
- 2) How do you feel about your relationship with your colleagues and your department/faculty? Do you feel sense of belonging and collegiality?
- 3) Do you feel any differences interacting with your coworkers with various racial/ethnic backgrounds?

#### **Part 6 Relationship with Students**

- 1) How would you describe your relationship with students?
- 2) Do you think students behave differently when dealing with professors from different racial groups?
- 3) Do you find any difference working with students of different racial/ethnic backgrounds?

## Curriculum Vitae

### EDUCATION

- |  |                  |
|--|------------------|
| <b>Ph.D., Critical Policy, Equity, and Leadership Studies</b><br>Western University, London, Ontario, Canada | <b>2020-2025</b> |
| <b>M.A., Critical Policy, Equity, and Leadership Studies</b><br>Western University, London, Ontario, Canada  | <b>2018-2020</b> |
| <b>B.A., English Language and Literature</b><br>Beijing Language and Culture University, Beijing, China      | <b>2008-2012</b> |

### PUBLICATIONS

#### Journal articles

Zhao, C. F. (2024). From “Big White” army to White Paper Protests: China’s gendered pandemic war and feminist interventions. *Feminist Media Studies*, 1–24.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2024.2418381>

Cleveland, M., Zhao, C. F., & Ghebrai, S. (2024). “I’m like, whatever you want me to be. I’m the flavor of the day”: A mixed-methods study of the food dispositions and behaviors of mixed-race individuals. *Food Quality and Preference*, 105259.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodqual.2024.105259>.

Rezai-Rashti G., Arumuhathas S., Zhao C. F., & Leung V. (2024). Racialized International Students and Their Experiences in a Canadian University During COVID-19 Pandemic. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Leadership Studies*, 5(1), 8-24. doi:10.61186/johepal.5.1.8

Zhao, C. F., & Rezai-Rashti, G., (2021). Knock on the Door: The Experiences of Internationally Educated Women Seeking Academic Positions in China. *World Studies in Education* 22 (1), 23-44. <https://doi.org/10.7459/wse/22.1.03>

#### Book Chapter

Zhao, C. F. (2025). Embodied, emotional, and empowering: An online study of China’s gendered pandemic. In *Gendersphere: Exploring Online Culture and Discourse with the Perspective of Gender*. Gender and Affect Book Series, Dong-A University.

### INVITED TALKS

14 May 2021, *The University of Hong Kong*

The Gendered Pandemic in China: A feminist online ethnographic study

Committee on Gender Equality and Diversity, Center for the study of globalization and cultures,

Comparative Education Research Center <https://cged.arts.hku.hk/gender-diversity-democracy>

<https://csgchku.wordpress.com/2021/05/07/gender-diversity-democracy-the-gendered-pandemic-in-china-a-feminist-online-ethnographic-study/>

26 October 2023, *Institute for Gender and Affect Studies, Dong-A University, South Korea*

Embodied, emotional, and empowering: An online study of China's gendered pandemic

Gendersphere: Exploring Online Culture and Discourse with the Perspective of Gender

Colloquium series

## CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

1 June, 2025, *Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE)*  
Exploring the lived and affective experiences of Chinese faculty members in Canadian higher education: An intersectional feminist study

24 June, 2023, *Association for Asian Studies AAS-in-Asia*  
Feminist archiving as anti-discourse: Memories of the pandemic in China

19 April 2022, *Comparative and International Education Society (CIES)*  
Investigating the impacts of COVID-19 on racialized international students' experience in Ontario higher education.

17 May 2022, *Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE)*  
Knock on the door: Internationally educated Chinese women finding academic positions in China

16 May 2022, *Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE)*  
Investigating the impacts of covid-19 on Racialized International Students' Experiences

1 April 2022, *13th Robert MacMillan Symposium in Education*  
Investigating the impacts of COVID-19 on racialized international students in Ontario higher education.

29 July 2021, *8th International Conference on Gender & Women's Studies*  
The Gendered Pandemic in China: A Feminist Online Ethnographic Study, Best Presenter Award

17 June 2021, *International Teaching Online Symposium, University of Windsor*  
The Real Pandemic: An Institutional Neglect

8 February 2021, *Situations Conference: Postcolonial, Feminist, and (Post-)Marxist Perspectives on the Other in Asia, Yonsei University, South Korea*  
The Gendered Pandemic in China: A Feminist Online Ethnographic Study

26 March 2021, *12th Robert MacMillan Symposium in Education*  
The gendered pandemic in China: A feminist online ethnographic study

27 March 2020, *11th Robert MacMillan Symposium in Education*  
Knock on the door: internationally trained women finding academic positions in China

## WORK EXPERIENCE

**Graduate Research Assistant** **2018-2025**  
Faculty of Education, Western University

**Research Assistant** **2023-2024**  
DAN Department of Management & Organizational Studies, Western University

**Graduate Student Teaching Assistant** **2022-2023**  
Faculty of Education, Western University

**Marker** **2025, 2022**  
Faculty of Education, Western University

## KNOWLEDGE MOBILIZATION

10 March 2025, Guest on Against the Tides of Racism Podcast

*Solidarity Against Racism: Revisit Intersectionality*

<https://against-the-tides-of-racism.simplecast.com/episodes/chenzi-feng-zhao-xxApRP3w>

21 February 2024, Co-presenter at Faculty of Education seminar series 2023-2024, Western University

*Racialized International Students and Their Experiences in a Canadian University During COVID-19 Pandemic*

12 March 2020, 3MT finale competitor, Western University

*Knock on the door: women finding academic jobs in China*