Introduction

As the mirror image of Orientalism, Occidentalism in China envisions the West as the modern, civilized, and advanced Other on the one hand, and conceives of it as being untrustworthy, aggressive, dangerous, and even threatening on the other (Gries, 2004; Y. Liu & Dervin, 2020; Y. Liu & Self, 2020; Stanley, 2013; Y. Wang, 2015). In Chinese Occidentalism, Westerners have long been constructed as the fundamentally different foreign Other (Conceison, 2004; Y. Liu & Self, 2020; Stanley, 2013). Accordingly, a growing body of studies has attended to Chinese Occidentalism through scrutinizing stereotype-laden Othering of Westerners enacted by the Chinese government, intelligentsia, and popular culture (Chen, 1995; Conceison, 2004; Gries, 2004; M. Wang, 2013; Zhang, 2015). Nonetheless, these studies leave a worthwhile question insufficiently answered: how do ordinary Chinese people’s mundane practices, underlain by Chinese Occidentalism, stereotype Westerners as the foreign Other daily? Compared to the current scholarship’s institutional focus, much less attention has been dedicated to migrating individuals’ everyday experiences determined by their actual encounters and practices on a day-to-day basis (Zhu & Qian, 2021). To fill the void, this study attempts to reveal Westerners’ everyday experiences of Otherness in the stereotype-laden Chinese gaze. Specifically, this study takes Americans’ narratives of the perceived stereotyping as an illuminating case since this group has been viewed as the prototypical Westerners in China owing to the United States’ re-entry into the focal point of Chinese Occidentalism in the post-Cold War era (Conceison, 2004; Gries, 2004; Stanley, 2013; L. Wong, 2018).

Literature Review

Conflating Westernness with Foreign Otherness in Chinese Occidentalism

Occidentalism stereotypically creates a fundamentally different Other termed the West via essentialization and misrepresentation, as did Orientalism to the East and its people (Birks, 2012; Buruma & Margalit, 2005; Conceison, 2004). Not only social elites but the general public can enact Occidentalism in their imaginary perception of the West (Birks, 2012; Chen, 1995; Grimshaw, 2010). Embedded
in the burgeoning migration from the West to the East, Westerners constantly confront their Otherness formulated in and through non-Western locals’ Occidentalism-underscored imaginations during everyday intercultural interactions (Birks, 2012; Fechter, 2005; Foote, 2017; P. Lan, 2011; Maher & Lafferty, 2014). Previous studies have recorded that Westerners’ racial characteristics, first and foremost, are commonly accepted as visible markers of their conspicuous foreign Otherness in Asian societies (Fechter, 2005; P. Lan, 2011; S. Lan, 2017; Y. Liu & Dervin, 2020; Maher & Lafferty, 2014; Rivers & Ross, 2013). Similar to its exemplification in other Asian countries, Occidentalism in China inscribes foreign Otherness to Westerners by taking Chinese physical appearance as a crucial intergroup differentiating criterion. As an essential reflection of Chinese blood kinship, Chinese physical appearance is widely accepted as a prerequisite for being Chinese in China, which is governed by a blood-centered membership ascription principle termed jus sanguinis (Brubaker, 1992; Dan, 2009; Dikötter, 1992; S. Liu, 2015; Y. Liu & Self, 2020). Consequently, Westerners without Chinese physical appearance are habitually captured as foreigners, and contrarily, those looking indistinguishable from the Chinese are least possibly categorized as the foreign Other in the eyes of Chinese locals (Y. Liu & Self, 2020; Mao, 2015; Stanley, 2013).

However, Occidentalism in Asian countries has been neither monolithic nor homogenous due to their “different encounters with the West in particular socio-historical contexts” (Birks, 2012, p. 5). Specific to China, Chinese Occidentalism is primarily attributed to the long-standing Sino-barbarian dichotomy, a cultural exemplification of Sinocentrism (Ge, 2018; M. Wang, 2013; Y. Wang, 2015). Heavily influenced by the Sino-barbarian dichotomy, China had differentiated itself as the civilized, developed, and superior Central Kingdom from the West as a foreign and peripheral place full of uncivilized, brutal, and inferior barbarians since their initial encounter dating back to the 13th century (Ge, 2018; M. Wang, 2013). China’s Sinocentric imaginations of the West remained unshattered until the Qing Dynasty’s defeat in the First Opium War, which exposed this empire to a different foreign Other equipped with the advanced military technologies, political system, and scientific knowledge (Gries, 2004; M. Wang, 2013; Y. Wang, 2015). With the deepening of Europe-led colonization in China, the Manchu emperors and Chinese intellectuals resented the West as an aggressive, brutal, and dangerous devil and paradoxically perceived it as advanced for the first time out of the Qing Dynasty’s self-strengthening aspiration starting in the 1860s (Gries, 2004; S. Lan, 2017; Li, 2008; Mao, 2015; Y. Wang, 2015). Albeit the interruption at the end of the 19th century, Chinese intellectuals resumed China’s self-strengthening course with the aspiration of modeling the nation after the civilized, progressive, and advanced West, especially the United States (Gries, 2004; Y. Wang, 2015). Eventually, the West has come into the focal point of China’s imaginations of the foreign Other, serving as the pivot on which China has charted the Chinese Self or Chineseness from the 1920s until the present day (Conceison, 2004; Farrer, 2014; Y. Liu & Dervin, 2020; Stanley, 2012, 2013). The conflation of Westernness and foreignness has been further consolidated in Chinese Occidentalism due to Westerners’ influx into China during the 1980s and the 1990s (Boncori, 2013; Farrer, 2014; S. Lan, 2017). Compared to blackness, whiteness is predominantly seen as a distinguishable marker of Westernness and/or foreignness in China in consequence of Chinese people’s collective memory of the ghostly white Western imperialists in history and impression of white-skinned Westerners, the majority of foreigners who made their way to China at the end of the 20th century (Ford, 2010; S. Lan, 2017; Y. Liu & Dervin, 2020).

**Formulating Everyday Otherness out of Chinese Occidentalism**

In predominantly non-white Asian societies, the lingering global White supremacy has transformed whiteness into a congenital sign that categorizes white Westerners as a social group endowed with massive privileges in intimate relationships, workplaces, income, social status, and global mobility (Fechter, 2005; Maher & Lafferty, 2014; Rivers & Ross, 2013; Scuzzarello, 2020; Ullah et al., 2021). Besides racialized superiority, Western nationalities function as less overt determinants of the privileges granted to Westerners, regardless of their skill level, race, and ethnicity (S. Lan, 2017, 2021; Ullah et al., 2021). Similarly, being white is favored as a coveted ticket to the preferential treatment traditionally offered to Westerners in Chinese society, and hence whiteness is preferred as transnational capital that can be converted into such desirable Westernness as innate English competency, modernity, and internationalization in China’s labor market (Brady, 2003; Farrer, 2014; P. Lan, 2011; S. Lan, 2021; Leonard, 2019; Y. Liu & Dervin, 2020; Stanley, 2013). Moreover, America symbolizes the West as the sole superpower in China’s post-Cold War era as it does in other Asian countries (Gries, 2004; Y. Liu & Dervin, 2020; Y. Wang, 2015). Against this backdrop, American nationality is regularly associated with preferable traits like freedom, fun, and technological advancement, and Americanness is typically perceived to represent Westernness and foreignness in the Chinese gaze (Ji & Bates, 2019; S. Lan, 2021; Li, 2008; Y. Liu & Dervin, 2020).

Besides the positive stereotyping, Chinese Occidentalism derogatorily constructs Westerners as the untrustworthy, aggressive, dangerous, and even threatening foreign Other embedded in China’s particular cultural, societal, and political landscapes. Straightforward representation of sex in Western mass media, especially in Hollywood movies and American television programs, has left a profound imprint on many Chinese people that Westerners in general and Americans in particular are sexually open-minded.
(Eikenburg, 2014; P. Lan, 2011; Y. Liu & Dervin, 2020; L. Wong, 2018). Direct contact with misbehaved foreigners elicits some Chinese locals’ antipathy toward Westerners, and such an antipathic attitude can be exacerbated in the face of insufficient intergroup contact, which is partially attributable to international migrants’ scarce presence in Chinese society (Conceison, 2004; Farrer, 2014; Y. Liu & Self, 2020). Additionally, the traumatized collective memory of Western imperialistic powers’ oppression of China beginning in the 19th century has dramatically shaped many ordinary Chinese people’s antagonism toward the West, and the intensity of anti-Western sentiments depends on twists and turns of the Sino-Western relations (Brady, 2003; Callahan, 2004, 2006; Gries, 2004; Z. Wang, 2008). Coming from the country that symbolizes the West, Americans are more likely to fall prey to the hostile stereotype-laden Chinese gaze than other Westerners, given the never-ending Sino-American disputes from the mid-20th century onwards and the heightened waves of anti-Americanism since the 1990s (Conceison, 2004; Ford, 2010; Gries, 2004).

The widely-circulated stereotyping of Westerners springs from Chinese Occidentalism and reversely manifests, sustains, and consolidates China’s paradoxical imaginations of the West. The Chinese Occidentalism-rooted stereotyping, embodied in Chinese people’s mundane practices such as staring, labeling, and commenting, molds Westerners’ everyday experiences of Otherness in Chinese society (Y. Liu & Dervin, 2020; Y. Liu & Self, 2020). As the majority in China, Chinese locals have more opportunities to form, perpetuate, and disseminate stereotypes of Westerners (Conceison, 2004; Leonard, 2019; Y. Liu & Self, 2020). Although some stereotypes go unnoticed by and are even seen as positive in the Chinese gaze, they are still experienced by Westerners as exclusionary discourses of Othering that convey the idea of you-do-not-belong-here and leave them with adverse residual effects (Conceison, 2004; Y. Liu & Dervin, 2020; Y. Liu & Self, 2020; Stanley, 2013; Yeoh & Willis, 2005). Ultimately, the Chinese Occidentalism-rooted stereotyping confronts Westerners with their everyday Otherness and exposes them to the fact that they cannot entirely integrate themselves into Chinese society, no matter how hard they try. Narrowing the scope down to 37 American migrants’ narratives of their intercultural experiences in China, this study intends to further the exploration of Chinese Occidentalism by examining how these Americans’ everyday Otherness is formulated in and through the perceived stereotyping on a daily basis.

**Research Methods**

This study adopts the qualitative approach since it, compared with quantitative research methods, can best address such complex social phenomena as international migrants’ everyday experiences of Otherness and reveal how they inductively make sense of their intercultural experiences from the inside out. Therefore, this qualitative research, which examined Americans’ everyday intercultural experiences in Chinese society as a representative case, did not aim to represent “a wider population from a sample” (Stanley, 2012, p. 218). Given international migrants’ scarce presence (0.06% of China’s national population) in China, this study recruited qualified interviewees via snowball sampling, a well-suited technique to reach elusive and hard-to-approach individuals with specific attributes in common (Lindløf & Taylor, 2011; National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2021). Since the outbreak of the 2008 financial crisis, a growing number of young and college-educated Americans have made their way to China, a new land of opportunities (Farrer, 2014; Levine, 2012). Analogous to other skilled migrants in China, these Americans are desired as foreign talents and mainly assemble in Chinese higher education institutions and corporations (Farrer, 2014; Tan, 2021; Xu & Montgomery, 2019).

Focusing on these fields, this study narrowed its scope to young Americans who self-reported Mandarin fluency and Chinese cultural literacy at different levels and had been living in China for at least 6 months by the time of their interviews. To a great extent, these three qualities could significantly reduce international migrants’ misinterpretation of their intercultural experiences caused by linguistic barriers, cultural illiteracy, and short dwelling lengths (InterNations, 2018; B. Wang & Chen, 2020).

To minimize the sample bias, this study employed diverse starting points as the basis for snowball referrals, including cohorts and administration staff from her (under)graduate institutions, colleagues from her current university, and her research collaborators from other universities. The author provided notice of research recruitment to the contact points mentioned above, who subsequently disseminated the information via emails, campus bulletin boards, and social media. Eventually, the study recruited 35 Americans between October of 2015 and April of 2016 in Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing, and Guangzhou, four Chinese cities most favored by international migrants (Zheng, 2016). Between 2019 and 2020, a follow-up interview with one interviewee was conducted and two more interviewees were recruited since the Sino-American trade war and the COVID-19 pandemic might have complicated Americans’ intercultural experiences in China. About 37 interviewees ranged from 19 to 40 years, were engaged in different occupations (18 international students, 5 college English teachers, 10 employees of institutions and enterprises, and 4 business owners), covered diverse ethnicities (33 European Americans, 1 Chinese American, 2 African Americans, and 1 Latino American), and varied in dwelling length from 6 months to 20 years.

The author conducted semi-structured interviews with each interviewee in their desired locations and their first language, English in all cases, to ensure they could precisely express themselves. The interviews generally started with such warm-up questions as why they chose China and how long they had been living in this country. Then the author moved to these Americans’ daily experiences of being caught
as foreigners in Chinese locals' eyes and encouraged them to share specific stories about how and under what circumstance they encountered the Chinese gaze. Unlike etic research, the author adopted an emic angle to explore American migrants' experiences of everyday Otherness from their standpoints, hoping to further the understanding of how international migrants, as the minority in Chinese society, see dominant societal structures from inside out (Orbe, 1998). Ultimately, the interviews totaling 83 hours were digitally audio-recorded with all interviewees' approval, generating 1,372-page transcripts with 797,623 words.

Constant comparative analysis guided the data analysis, in which an incident was compared and contrasted with other incidents, empirical data with concepts, concepts with categories, and categories with categories to reach higher levels of abstraction and advanced conceptualization (Charmaz, 2014). First, the author reviewed all transcripts during the initial coding phase and conducted line-by-line coding to generate codes, which converged into 12 categories under four themes (see Table 1). Then, the author adopted focused coding to re-examine all narratives pertinent to the above themes and placed the sense of being stereotyped as the foreign Other on a higher level of conceptualization, which emerged from the previous coding as a common theme running through all interviews. Finally, the author treated the common theme as a core concept and conducted the axial coding around it to answer the following questions: (1) the specific conditions in which the interviewees perceived themselves as being stereotyped in the Chinese gaze, (2) the particular interactions with Chinese locals in which the perceived stereotyping was enacted on a daily basis, and (3) the impact of the perceived stereotyping on the interviewees' everyday lives in China. Upon completion of the axial coding, it was concluded that the interviewees felt stereotyped on both phenotypic and national levels, then exposed to their sense of Otherness formulated in and through the perceived stereotyping via fantasization, underestimation, and stigmatization on a daily basis, and ultimately felt excluded in the face of Chinese Occidentalism (see Table 2). To increase the accuracy of the data analyses, the author checked back with every interviewee and revised the analysis based on their feedback. After all interviews, two more qualified Americans were invited for member checking (Patton, 2015), and both of them agreed with the findings from previous analyses.

Findings

Sense of Separation Arising from Fantasization-Rooted Stereotyping

As set out previously, whiteness has been primarily constructed to symbolize Westernness and/or foreignness in the Chinese gaze, both of which are admired and desired as the

| Themes | Categories |
|--------|------------|
| Being fantasized | Being perceived to possess the desirable American traits; Being perceived to possess the desirable Western/foreign traits. |
| Being underestimated | Being presumed incapable of understanding the Chinese culture as foreigners; Being presumed to possess no or only a minimal level of Mandarin proficiency as foreigners. |
| Being stigmatized | Being deemed sexually promiscuous foreigners; Being deemed misbehaved foreigners; Being deemed threatening foreigners; Being deemed unreliable foreigners; Being deemed symbols of the United States that bullies and threatens China. |
| Sense of being the foreign Other | Feeling ostracized due to non-Chinese phenotype; Feeling rejected at the intersection of non-Chinese phenotype and American nationality; Feeling separated at the intersection of non-Chinese phenotype and American nationality. |

| Condition | Interactions | Consequence |
|-----------|--------------|-------------|
| The perceived stereotyping was triggered by the interviewees’ differences from the Chinese on both phenotypic and national levels. | Being fantasized to represent the desirable Westernness/foreignness and Americanness in the admiring Chinese gaze; Being underestimated in terms of Mandarin proficiency and the capability to learn and understand Chinese culture in the deprecating Chinese gaze; Being stigmatized as troublemakers and unwelcomed national out-group members in the wary and even hostile Chinese gaze. | Being exposed to their everyday Otherness, the interviewees experienced the perceived stereotyping as an exclusionary discourse that separated, ostracized, and rejected them as the foreign Other under the lens of Chinese Occidentalism. |

Table 1. Interviewees’ Narratives of Being Caught as Foreigners in the Chinese Gaze.

Table 2. Everyday Otherness Formulated in and through the Perceived Stereotyping.
they were usually first and foremost captured as foreigners by Chinese locals and then fell prey to their fantasy-driven stereotyping. During class discussions, Kathy noticed that her Chinese students first saw her as a foreigner and then accounted for her certain behaviors in adherence to their presumptions of this group. Although these presumptions sounded benign and even admiring, they still caused discomfort to Kathy because she felt unwillingly categorized as a foreigner and associated with certain preconceived notions that were generalized to all foreigners. Embedded in Kathy’s daily experiences, such category-based generalization constituted stereotyping that completely ignored her individuality (Lippmann, 1922). In this context, Kathy’s whiteness was brought to the forefront as a marker of her foreignness that triggered Chinese students’ fantasization-rooted stereotyping:

They [Kathy’s Chinese students] will have some presumptions of me by talking about their ideas of how foreigners behave, like, “Nimen waiguoren [你们外国人 in Mandarin, ‘you foreigners’ in translation] are more liberal or open to traveling.” I always try to encourage them not to have any preconceived notions about why I am behaving in a certain way based on my background. I hope they can treat me first as an individual rather than a foreigner because I don’t want to be put in a general group and figured out what kind of person I am based on the category I belong to. When I feel I’ve been put in this category, there is no way for me to be integrated into the department, especially with communication like that (European American, college English teacher).

Besides phenotype, nationality can determine the content of stereotypes held by locals toward international migrants (Lee & Fiske, 2006; Subba, 2018). Although being black is predominantly associated with impoverishment and illegality in China, African Americans like Jroux and Nick were still more positively received than African migrants due to their nationality’s symbolic significance in Chinese society (Haugen, 2018; S. Lan, 2017; Mathews, 2011). As an African American working in Kathy’s department, Jroux was complimented by his Chinese colleagues and students for being creative merely because of his nationality, which is widely recognized to symbolize creativity in the Chinese gaze (R. Wong & Niu, 2013). Likewise, Nick was assumed to be rich by many Chinese people to be excellent in playing basketball as an African American since this group has been mainly represented as gifted basketball players due to the Chinese media’s broadcast of NBA games and reports of Yao Ming’s career achievement when he played for the Houston, a predominantly black NBA team (Feagin, 2010). Benefiting from the stereotyping, Nick received Chinese classmates’ acceptance and gained access to some job opportunities in Beijing:

They [Chinese classmates] are usually accepting, especially on the basketball court. They would cheer for me. I think it might be because I am black and from America. And there was one time that I was approached by two Chinese students from Beijing Film Academy when I was playing basketball. They were shooting a basketball advertisement and asking me if I wanted to take part in the commercial. I had the time, so I took the offer (African American, undergraduate student).

Compared to desirable traits presented above, American nationality is more commonly seen as a symbol of economic abundance in Chinese society (Hessler, 2006; R. Wong & Niu, 2013). Many Chinese locals presume Westerners to be more affluent than the average Chinese as a result of higher salaries and better compensation exclusively offered to foreigners dating back to the 1980s and 1990s when China energetically attracted foreign talents to propel its modernization (Farrer, 2014; Leonard & Lehmann, 2019; Pieke, 2012). When it comes to Americans, this stereotype is more manifest because the United States is commonly perceived to dominate the global economy and symbolize the West in many Chinese locals’ eyes (Gries, 2004; Y. Liu & Dervin, 2020; Stanley, 2013). Therefore, the interviewees described that they would be assumed to be wealthy once their American nationality was revealed, regardless of their ethnicities. For example, Laura, the only Chinese American in this study, disclosed that some Chinese colleagues approached her for investment, who believed that she must be wealthy as an American:

Some of my colleagues invited me to join them for investment because they think I am rich [as an American]. This assumption constantly makes me feel singled out. Like the other day, my co-worker said she wanted to open a milky tea shop and tried to push me to be her business partner. I told her that the main reason was the financial situation. I don’t have much money because I am paying back student loans in America (Chinese American, college administration staff).

Like Laura, Lana was stereotypically assumed to be rich by some Chinese vendors merely because of her nationality, although she was studying in Nanjing as an exchange student on a scholarship and did not have her own money at all. For the same reason, Claire was considered wealthy by many Chinese vendors simply because they thought all Americans were wealthy:

I don’t want to wave my flag like, “Look, I’m American” when I go to barter for items. When they know I’m from America, they would be like, “Oh, American! You have so much money!” No matter how many times I say I’m a student and I’m poor. They are like, “Americans have so much money.” I feel frustrated sometimes because I’m constantly exposed to the divide between Americans and the Chinese. The divide never fades off (European American, undergraduate student).

Stories presented above reveal that the interviewed Americans perceived the fantasization-rooted stereotyping illustrated above as being exclusively triggered by their
whiteness or American nationality, both of which are translated into symbols of the desired Westernness, foreignness, or Americanness in Chinese Occidentalism (Ji & Bates, 2019; Li, 2008; Y. Liu & Dervin, 2020). During their daily interactions with Chinese locals, these interviewees’ non-Chinese physical appearance and nationality functioned as social categorizing criteria to distinguish them as the privileged foreign Other whose values, lifestyles, talent in sports, and economic abundance were praised, admired, idealized, and desired by many Chinese locals in line with the latter’s fantasy-driven presumptions of foreigners and Americans at the everyday level. Though these stereotypes did not seem hostile at all from the Chinese perspective, they annoyed these interviewees for making them constantly feel separated as outsiders in Chinese society (Conceison, 2004; Y. Liu & Dervin, 2020; Stanley, 2013). As Kathy disclosed, the whiteness-triggered categorization and generalization not only accentuated her foreignness but also obstructed her integration into the department where she worked. Although Nick did not feel bothered too much by Chinese locals’ aforementioned fantasization, he still admitted that standing out due to his skin color in the Chinese gaze was the only situation in which he was distinguished as a foreigner. Unlike the non-Chinese look, American nationality was experienced as a less overt marker of the interviewees’ Otherness in China. Even if looking indistinguishable from Chinese locals, Laura acknowledged that the American-Chinese divide built upon many Chinese locals’ fantasization-rooted stereotyping would never fade off and continually made her feel separated in Chinese society.

**Sense of Ostracization Triggered by Underestimation-Grounded Stereotyping**

Governed by the principle of jus sanguinis, Chinese culture makes Chinese physical appearance prior to and confused with Chinese cultural dispositions (Brubaker, 1992; Dan, 2009; Dikötter, 1992; S. Liu, 2015; Y. Liu & Self, 2020). Unless looking Chinese, foreigners are not expected or even perceived as possessing such Chinese cultural dispositions as Mandarin fluency and Chinese cultural literacy, despite their dwelling lengths in China, actual mastery of Mandarin, and familiarity with Chinese culture (Conceison, 2004; Foote, 2017; Y. Liu & Self, 2020; Stanley, 2013). Despite her fluency in Mandarin, Sarah was repeatedly exposed to many Chinese interns’ underestimation of her Mandarin proficiency:

They [Chinese interns in Sarah’s company] didn’t even try. It’s like they just saw me as a foreigner, and they were like, “Oh my god! I don’t know what to do.” They got really flustered and wouldn’t even try to explain things to me [in Mandarin] because they would be too scared if they couldn’t explain it right and I wouldn’t understand. And I’m like, “Come on, I speak Chinese and I live here. Just to explain that to me as a Chinese friend. And I’ll be fine.” So they just say, “Okay” and it does get better. But whenever there is a new person, I often have to go through the same process. It is really bothering. I feel rejected (European American, business owner).

When coming to complicated issues, Sarah noticed that her Chinese interns did not consider explaining the issues in Mandarin to her on their first attempt but struggled to make themselves understood in speaking English. In Sarah’s opinion, these Chinese interns’ preference over English over Mandarin revealed their steadfast presumption that foreigners could not understand complicated Mandarin. To dispel their worries, Sarah had to ensure these interns her Mandarin proficiency and encouraged them to explain to her as they did to their Chinese friends. Such daily communication in workplaces, triggered by Sarah’s foreign face, repeatedly disturbed her as discourses of rejection whenever new interns joined her company. In a similar vein, Dylan, who was fluent in Mandarin and good at singing Chinese folk songs, was assumed incapable of speaking Mandarin at first sight by a McDonald’s employee in Nanjing. To Dylan’s surprise, this employee gave him a picture menu to indicate that he could order food by pointing to the picture even before he spoke Mandarin.

The underestimation of foreigners’ linguistic competence did not dissolve after they displayed their Mandarin proficiency (Y. Liu & Self, 2020). Therefore, Maroon had to repeat his address several times until Chinese taxi drivers finally realized that he was speaking Mandarin. Maroon described this miscommunication as an outsider-context problem, arising from many Chinese locals’ expectation that foreigners could not master Mandarin:

There is this expectation that foreigners can’t speak Chinese. You might have to repeat yourself multiple times, and they [Chinese locals] would be like, “Okay.” When they first look at your face, you are so out of context. When you open your mouth and speak Mandarin, they are like, “It does not equal.” So they would reject that you were speaking Mandarin. So they don’t listen to what you say (European American, enterprise employee).

Even if some interviewed Americans did not encounter the outsider-context problem, they still sensed their Otherness from how Chinese people reacted to their displayed Mandarin proficiency. Growing up in Sacramento, Jroux has been fascinated by Chinese culture and has studied Mandarin for years. Yet, despite his Mandarin proficiency, Jroux was still lumped with the imagined linguistically incompetent Other labeled as *laowai* (老外 in Mandarin, “foreigner” in translation) in the Chinese gaze (Conceison, 2004; Foote, 2017; Y. Liu & Self, 2020; Stanley, 2013). Such labeling deeply upset Jroux as a discourse of Othering, which was perceived to erase his previous efforts in studying Mandarin entirely:

No matter how great I get at Mandarin, I’m always going to be a *laowai*. I’m working hard to practice my language and understand [Chinese] culture. But using that word [*laowai*]
Though Claire made herself well understood by some Chinese people, these acquaintances merely saw her fluency in Mandarin as a surprise instead of a conventional act because it violated their expectation that foreigners possessed no or only a minimal level of Mandarin proficiency:

If I speak Chinese, they [Chinese acquaintances] go “Wow, what a surprise!” But in the U.S., if someone speaks English, I don’t really care or get excited regardless if they look foreign or say they look Chinese. We are not going to have the same perception because America has so many different people there. But here it is a little bit different. It is kind of a big thing that separates us with language.

Growing up in a multicultural society, Claire was accustomed to hearing people of different cultural backgrounds speak English and thus did not consider English-speaking as a skill that individuals of her ethnicity could only grasp. However, such a belief was greatly challenged with Claire’s transnational migration to China, in which Mandarin proficiency was generally deemed to be only mastered by the Chinese. Though Chinese locals’ surprise at her mastery of Mandarin sounded positive, Claire still experienced these compliments as foreignness-focused discourses that separated her from the Chinese. Eventually, Claire found her excellent Mandarin skill was transformed into a prominent specialty, which did not help her merge into the Chinese society but further spotlighted her as the foreign Other in the Chinese gaze.

Apart from the underestimated Mandarin proficiency, the interviewees repeatedly encountered many Chinese locals’ comments that they did not understand the Chinese culture as the foreign Other. Triggered by these Americans’ salient non-Chinese phenotype, these comments were commonly experienced as stereotyping that underrated their capability of understanding Chinese culture’s intricate nuances. For example, Susan was assumed by some Chinese people that she knew nothing about her Chinese name, Hua Mulan (花木兰 in Mandarin, a famous female general in Chinese legend):

Do you know the word Orientalist? Someone would think of Asia as a distant, alienated type of thing, sort of ways that I feel a lot of Chinese people do to me. Whenever I meet someone [Chinese person] new, they would be like, “Do you know who Hua Mulan is?” I am like, “I have had this name for eight years. Of course, I know!” But they are like, “Let me tell you this story.” They think there is no way that I could possibly know because I am not Chinese (European American, graduate student).

According to Susan’s description, these Chinese people thought it was impossible for her to know about the legend of Hua Mulan and hence were eager and proud to explain the tale to her. Susan attributed Chinese people’s reaction to her whiteness-marked foreignness, which rendered her incapable of understanding Chinese culture in the Chinese gaze. Feeling annoyed, Susan compared Chinese locals’ phenotype-focused attribution to what Orientalists did to Asia, claiming that she was perceived as a distant and alien foreigner oppositely. As a European American who had been studying in China for more than 3 years, Stacy was often told by her Chinese classmates that it was hard for waiguo xuesheng (外国学生 in Mandarin, “foreign students” in translation) like her to understand the Chinese culture as a laowai. These comments, according to Jroux, completely erased his qualification of grasping Chinese culture and dismissed his substantial efforts in accumulating a deeper understanding of China.

By contrast, Laura was the only one who escaped the underestimation-grounded stereotyping. As a Chinese American, Laura was included as an in-group member for her Chinese blood lineage, a vital determinant of Chineseness in the Chinese gaze (Dikötter, 1992; S. Liu, 2015; Y. Liu & Self, 2020). Therefore, Laura was expected to understand Chinese culture the same way as these Chinese locals did since such an understanding was seen as a mandatory requirement for being Chinese. As a result, Laura did not feel at home in China, and her insufficient Chineseness reinforced her American identity in Chinese society:

When I offered different opinions to my relatives in China, like complaints, they were like, “You should understand that because you are Chinese.” They saw it [Laura’s complaints] as a betrayal since I have zhongguo xuetong (中国血统 in Mandarin, “Chinese blood lineage” in translation) in that sense. I think it is hard for them to see a lot of things from my perspective. When I moved to China, I realized that I am not Chinese. It was hard for me to see myself as an American before. But now, I see myself as an American.

The contrasting experiences of Laura and other non-Chinese Americans support the idea that many ordinary Chinese people exclusively attribute Mandarin proficiency and the capability to learn and understand Chinese culture to individuals who are considered ethnically Chinese in the Chinese gaze. This attribution differentiated all interviewees except Laura from the Chinese and permanently ostracized them as the foreign Other in China due to their unerasable non-Chinese phenotype. From the standpoint of these non-Chinese Americans, the underestimation-grounded stereotyping impeded their engagement in communication with Chinese people. Hence, they felt perpetually shut out of Chinese society as culturally ostracized outsiders. As Susan revealed,
Chinese people’s stereotyping distanced and alienated her quickly. Studying in Nanjing as an exchange student, Ryan, the only Latino American in this study, depicted how this separating attitude prevented him from becoming very close to his Chinese friends, who too often reminded him of his incapability of understanding Chinese culture as a foreigner. Samuel, who had been living in China for 4 years, described that Chinese people’s stereotype-laden perceptions of foreigners repeatedly highlighted and accentuated his differences from the Chinese.

**Sense of Rejection Generated by Stigmatization-Anchored Stereotyping**

Besides fantasization and underestimation, the interviewees were also exposed to stereotyping via stigmatization, defined as a process of devaluing individuals who possess a socially discredited attribute, behavior, or reputation called stigma (Goffman, 1963). Given the asymmetric power structure embedded in international migration, local people in receiving countries have more power to designate international migrants as the inferior, unwelcomed, and even threatening Other through maximizing out-group members’ negative aspects (Croucher et al., 2020; Kurzban & Leary, 2001; Link & Phelan, 2001; S. Liu, 2007). The group-based categorization gave prominence to American migrants’ Otherness, characterized by foreigners’ stigmatized images entrenched in Chinese psychology, and these images were co-constructed by media, direct intergroup contact, and ideologies in China. One of the most widely disseminated stigmas of foreigners in the Chinese gaze is that these migrants, especially Americans, are generally more sexually promiscuous than Chinese people, given the popularity of such Western mass media as Hollywood movies and American television programs in Chinese society (Eikemburg, 2014; P. Lan, 2011; Y. Liu & Dervin, 2020; Y. Liu & Self, 2020; L. Wong, 2018). Seen as a foreigner at first sight, Maroon was frequently described as being kaifang (开放 in Mandarin, “being sexually promiscuous” in translation) by many Chinese locals:

> Whenever any topic like dating comes up, the first word out of a Chinese person’s mouth is always kaifang; foreigners are kaifang. When they say foreigners, they literally mean Westerners like me [a white person]. Americans are actually much more conservative than Europeans. They [Chinese people] don’t get the idea that foreigners are different. They always say, “You must have five girlfriends.” But I’m not dating anyone. It’s not okay to say that to me.

Maroon’s narratives show that whiteness, foreignness, and Westernness converged on many Chinese people’s mental picture of foreigners. Triggered by his white face, these Chinese locals generally categorized Maroon as a foreigner and then applied their stereotypic view of this group, which was epitomized in kaifang, to him by asserting that he must have multiple girlfriends at the same time. Maroon experienced such an assertion as an irritating stereotype-laden discourse that completely ignored the diversity of foreigners/Westerners and misrepresented him in a derogatory way.

Not only media but some Chinese locals’ direct contact with certain impudent and arrogant foreigners can serve as an essential channel to stigmatize Westerners as a whole group, and such stigmatization is far-reaching and hard to be altered in the Chinese gaze due to Chinese people’s insufficient intergroup interactions with the foreign Other on a daily basis (Conceison, 2004; Farrer, 2014; Y. Liu & Self, 2020). Though being considered as a neutral and even friendly expression from the Chinese perspective, the label of laowai is commonly experienced by Westerners as a derogatory expression that Chinese locals habitually use to describe misbehaved foreigners (Birks, 2012; Farrer, 2019; Foote, 2017; Y. Liu & Self, 2020). Therefore, Kevin, who had been living in China for 5 years by his interview, expressed his dislike for laowai since it implied foreigners who Chinese people criticized for their misbehaviors. For the same reason, Will showed an aversion to laowai, which lumped him with some highly undesirable foreigners in China. According to Will, some foreigners irritated Chinese locals with their impudent and arrogant behaviors that were guaranteed by their privileges in China. Consequently, these Chinese people would stereotype all foreigners, including Will, as behaving the same way and even make him a scapegoat for the discredited foreigners:

> There are always foreign exchange students who are assholes and go like, “I’m special; I’m great.” You know, “Oh, all of a sudden, I am handsome, and girls wouldn’t talk to me back home. This is great.” Then I have a big problem because they make it [living in China] harder for me. They are going home in six months. But I am still here (European American, business owner).

When asked about how his life in China became harder, Will disclosed that many Chinese locals would presume him as untrustworthy. Given the tainted image in the suspicious Chinese gaze, foreigners would be blamed for having disputes with Chinese locals. Hence, some interviewees revealed that they became vulnerable to certain greedy Chinese blackmailers. For example, Will recalled that he was once charged RMB 2,000 by an old Chinese lady who trapped him into breaking her basket. Initially, Chinese onlookers believed that Will was wrong because he was a foreigner. However, Will detected this lady’s trick and successfully defended himself by showing his proficiency in the Beijing dialect. Similarly, Frank escaped being blackmailed with the help of his American co-workers:

> I was biking and a car was holding in front of me. It kicked my bike and I was hurt. The couple got out of the car and noticed my wheel had this little tiny scratch on the back of their car. So they publicly demanded money and accused me. People came around and watched with the look like, “This is clearly the foreigner’s
fault.” I couldn’t verbally defend myself because my Chinese was not good enough. Then my co-workers passed by and joined my side to argue back with them. Then the police came and reprimanded the couple, “This is ridiculous and you need to leave.” In that situation, it could have gone really badly, like maybe my co-workers didn’t show up. That would be terrible for me (European American, college English teacher).

The stigmatization of foreigners became acute when they were perceived as threats in the Chinese gaze. According to integrated threat theory (ITT) developed by Stephan and Stephan (1996, 2000), the in-group’s negative attitudes toward out-group members could emerge when the former believes their existence is threatened by the latter, realistically or symbolically. Whether real or not, the perceived threats can lead to the in-group’s prejudice toward and discrimination against an out-group (Stephan & Stephan, 2000). China’s aspiration of restricting immigration to foreign talents with the skills needed to boost its economy has resulted in waves of investigations into foreigners’ legal status and crackdowns on those with illegal entry, residence, or work (S. Lan, 2017; Leonard, 2019; Pieke, 2012). Under the circumstance, Will encountered the foreignness-triggered suspicion from some Chinese policemen when his Chinese step-son and he made a report at a police station about their stolen bike. To Will’s surprise, the Chinese policemen asked for his visa first to ensure his legality instead of attending to the bike theft. Will attributed his experience to the prevalent illegality-focused stereotyping of foreigners in China:

They don’t want to take a report about bike theft. I hear this from other foreigners too. When they walk into the police station with a complaint or with a thing, they [Chinese policemen working there] just fixate on “Well, what have you done wrong? Are you here illegally? Let me see your papers. What work unit are you in?”

The suspicion of foreigners can be amplified when they are perceived to symbolize foreign threats to China, and such distrust can lead to more evident nationalism-underlaid exclusion (Birks, 2012; Brady, 2003; Callahan, 2004; Gries, 2004; Leonard, 2019; Leonard & Lehmann, 2019; Pieke, 2012). Since it entered into public purview in the early 20th century, the narrative of China’s century of humiliation has largely shaped ordinary Chinese people’s collective memory of Western imperialistic powers’ colonization of China beginning in the 19th century (Callahan, 2004, 2006; Gries, 2004; Z. Wang, 2008). From the late 20th century onwards, the humiliation-focused narrative has been successfully reconstructed and institutionalized to penetrate ordinary Chinese people’s daily lives and cast a long shadow over their perception of foreigners (Birks, 2012; Brady, 2003; Callahan, 2004, 2006; Conceison, 2004; Gries, 2004; Leonard, 2019; Leonard & Lehmann, 2019). When nationalism comes to play, severe exclusion of such national out-groups as foreigners/Westerners can be quickly provoked in Chinese society (Cabestan, 2005; Conceison, 2004). For instance, Will once saw a poster in which two scenarios were compared. One scenario depicted a Chinese man lying on a bed with an opium pipe 100 years ago, and the other a Chinese man concentrating on a cell phone. Finding this poster quite interesting, Will posted it on his WeChat moment. To Will’s surprise, one of his Chinese friends suggested he should take the post down:

He is a close Chinese friend. He is older than me, and I respect him very much. Um, he messaged me and said, “Will, you have to take that down.” I said, “Why?” He said, “because as a foreigner, first, opium was nimen waiguoren zuo de [you foreigners did this] in translation, and you’re bringing up zhongguo choulou de lishi [Chinese history] in translation.” And I was really bothered by it because he was not saying the speech wrong; he was saying the speech was wrong because I’m a foreigner. So I figured that if a really good friend was taking it the wrong way, then other people would too. I don’t want to offend my clients because I use WeChat a lot for business. I took it down.

Though living in China for 10 years, Will still felt bothered by his Chinese friend’s suggestion, which attended to his foreign identity rather than the message itself. Will admitted that if a close friend was second-guessing his motives in posting that picture, his other WeChat friends might also interpret the post in the wrong way. With concern for the sustainability of his business in China, Will decided to delete the post to avoid insulting his Chinese clients.

In addition to the history of intergroup relations, such global health emergencies as the COVID-19 pandemic can spark the rejection and exclusion of ethnic minorities and immigrants (Croucher et al., 2020; Margolin, 2020; Yu, 2021). Against this backdrop, foreigners were reported to encounter ascending hostility in China at the everyday level, and the resentment against foreigners was further fermented on social media platforms during the pandemic (Davidson, 2020; Walden & Yang, 2020; V. Wang & Qin, 2020). Due to his disappointment with the American government’s politicization of the pandemic, Frank considered applying for permanent residence in China. Shortly after the outbreak of coronavirus, Frank’s envisioning, however, was shattered by a torrent of xenophobia online that was stirred up by the release of a proposed regulation on foreign permanent residence in February 2020 (Giovannini, 2020; Jung, 2020). The anti-foreigner sentiment, in Frank’s opinion, ascribed to him a sense of being shut out of Chinese culture:

I felt so distant from American culture because of some stupid dramas of American politics during the pandemic. And at that moment, I felt so confident about where my future would be. And then the [Chinese] government proposed this draft Green Card proposal. So that was the moment where I began to envision a future life here permanently. But when I saw that whole online discourse, just kind of anti-foreigner sentiments
emerging at that point, that was the worst part of things for me. Because all of a sudden, I began to think maybe I’m not gonna make a future here. Because of all of this stuff on the Internet, I feel no culture wants to have anything to do with me.

Besides their foreignness marked by their non-Chinese phenotype, the interviewees’ American nationality exposed them to a more intensified anti-foreigner sentiment in Chinese society since the United States has long been regarded as the leading Western country that continuously bullies and threatens China since the mid-20th century (Conceison, 2004; Ford, 2010; Gries, 2004). When the Sino-American relations worsened, some nationalistic Chinese individuals extended their hostility toward the United States to the interviewees once their American nationality was revealed and instantly made them the scapegoats of the American government’s actions. For instance, Kevin was told by a Chinese taxi driver that he felt happy when the September 11 attacks happened. A Chinese convenience store owner said “I hate America” to Will’s face just because it was July 4th, the United States’ Independence Day. Owing to the detrimental impact of the trade war and pandemic on Sino-American relations, Fred, who had been obsessed with Chinese culture and living in China for 20 years, was insulted by some nationalistic Chinese subscribers who left messages on his Chinese podcast channel, calling him American junk and asking him to get out of China. Such comments deeply worried not only Fred but his wife, a Chinese woman, who felt terrified by the permeating xenophobic sentiment online and warned Fred to stay at home as much as possible. In the face of nationalism, American nationality overwhelmed race and ethnicity in the Chinese gaze. Will disclosed that Kaiser Kuo, famous in the American diaspora in China, was excluded from his Chinese community after the United States bombed the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999, even if he is ethnically Chinese and had lived in China for many years:

He is American-born Chinese and has been [in China] for twenty years. He was the leading guitar player for an influential Chinese rock band formed in the 1980s when they started out. But he was forced to leave a little bit because of his American affiliation. At that time, he was caught in a backlash a little bit against America because the U.S. bombed the embassy in Belgrade. His relationship with his gemen (哥们 in Mandarin, “buddies” in translation) fell apart because he was still American and the Other.

From the interviewed Americans’ perspectives, stereotypes illustrated above were considered as the epitome of the widely-held stigmatization of foreigners and Americans as a whole in China. Owing to their phenotype and nationality, these interviewees were assumed to be sexually promiscuous, misbehaved, suspicious, and threatening in the same way. In light of the stigmatized images, these Americans felt dissociated from the Chinese and negatively evaluated as the unwelcomed foreign Other in China. As the minority in an asymmetric power structure, these interviewees learned they could not easily dispel these prevalent stereotypes entrenched in many Chinese locals’ minds, especially when they were suspected of threatening China’s societal stability, political legitimacy, and national security in a realistic or symbolic manner. Ultimately, these Americans experienced the perceived stigmatization as exclusionary acts that constantly formulated their Otherness in the derogatory, wary, and even hostile Chinese gaze. The stigmatized Otherness became more manifest at the juxtaposition of the humiliation-focused narrative deeply rooted in China’s historical trauma and the presence of political disputes between China and the West (particularly the United States). As Will disclosed, the distrust he captured in Chinese onlookers’ expressions when having disputes with some Chinese individuals in public struck him that he was and would always be the foreign Other in China. Experiences of Kaiser Kuo further frustrated him because he realized that if such a Chinese American was not immune to nationalism-anchored exclusion resulting from the Sino-Western/American tensions, let alone foreigners like him, whose foreignness and nationality would be more violently resisted by some nationalistic Chinese individuals as symbols of Western or American imperialism.

Discussion and Conclusion

Everyday Otherness and Bordering in and through Stereotype-Laden Chinese Gaze

As elaborated above, the interviewed Americans felt distinguished as being different at the intersection of non-Chinese phenotype and American nationality in and through the admiring, depreciating, wary, and even hostile Chinese gaze. They experienced the fantasization, underestimation, and stigmatization epitomized in Chinese locals’ mundane practices as stereotype-laden discourses, which over-simplified, generalized, and distorted them as the foreign Other in such everyday settings as the classroom, sports field, workplace, marketplace, social occasion, family gathering, and cyberspace. In line with Radford’s (2016) conceptualization, these Americans’ experiences of the perceived differences during their daily intercultural interactions lead to the emergence of their everyday Otherness in Chinese society. Unlike the Other-identity ascribed by governments and institutions from above, international migrants’ sense of everyday Otherness is triggered, perpetuated, and reinforced from below during their daily encounters with locals in destination countries (Hiitola, 2021; Johnson et al., 2011; Radford, 2016; Tervonen, 2018).

The formulation of everyday Otherness is attributable to the establishment and consolidation of everyday bordering, defined as the daily construction, negotiation, and performance of social-cultural boundaries between individuals, groups, and states (Tervonen, 2018; Tervonen & Enache, 2017; Yuval-Davis et al., 2017). Specific to this study,
everyday bordering experienced by the interviewed Americans was created and recreated by the joint forces of the legacy of global White supremacy, media misrepresentation of Westerners and Americans, preferential treatment traditionally offered to foreigners, the United States’ globally dominant place, jus sanguinis-governed understanding of Chineseness, insufficient intergroup contacts, skilled migrants-oriented immigration policies, and the recurrent antagonism and hostility toward the West and the United States in China. Subject to these ideological, mediated, cultural, and political forces, many Chinese locals, unconsciously, subconsciously, or intentionally, assumed the border-guard roles to delineate, highlight and defend everyday bordering in and through mundane practices. As a result, the interviewed Americans experienced these bordering-emphasized practices as stereotype-laden discourses of Othering, which pointed out their differences from the Chinese at the everyday level, and elicited their sense of exclusion via phenotype/nationality-focused over-simplification, generalization and distortion on a daily basis, despite their diversities within the categories they were put in (Conceison, 2004; Y. Liu & Dervin, 2020; Y. Liu & Self, 2020; Stanley, 2013).

The Blurry and Fluid Foreign Other under the Lens of Chinese Occidentalism

Embedded in American migrants’ transnational relocation to China, they experienced their non-Chinese phenotype and American nationality as essential intergroup differentiating markers that separated them as the foreign Other in the Chinese gaze. Here comes a question: what should the foreign Other look like under the lens of Chinese Occidentalism? As illustrated above, foreignness, Westernness, and whiteness are not clearly distinguished in many Chinese locals’ eyes. Therefore, the label of foreigners in its everyday usage habitually connotes Westerners with non-Chinese phenotype, especially those with bodily whiteness, despite its legal denotation of international migrants without Chinese nationality (Farrer, 2014; S. Lan, 2017; Y. Liu & Dervin, 2020; Y. Liu & Self, 2020; Mao, 2015; Pieke, 2012). Given China’s ideological, cultural, historical, and societal contexts discussed above, such white-skinned foreigners as the interviewed American migrants are more easily subject to Chinese locals’ polarized perception of the West: whiteness symbolizes the desirable Westernness on the one hand and loathsome foreign threats on the other, as previously articulated. Regarding this aspect, foreignness, whiteness, and Westernness converge in Chinese Occidentalism.

Following whiteness, blackness has progressively complicated the Chinese imaginations of foreignness with the ever-increasing flux of black Africans into China (Brady, 2003; S. Lan, 2017; Mathews et al., 2017). Due to their salient non-Chinese look, Nick and Jroux felt distinguished as foreigners in the Chinese gaze the same as their white counterparts did. However, these two African Americans experienced the Chinese gaze slightly differently from the interviewed European Americans. According to Nick, standing out as a foreigner in the Chinese gaze was the only situation where he confronted his foreign Otherness. In this context, Nick genuinely attributed many Chinese locals’ attention to their lack of contact with black people in real life, especially considering how African Americans were unfairly treated in the United States. Being more sensitive to the race-related issue, Jroux initially resisted the label of heiren (黑人 in Mandarin, “black people” in translation) out of his resentment against being identified by his skin color. However, Jroux felt more comfortable with heiren as time went by because he realized that its use was not attributable to its Chinese users’ racial discrimination against him but that he genuinely has a much darker skin color than the Chinese. In sharp contrast, Jroux could not accept being labeled laowai, a discourse of Othering that permanently misconceived and separated him as an outsider in Chinese society.

Besides non-Chinese phenotype, American nationality affects Chinese Occidentalism as well. Being as racially visible as black Africans, African Americans are generally better treated because of the United States’ symbolic, economic, and cultural significance in China (Haugen, 2018; S. Lan, 2017; Mathews, 2011). Therefore, Nick acknowledged that he generally felt welcomed and embraced as a gifted basketball player, and Jroux was admired for living a desirable American lifestyle in the Chinese gaze. Though being perceived as ethnic Chinese for their Chinese ancestry, Chinese Americans’ nationality still overrides their in-group membership as the decisive factor in their economic privileges, as Laura disclosed above. The overriding impact of American nationality on Chinese Occidentalism is more prominent when international relations, especially the Sino-American relations, became tense. Under the circumstance, the nationalism-rooted anti-Americanism significantly constitutes Chinese Occidentalism, which is possible to expose Chinese Americans to stigmatization-anchored stereotyping and exclusion as it did to Kaiser Kuo. Consequently, the foreign Other evolves into a blurry social construct resting upon the fluid everyday bordering at the intersection of race, ethnicity, and nationality. Subject to Chinese Occidentalism, this construct is crystallized into situate-contingent connotations: predominant whiteness and then blackness on the racial level, non-Chinese on the ethnic level, and citizenship of Western countries, especially the United States, on the national level (Farrer, 2014; S. Lan, 2017; Y. Liu & Self, 2020; Mao, 2015; Pieke, 2012; Stanley, 2013).

Remarks on Future Directions of Research

Chinese Occidentalism has never been static but is continuously constructed to generate diverse and context-contingent representations with the dynamic changes of the Sino-Western relations. However, the author’s financial constraints and lack of in-depth contacts with Western diasporas limit this study
temporally, geographically, and demographically. To enrich the explorations of Chinese Occidentalism, future studies are suggested to conduct longitudinal research by examining the impacts of such factors as geographic distribution, length and purposes of sojourning, political beliefs, nationalities, and occupations on Western migrants’ experiences of the perceived stereotyping and everyday Otherness. For example, Westerners who did not initially come to China as international students should be included, especially those who relocated to this country out of their commitment to communism and/or dissatisfaction with capitalism. Moreover, this study is limited by underrepresented non-white ethnicities. The majority of interviewees are European Americans who benefited from the global White supremacy in Chinese society. Compared to these privileged white people, African Americans may encounter different discourses of Othering for being black in the Chinese context (S. Lan, 2017, 2021). Nevertheless, the only two African Americans did not reveal any clue in this regard. It is possible that they were unwilling to talk about their unpleasant experiences in front of the author, a Chinese researcher. Under this circumstance, the insufficient representation of African Americans’ voices in this study can set a direction for future research that should focus on how African Americans and members of other non-white ethnic groups make sense of their everyday Otherness in China.

It should be noted that the interviewed Americans’ narratives might be constrained by their ethnocentric perspectives. With an emic angle, this study attempted to present a comprehensive description of how American migrants interpreted their experiences in China from their own perspectives. These American perspectives might expose blind spots or be deluded on some issues because these interviewees’ actions were overwhelmingly based on what was salient and important for them (Kottak, 2006). In this context, it would be invaluable for future studies to include Chinese locals’ descriptions of their interactions with Americans and compare the Chinese viewpoints to those of the interviewees. Such comparisons would likely be helpful in detecting consistencies and contradictions between these two perspectives, hoping to better overcome intercultural communication barriers and enhance the quality of intercultural encounters. Last but not least, further future studies are also expected to examine whether and how the quality of intergroup contact can counteract Westerners’ sense of displacement in China. Although feeling otherized by some Chinese acquaintances who were surprised by her Mandarin fluency, Claire was well accepted by her Chinese host family, with which she has developed a close emotional bond. Despite being untrusted and even excluded by some Chinese strangers for being a foreigner, Frank made friends with some Chinese locals during campus closures caused by the COVID-19. These Chinese friends helped Frank purchase necessities of life, soothed him via WeChat and made him feel included and protected during the pandemic. Not only Fred’s wife but also his loyal Chinese subscribers firmly backed him up when he was confronted with insults on cyberspace. These interviewees’ experiences revealed that sufficient intergroup contacts with good quality could challenge stereotyping and alleviate their sense of Otherness during intercultural encounters. By considering this point, future studies are expected to generate a more heterogeneous, nuanced, and contextualized understanding of international migrants’ Otherness at the everyday level.

**Declaration of Conflicting Interests**
The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

**Funding**
The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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