“Every Piece Can Fit”: Understanding and Remedying Cultural Mismatches Between Chinese Diaspora Students and Advisors

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As higher education diversifies, students from underrepresented groups find themselves on campuses unprepared to support them. Academic advising can cultivate belonging or reify “cultural mismatches” when students’ norms do not match institutional norms. Leveraging interviews with Chinese international, Chinese American, and European American undergraduates and advisors, this study examines whether cultural mismatches in advising exist for Chinese diaspora students and, if so, on what fronts. Findings reveal cultural mismatches in definitions of autonomy; the amount of student voice expected in advising; valuation of exploration; emphasis on passion; and types of socioemotional support. This study yields important findings for advisors to improve the cultural responsiveness of their advising.

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As higher education institutions (HEIs) diversify, students from underrepresented groups find themselves on campuses unprepared to support them (Lerma et al., 2020). Scholars describe this phenomenon as a *cultural mismatch* between institutional and student norms (Stephens et al., 2012). In response, HEIs face pressure to adjust student affairs approaches to affirm students’ different ways of being. These efforts have achieved limited success to date; students of color and international students continue to perceive their institutions as culturally unresponsive (Heng, 2018; Zhang, 2016), and HEI leaders continue to struggle to support their increasingly diverse student bodies (Museus, 2021; U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Some studies examine why students of color and international students experience dissatisfaction with HEI support (Mitchell et al., 2010; Zhang, 2018). Others highlight unique aspects of students’ cultural norms and upbringings (Allen & Smith, 2008; Kohlfeld et al., 2020), such as one guide on cultural factors advisors should consider when advising Chinese international students (Galinova & Giannetti, 2014). Moreover, theoretical literature, such as work on cultural mismatch (Stephens & Townsend, 2015), indicates advising could be an area where institutional norms conflict with students’ norms. Taken together, scholarship points to advising as a likely site of cultural mismatch for underrepresented students, with implications for improving student support and experiences.

This study aims to investigate this mismatch. Through thematic analysis of interviews with 41 Chinese international, Chinese American, and European American undergraduates and 33 advisors, this study examines whether a cultural mismatch exists between advisors and their international and immigrant advisees and, if so, on what fronts and for whom.

Background and Literature Review

Research shows that academic and career development, although important to all students, are especially connected to well-being and identity for Asian American students (Kodama et al., 2001; Ma, 2020). Furthermore, Asian students—particularly Chinese international students (Yan & Berliner, 2011)—perceive advisors as a crucial touchpoint to their HEI (Smith & Allen, 2006). Despite the importance of advising to Chinese students and their significant representation at U.S. HEIs (Zong & Batalova, 2019), limited literature exists on their HEI or advising experiences. Early literature relies on essentializing tropes (e.g., “model minority;” Kim et al., 2001) or studies Asian students as a monolith (Zhang & Dixon, 2001). Even when the literature moves beyond stereotypes or focuses on East Asian students, it still tends to oversimplify these students’ academic decision-making processes, over-emphasizing parental influence (Samura, 2015; Song & Glick, 2004), while neglecting other factors (e.g., financial security, peers) that also drive students’ decisions (Schell, 2022).

Even if advisors recognize diversity in students’ motivations, guidance on applying this understanding is limited. A meta-analysis of Asian American students’ academic development (Kodama & Huynh, 2017) and a guide on advising Chinese

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international students (Galinova & Giannetti, 2014) identify promising ways to translate knowledge of cultural differences into advising (e.g., coaching to help students develop cross-cultural competence). However, neither addresses aspects beyond the content of advice, such as effective delivery or expectations of the advising relationship. Moreover, except for Galinova and Giannetti's (2014) individual perspectives as scholar-practitioners, these studies do not integrate advisors' perspectives, a critical gap. Scholarship that relies solely on students' perspectives neglects to account for the ways advisors' perspectives shape the advice students receive or how advice is given.

Most studies focus on Asian American students' advising experiences. Very few works (two books and six papers, according to Lin and Liu [2019]) isolate international students' advising experiences, and even fewer concentrate specifically on Chinese international students. This literature highlights unique considerations for these students, such as language barriers and acculturation stress (Andrade, 2006; Galinova & Giannetti, 2014; Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002).

Recent literature on Chinese international students broadly notes changing demographics and the detrimental impact of COVID-19 on this population. An increasing number of Chinese international students are from less-resourced or rural backgrounds (Yan, 2017; Zhu, 2018). These students also reported significant upticks in anti-Chinese sentiment (Koo et al., 2023; Ma & Zhan, 2022; Tessler et al., 2020) since the pandemic's onset. Together, these changes heighten the potential for acculturation stress, increasing students' need for culturally responsive advising in turn.

Theoretical Framework

Cultural mismatch theory (Stephens et al., 2012) argues that there are differences between institutional norms and the norms of students from underrepresented groups. Furthermore, students' academic performance and well-being depend on an alignment between institutional and personal norms. Specifically, theories suggest mismatches between Chinese diaspora students and their advisors on three fronts.

Individualism versus Collectivism

Individualistic cultures (e.g., U.S.) typically prioritize the individual and emphasize self-directedness and independence. Collectivistic cultures (e.g., China) typically prioritize the family unit, value deference, and emphasize collaborative decision-making (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis et al., 1988). Clashes between individualistic and collectivistic decision-making have been shown to drive cultural mismatch (Schell, 2022; Stephens et al., 2012), but other explanations for this mismatch remain underexplored.

Emerging Adulthood Theory

In the U.S., HEIs encourage students to explore various academic and extracurricular interests. At Chinese HEIs, where students enter majors based on college entrance examination scores, choice and exploration are neither expected nor encouraged (Liu, 2013). These differences are partially driven by cultural differences in perceptions of emerging adulthood. According to *emerging adulthood theory* (Arnett, 2000) as well as Erikson's concept of *psychological moratorium* (Erikson, 1968), European American 18- to 24-year-olds are not seen as fully adult and do not identify as such. They are encouraged to use their undergraduate years to experiment with different roles and career paths. Conversely, Chinese 18- to 24-year-olds are perceived as adults and identify as such; their undergraduate experience is intended to prepare them for a career (Nelson et al., 2004). Such disparate expectations may create an environment where Chinese diaspora students feel pressured to explore when selecting courses, even if it feels unnatural or directionless.

Affect Valuation Theory

Research on Tsai's *affect valuation theory* (2007) found that, in European American contexts, displaying excited affect (e.g., passion) is expected, while in East Asian contexts, calm affect and measured communication are preferred. These cultural norms, known as a culture's *ideal affect* (Tsai, 2007), have significant implications, such as perceptions of a leader's competence based on their smile (Tsai et al., 2016). Consequently, advisors might expect Chinese diaspora students to demonstrate passion toward their academic pursuits when such intense positive affect is not highly valued by these students' communities. Moreover, a Chinese diaspora student might perceive an advisor as less competent because of their excited affect.

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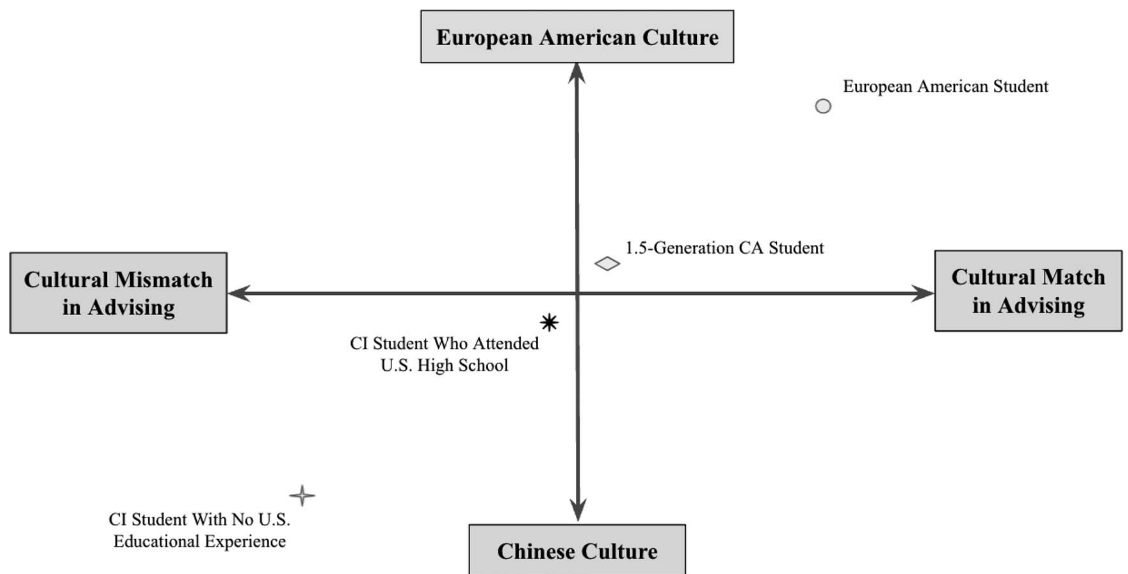
Figure 1. Hypothesized Dimensions of Mismatched to Matched Experiences Based on Acculturation Level



Note. Even a European American student may not experience a full cultural match or may not identify with every aspect of European American culture. Other intersecting identities (e.g., SES, gender, sexual orientation) as well as students' personal beliefs influence students' subjective cultures. Any descriptions of culture in this study should be used as frames for understanding some of the influences that students might experience, rather than prescriptions of how students actually are. "CA" denotes Chinese American and "CI" denotes Chinese international, for the purposes of this graphic.

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Research Design

Research Questions

Considering the scholarly gaps, this study incorporates the perspectives of students and advisors to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. What are the cultural mismatch(es) between advisors and Chinese American as well as Chinese international students?

RQ2. For which groups of students are these mismatch(es) more acute and why?

RQ3. What differences, if any, exist between European American and Asian American or professional, faculty, and volunteer advisors with respect to cultural mismatch(es) with their advisees?

Study Sites and Participants

I purposefully chose selective Research 1 (R1) HEIs, as these institutions present the best opportunity to observe cultural mismatches in advising. Specifically, I analyzed two private and two public R1s on the East and West Coasts based on each school's sizable population of Chinese diaspora students and varied advising approaches (i.e., professional staff at two, volunteer staff at one, and faculty members at one).

I gathered a cross-cultural sample of Chinese international, Chinese American, and European American first- and second-year undergraduates aged 18–20, an age range aligned with the shortened window of emerging adulthood in a Chinese context (Nelson et al., 2004). I included European American students (who may identify more with European American norms) as a comparison group to observe a spectrum of matched to mismatched advising experiences (illustrated in Figure 1). Participants were allowed to self-identify cultural backgrounds —a common practice in cultural psychology (Lu & Wan, 2018)—because it is important to understand how students perceive of their own background relative to cultural mismatch. I also recruited advisors who self-identified as European American and/or Asian American. Over a data collection

Table 1. Demographics of Student and Advisor Interviewees

Student Interviewee Demographics (N = 41, Average Age = 19.5)				
Ethnicity	**Gender**	**Socioeconomic Status**	**First-generation Status**	**University Type**
Chinese American: 46% (1.5-gen: 32%, 2nd-gen: 42%, 3rd-gen: 26%)	Female: 76%	Upper: 32%	Not first-gen: 80%	Private: 83%
Chinese international: 27% (Avg. years in U.S.: 1.6)	Male: 22%	Upper middle: 29%	First-gen: 20%	Public: 17%
European American: 27%	Nonbinary: 2%	Middle: 22% Low: 12% Very low: 5%		

Advisor Interviewee Demographics (N = 33)				
Race	**Gender**	**Exposure to Diversity****	**Staff Type**	**University Type**
White: 73%	Female: 79%	Little exposure growing up: 61%	Volunteer:*** 61%	Private: 76%
Latinx: 15% International:* 9% Black: 6% Asian: 6%	Male: 21%	Some to lots: 39%	Professional: 24% Faculty: 15%	Public: 24%

Note. *International is not a mutually exclusive category. For example, one of the advisors who identified as White also identified as international (i.e., from Europe). **Exposure to diversity was calculated by averaging advisors' scores on two questions regarding the neighborhood in which they grew up (e.g., "How would you describe the neighborhood where you spent the majority of your time growing up?"). A score of 3 or less (out of a total of 7 possible points) placed advisors in the "little exposure" category; a score of 4 or more placed them in the "some to lots" category. ***Volunteer advisors were employees (e.g., researchers, librarians, student affairs staff) and graduate students.

period spanning April–May 2022, I interviewed 41 students and 33 advisors who fit participant demographic requirements (see Table 1).

Data Collection and Analysis

I recruited participants via snowball sampling (Goodman, 1961), first reaching out to student organizations and advising offices to find participants who fit study requirements, and then letting the word of the study snowball. Students and advisors responded through an online form and were then directed to a demographic questionnaire and interview scheduling page.

Demographic questionnaire items for both students and advisors covered topics such as racial, ethnic, and gender identification; socioeconomic status; parental education; immigration status (if applicable); and exposure to diversity growing up. Chinese diaspora students also received all 12 items from the Marin et al. (1987) Short Acculturation Scale to determine the degree to which these students had acculturated to European American norms. As Berry's (1997) *acculturation theory* suggests, greater levels of acculturation to European American norms may buffer students from more intense cultural mismatches with advisors.

After consenting to the study, participants completed semistructured interviews, as interviews are an ideal approach to gather individuals' beliefs about their experiences (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Interviews ranged between 45 minutes and 55 minutes for advisors and 55 minutes and 65 minutes for students. All participants received $20 gift cards for their time. Both advisor and student interviews examined similar topics to understand convergence and divergence in both groups' expectations of the advising relationship (as well as the reasons behind divergences). Interviews addressed: goal(s) for advising; expectations concerning the nature of

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advising (e.g., affect, logistics); and students' academic decision-making processes (or advisors' perceptions of those processes). Students answered additional questions regarding how their expectations of advising shifted over the academic year and reasons for those shifts.

After concluding data collection, separate codebooks for students (39 items) and advisors (28 items) were developed, with input from Chinese international colleagues, researchers, and advising professionals. These codebooks (Tables A1 and A2) included descriptive (e.g., "exploration"), interpretive (e.g., "desire for relationship"), categorical ("expectation type"), and in vivo (e.g., "advisor talk") code types derived from the literature and interview transcripts. I refined my codebooks through testing them on a subset of 16 interviews and then double-coding all 74 interviews, documenting coding decision-making through analytic memoranda to enhance the validity and replicability of the analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Findings

Cultural Mismatches on Multiple Fronts

Findings indicate cultural mismatches between advisors and Chinese diaspora students on the following fronts: definitions of autonomy; the amount of student voice expected in advising; the degree to which students should engage in academic exploration; the degree to which passion should motivate academic decisions; and the amount and type of socioemotional support in advising.

Different Definitions of Autonomy

Advisors, many of whom were influenced by European American norms, often subscribed to individualistic expectations of decision-making. They encouraged students to focus on what they individually wanted to do and seldom asked questions about who else might be important to their decision-making. For example, Sandy, a professional advisor, described her approach to advising first-year students:

> That first meeting is that transformation into, "you get to decide what your education looks like, your vision." This is our way of saying you have full autonomy over your academics and how we can help you get there. Many freshman conversations are what interests you, what material did you like, what do you want to do moving forward.

In contrast to this individualistic conception of autonomy, Chinese international and some Chinese American students made decisions in a more collectivistic manner, seeking input from stakeholders such as family. When advisors did not account for these stakeholders, Chinese diaspora students felt advice was "disconnected from their reality" or discounted important people in their lives. For some students, to involve parents in decision-making was to exercise autonomy, as they autonomously chose whose input to value. Carina, a Chinese American student, explained the significance of her parents' perspectives:

> What am I here at college to do? I'm here to learn, but also to get a job . . . and so I think my parents' expectations definitely played a role in my [major choice]. . . . I still feel that way, because of how I grew up, because of my parents and what they've sacrificed for me to get this education.

Of course, not all students shared such positive experiences of parental involvement. A small, but notable, portion of Chinese diaspora students who wanted a more individualistic decision-making process or felt their wishes conflicted with their parents' wishes, reported challenging parental interactions. Nonetheless, they perceived parental involvement as a nonnegotiable element in decision-making; advisors who encouraged these students to follow their desires, even if they differed from those of their parents, were considered "out of touch." Gloria, a Chinese American student with a strained relationship to her parents, expressed frustrations with an advisor whom she considered unwilling to understand her situation:

> I would love to figure out what I'm passionate about, but I'm concerned that it won't be a major that my parents are okay with and there's nothing I can do. . . . I met with my advisor, I don't feel it helped because I was trying to convey my situation, this is what I'm going to do, just please tell me how to make it happen, and she was like, "You can explore what interests you, stop worrying about that."

When advisors focus only on the individual when supporting students who make decisions in a collectivistic manner, they risk being perceived as "invalidating" or "unhelpful."

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Different Expectations of Student Voice in Advising

Advisors tended to expect students to lead the conversation, which proved daunting to some, particularly Chinese international and first-generation, low-income (FGLI) Chinese American students. This difference in expectations may arise from individualistic versus collectivistic expectations for engagement. Katie, a 1.5-generation Chinese American student, described her acculturation process in middle school adjusting to this individualistic style of engagement:

> When I was in China, I definitely wasn't encouraged to be vocal. . . . I think the culturally appropriate standard was to follow the teacher and abide by the rules. . . . in the U.S., I realized very quickly even from classes, seeing my peers raise their hands and be vocal, that was something I needed to pick up on in order to get my way. That was something that changed over time for me academically, standing up for myself.

Different expectations of student voice may also stem from a developmental advising approach. Developmental advising entails encouraging "shared responsibility, allowing the student to take responsibility for [their] decisions and actions" (King, 2005, para. 4). It is currently the most popular advising approach, in contrast to traditional forms of "prescriptivist advising" (i.e., prescribing a course of action for students). However, this approach was developed in European American contexts (Drake et al., 2013), which may create mismatches when applied in non-European American contexts. Most advisors appeared to receive some developmentally based training. For instance, Rene, a volunteer advisor, described a typical first meeting:

> I always ask [advisees] to come with at least two classes that seem interesting and questions for me . . . half will come with a full plan of the classes they want to take, whereas some students come in like "I'm absolutely overwhelmed, I have no idea what I want to do." That's where it starts bigger picture, talking about what you like to do in high school . . . it is a little more student-led that way.

For some Chinese American students, such as Katie, and most European American students, the idea of a class plan and prepared questions is feasible. Even the few European American students who did not have a clear plan entering college felt comfortable discussing themselves, their interests, and their goals. To some Chinese diaspora students, however, the student-led approach felt "overwhelming." For example, Haley, a Chinese American student, described her discomfort with her advisor's open-ended approach:

> The meeting started with [my advisor] asking me something I'm interested in, and I was like, maybe engineering. Honestly, I didn't really have questions. I was confused, I was barely entering college. . . . My advisor talked to me about different options instead of helping me come to a conclusion [on my major]. I don't know anything about college, I don't know what I want to do with my life, it just didn't really help . . . talking to her felt overwhelming.

Haley and four other Chinese participants stopped seeing their advisors after initial meetings because she found the student-led nature of the process unhelpful. At the time of data collection, Haley had not been contacted again by her advisor.

Different Expectations of Exploration

Another cultural mismatch between advisors and their Chinese diaspora students was the amount of exploration advisors encouraged students to pursue as compared to the amount of exploration students wanted or felt prepared to pursue. When asked, "How do you perceive the role you play in your advisees' college trajectories," 31 out of 33 advisors' responses related to exploration. For some advisors, their emphasis on exploration was rooted in European American cultural expectations of emerging adulthood, which encourages emerging adults to try different roles before stepping into their adult identities. Corey, a faculty advisor, described the critical role of exploration in his advising:

> Students are coming in thinking they know what they want to do, so they're taking courses in that direction, they've got some freedom to take other courses to broaden their perspectives, but it takes multiple

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> meetings to say: What else are we not thinking about? What else might be out there? Just trying to find from that whole person perspective, where might you want to go that you haven't thought about?

Although cultural expectations of emerging adulthood influenced advisors' attitudes, the ideals of a liberal arts education also proved important. Linda, a faculty advisor, made an explicit connection between the goals of liberal arts and student exploration:

> I also stress to students the great opportunity they have to explore new things and explain what a liberal arts education is. People throw these words around, but students don't know what they mean, and so we talk about . . . how important it is through a liberal arts education to gain breadth, but also to explore the depth of a major.

Many Chinese diaspora students responded to this encouragement with trepidation. Some, such as Gloria, bristled at the seemingly sudden expectation to explore, because their communities discouraged exploration. Other students were eager to explore, but with limited exposure to exploration, were unsure where to begin. Opal, a Chinese international student who chose to come to the U.S. for its liberal arts education, explained:

> I prioritized exploring freshman year, plus I didn't have a liberal arts education in high school, so I knew I wanted to get that "freshman year" and resist the temptation to [do] computer science straight away, which I'm glad I did . . . that was a strong message from [HEI] and advising, but I wish my advisor would have given me more guidance about how to pick between majors or classes.

For FGLI students (including European American students), messaging around exploration proved especially fraught. In addition to the concerns mentioned above, these students felt financial pressure to reach the "end goal" of exploration. Andrea, a FGLI, Chinese American student, recounted her frustration with advisors who urged her to explore:

> Literally don't tell me to "explore." I spent my whole sophomore year out to "explore," then I came back and felt more anxious because I didn't know what to do. . . . I have to work hard to get into medical school, but I don't know anything about college or medical school, so I was very stressed because I felt like I wasn't doing what was right. There should be more understanding of your specific background, rather than just a "one size fits all" thing when they give advice.

Although some advisors acknowledged the potential challenges of academic exploration, they often attributed them to institutional structures (e.g., the complexity of the course catalog), rather than considering different cultural valuations or lack of exposure to exploration. Few advisors provided scaffolding to help students navigate the exploration process, especially during students' crucial first-year transition.

Different Expectations of the Role of Passion in Motivation

In line with theoretical work on the excited *ideal affect* in European American cultural contexts, advisors generally expected students to express passion or excitement about their academic decisions. Although they rarely used the word passion, advisors frequently referenced interest when discussing course exploration (c.f. Corey and Linda's statements). Implicit messaging surrounding the ideal of passion in academic decision-making was prevalent throughout interviews, such as the following statement from Miranda, a professional advisor:

> If [students] have a path and they're happy with it and enjoying it, then I help them find other ways to go deeper into that. . . . But if they're not enjoying their path and they're not ready to admit it yet, I try to help with whatever they need to find fulfillment in this undergraduate experience.

Messages about "find[ing] fulfillment" or passion were familiar to European American students and resonated with the motivations of students like Carl, who recounted that, "the overarching message I got through school was do something you're passionate about, don't worry about money or difficulty. If you're passionate, it won't be draining. That's how I chose environmental science."

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For most Chinese international and some Chinese American students not from predominantly European American communities, these messages were perceived as unfamiliar, inauthentic, or (in the case of FGLI participants) coming from a place of socioeconomic privilege.

Different Expectations of Socioemotional Support

The final evidence of cultural mismatch concerned both the need for and type of socioemotional support. To some advisors, providing any nonacademic support went beyond the scope of their job, as Eamon, a faculty advisor, expressed:

> I think the question that often comes up is adjustment to college life, how are they doing socially, mentally, and it may just be me as an advisor that I'm not comfortable advising them or don't feel I have the knowledge to do that, so I generally don't ask questions like that. Occasionally it comes up and I will point students towards resources, but I can't give them any solid advice.

In contrast, advisors who embraced discussing nonacademic topics, such as Lola (a professional advisor), received more referrals from students of color and/or FGLI students, many of whom were navigating complex cultural or financial questions alongside their academic ones. Some students even came from outside of Lola's advising group (e.g., "this [Vietnamese] student called me and said, my friend told me to call you because you're the best"). While one cannot infer causality from this study, the advisors who seemed to attract more marginalized advisees were those who provided holistic support.

More Chinese diaspora students wanted emotional or social support from their advisors as compared to their European American peers. In response to a question that asked students to rank forms of support from most to least important (i.e., academic, career, social/cultural, emotional, and one write-in option), Chinese international students more often listed emotional or social/cultural support among their top two (73%), as compared to 53% of their Chinese American and 36% of their European American peers. While a thorough explanation of these differences is beyond this study's scope, Jennifer, a Chinese international student, suggests one reason:

> I made a lot of effort at the beginning to make new friends. I was still immersed in the Chinese way of thinking, so I made a lot of awkward comments. I found it hard to make friends with U.S. students. And then, at the first football game, someone started shouting to me and my Chinese friends, "Do you know your government brainwashed you?" For international students, understanding social culture actually comes before academics. If you're not feeling safe or sense of belonging, then you're probably not doing so well in emotional or academics.

Jennifer's statement also calls attention to an important nuance in socioemotional support. Specifically, Chinese diaspora students often sought a different type of socioemotional support than advisors provided, if they provided socioemotional support at all. When asked about emotional or social support, multiple advisors described "talking students down" from high stress about grades and reminding them that their "GPA doesn't matter that much," rather than asking questions about students' social lives or belonging. This approach to socioemotional support might work for some European American students, such as Amanda, who would likely perceive such questions as invasive (e.g., "I don't need someone to hold my hand"). Conversely, Klara, a Chinese international student, perceived her advisor's attempt to de-emphasize grades as unsupportive:

> I'm panicking, I'm getting a C, I want to apply to this prestigious firm, and a lot of times advisors give reassurance like, it will be fine, they don't just look at grades, blah, which is somewhat true. But I prefer more real talk of, this is a disadvantage, here are ABC routes you can take to compensate, as opposed to telling me it's fine.

When reflecting on socioemotional support they received from advisors, Chinese diaspora students made a distinction between "real talk" versus "advisor talk," in which the latter entailed advisors telling students not to worry about grades. Chinese diaspora students, many of whom came from schools in which grades were the only metric for evaluation, perceived this advice as extremely out of touch. Advisor talk often caused advisors to lose credibility with

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Chinese diaspora students and sullied advising relationships. In place of advisor talk, many Chinese diaspora students wanted support in navigating European American spaces and the xenophobia that could arise, especially post-COVID-19 (Jeung et al., 2021; Tessler et al., 2020).

Who Experienced the Mismatch Most Acutely?

To address RQ2, students with less exposure to European American norms more frequently experienced friction from institutional norms conflicting with their personal norms, as acculturation theories would suggest (e.g., Berry, 1997). While all Chinese diaspora students experienced some degree of mismatch, mismatches were most acute for Chinese international students, Chinese American students from predominantly Asian communities, Chinese American students newer to the U.S. (e.g., 1.5-generation), and Chinese diaspora students who concurrently were FGLI.

Even if unsurprising, this finding concerning the experiences of FGLI Chinese diaspora students warrants further attention. Scholarship often overlooks the experiences of FGLI Chinese diaspora students, relying on stereotypical representations of Chinese communities, with negative ramifications for these students. Andrea recalled trying to advocate for the same resources that her non-Asian FGLI peers received:

> A lot of people assume Asians don't need help. . . . There's the stereotype of Asians being smart or nerdy, and it's heartbreaking. It made me feel worse about myself. I'm Asian, I need help, I struggle a lot, and not to cause a controversy or whatever, but I'm seeing some of my fellow Black and Latinx FGLI peers . . . people who people consider more "historically underserved," they are doing so much better in the same classes and having a lot more fun than me. And then it makes me more like: am I the one doing something wrong? It's hard to connect to people or find someone who will understand or help.

Matthias, another FGLI Chinese American student, noted that the gap between the support offered and needed was even more concerning at public universities, where there are fewer opportunities for students to rectify academic mistakes.

Who Could Rectify Mismatches Best?

All advisors—professional, faculty, and volunteer staff—contributed to at least one cultural mismatch identified above. However, professional advisors were most adept at avoiding potential mismatches. They more frequently acknowledged that some students face different expectations from home because of their individual circumstances (e.g., culture, class); provided more scaffolding for students who might be less familiar with academic exploration; and modulated the type of support they provide (e.g., developmental vs. prescriptivist, academic vs. socioemotional) based on individual needs. Aliya, a professional advisor, explained how she works with students from different cultural backgrounds:

> I don't have deep experience in different cultural expectations. . . . I just try to ask good questions. If a student is telling me, I have to study CS, I ask why, and if they say that's what people expect: which people? Your family? Can you tell me about that? I let the student tell me. . . . if a student tells me this is the way my family is, this is what is expected of me, I accept and respect what that student says to me.

Aliya's statement highlights this modulation process—utilizing preexisting knowledge of student communities, asking open-ended questions to make room for cultural differences (if there are any), and altering approaches as needed. More professional advisors engaged in this process than faculty or volunteer advisors.

Of the 33 advisors interviewed, only two identified as Asian. In addition, the only advisor who included factors such as "what you are good at" and "what will get you a job" in their model of students' academic decision-making was the sole Chinese American advisor. Her model was different than almost all other advisors, who relied predominantly on enjoyment.

Having a shared cultural background or common experience may help create a cultural match for some Chinese diaspora students (e.g., by "being understood without explaining"). Nonetheless, Chinese diaspora advisees rarely expected a shared background with their advisors beyond academic interests. Some students, such as Marian, a Chinese international student, even noted a preference that their advisor not share their identities because they came to the U.S. specifically to

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gain exposure to other ways of seeing the world. Moreover, shared identity was not an essential prerequisite for culturally responsive advising, as many of the advisors who exercised the most culturally responsive advising for Chinese diaspora students were European American.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

There are three main limitations of this study. First, the study only included students and advisors from R1 universities, which may not fully represent the experiences and needs of individuals at comprehensive state or two-year HEIs. Second, the study focused on Chinese diaspora students. However, other underrepresented student communities also experience cultural mismatches in advising, such as Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and FGLI students. Third, although my Mandarin fluency, extensive cultural study in China and Taiwan, and collaborations with Chinese diaspora communities ensured strong cross-cultural validity in the study's design and analysis, I recognize that my positionality as a European American researcher may still have influenced participants' responses and/or my interpretation of their responses.

Given these limitations, there are promising directions for future research. Future research could examine cultural mismatches in advising at other types of HEIs (e.g., comprehensive state universities, community colleges). It could also build on the scholarly framework in this study to investigate cultural mismatches for other underrepresented groups. The following section includes promising steps to improve the cultural responsiveness of advising for Chinese diaspora students; future research could implement these suggestions to evaluate their actual usefulness in improving the quality and responsiveness of advising.

Discussion and Implications for Advising

These findings have many implications for advisors and administrators seeking to improve the cultural responsiveness of their HEI's advising. All the advisor participants had excellent intentions, and some were already incorporating some of the approaches suggested.

Implications for Advisors

At the start of advising, advisors should set expectations for the advising relationship with students, especially international students or those with FGLI backgrounds. Conversations could cover the following: the role of an advisor and types of questions students can ask; background on the liberal arts approach and reasons advisors or faculty may encourage exploration; the student's identity and type of discourse that works best for them (e.g., advisor-led vs. student-led); and other stakeholders involved in the student's decision-making. Regardless of their satisfaction with advising, students across all three groups indicated that clear expectations would have improved the quality and effectiveness of advising. Many of these topics can be covered through an advising syllabus—a tool NACADA recommends that enables advisors to outline institutional expectations and their personal advising approach with students (McKamey, 2007; Trabant, 2006).

Additionally, approaching advising through a dichotomy of developmental versus prescriptivist or exploration versus no exploration does not appear to serve many Chinese diaspora students well. Culturally responsive advising requires modulating advice to meet students at their baseline, which may not always align with institutional (or advisor) expectations. For students like Haley, who felt uncomfortable directing her advising conversation, offering a menu of questions (i.e., From these questions, what do you want to discuss?) allows students to drive the discussion, while still receiving support. In terms of exploration, advisors can similarly modulate the recommended level for each student based on the student's familiarity and comfort with exploration. For example, Chinese diaspora students unfamiliar with exploration could explore with one course that also fulfills a requirement or in a more low-stakes environment (e.g., extracurriculars), which may encourage students to begin the exploration process without feeling overwhelmed or alienated.

Relatedly, advisors should provide more scaffolding around major exploration (e.g., helping students navigate the course handbook, creating a shopping plan, providing students with questions they can ask to understand different majors). As Chinese international student Jennifer noted, advisors should "walk with [students] first to show [them] the way." Many students who had limited experience with academic exploration or were discouraged from such exploration felt as if they were "rudderless" when encouraged to explore.

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Advisors should also consider providing non-academic support (to the extent they are comfortable), recognizing that the format of such support may differ for European American versus Chinese diaspora students. Socioemotional support is especially important to the academic success of international students, students of color, or FGLI students (Museus, 2021). Given the aforementioned finding that de-emphasizing grades was perceived as "advisor talk," advisors should inquire more broadly about students' lives outside of class, which could allow areas for support to surface more authentically.

Implications for Administrators

Although costly, investments in professional advising staff (or well-trained volunteer staff) will likely improve advising's cultural responsiveness. While a diverse staff appears ideal, this study suggests it is even more critical to prioritize advisors' training and motivation when advising these student populations. Advisors should work to gain an understanding of students' cultural backgrounds and how those backgrounds create knowledge gaps or shape students' HEI experiences differently. This level of awareness requires time, training, and motivation, which is easiest to cultivate in professional staff or, alternatively, motivated volunteer staff who have undergone rigorous training on the norms and experiences of their students. Although some faculty, including study participants, may have a strong motivation to advise, the demands of their faculty role do not always allow for the time or training required to advise well. Regardless of the types of advisors currently present at an HEI, administrators can help all advisors improve by integrating resources and workshops on cultural responsiveness into advisors' training. This professional development can either come from within the HEI or from external resources (e.g., NACADA).

Conclusion

The goal of this study was to determine if cultural mismatches exist between advisors and their Chinese diaspora students. This study finds that Chinese diaspora students may experience cultural mismatches in advising and offers suggestions for advisors to improve their practice. The findings and recommendations from this study do not discount an advisor's critical role in supporting students. Rather, they further underscore an advisor's importance. By taking steps toward culturally responsive advising, advisors and HEIs can make meaningful progress toward better student support. Culturally responsive advising does not entail shifting personal or institutional norms to align with the norms of advisees. It does entail providing additional support as needed to help students understand, successfully navigate, and modify the norms of their new institution to support their personal values and goals.

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Authors' Notes

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Appendix

Table A1. Codebook for Student Interviews

Parent Code	Child Code	Definition	Code Type
Academic Decision-Making Process	1. Collaborative 2. Individual	1. Collaborative decision-making is when a student mentions consulting others or being influenced by others. 2. Individual decision-making is when a student discusses making a decision without input or influence from others.	External, descriptive
Exploration		Coded when a student discusses exploration (e.g., engaging in academic or social exploration, discussing exploration with others)	Internal, descriptive
Expectations	1. Of self 2. Of advisors 3. Of other staff 4. Of others	1. Coded when a student discusses the personal expectations (e.g., what "success" means to them) 2. Coded when expectations of advisors are discussed 3. Coded when expectations of broader institutional support are discussed, particularly in terms of support (e.g., from mental health services) 4. Coded when expectations of faculty, peers, or others are discussed	External, categorical, descriptive
Motivation		Coded when a student discusses a motivational force in their decision-making process or underpinning their academic effort	Internal, interpretive
Advising Interaction		Coded when a student discusses any advising interaction (e.g., a meeting, an individual or group email)	External, descriptive
Support	1. Feeling supported 2. Feeling unsupported	1. Coded when a student describes feeling supported (e.g., welcomed, affirmed, getting the information they need) 2. Coded when a student describes feeling unsupported	External, descriptive
Source of Support	1. Family 2. Peer or friend 3. Advisor 4. Faculty (nonadvisor) 5. Other adult	This code should be assigned to the person/people to whom the student attributes their feeling of support. If the student feels supported by a resource not listed within the child codes, code "Source of Support."	External, categorical, descriptive

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Table A1. Codebook for Student Interviews (cont.)

Parent Code	Child Code	Definition	Code Type
Parent		Coded when a student discusses a parent, guardian, or other familial mentor (e.g., grandparent)	External, descriptive
Influence		Coded when a student discusses interactions with authority figures (e.g., parents, advisors, faculty members) who compelled them to think or act in a certain way	Internal, interpretive
Desire for Advising Relationship		Coded when a student implies they either want or do not want a relationship with their assigned advisor (regardless of the current relationship with that advisor)	Internal, interpretive
Desired Changes to Advising		Coded when a student discusses or implies a desired change in advising received	Internal, interpretive
Interaction Type	1. Student-led 2. Advisor-led	Coded when a student discusses either leading the conversation or their advisor leading the conversation. *Please note: This code should be applied within the context of advising meetings only.*	Internal, interpretive
Goal (Goals for . . .)	1. Academic 2. Career 3. Advising 4. Other	1. Coded when a student discusses an academic goal (e.g., taking a challenging course) 2. Coded when a student discusses career goals (e.g., participating in summer research to pursue a medical career) 3. Coded when a student discusses goals for the advising relationship (e.g., to have a support system for all four years) 4. Code here for any goals that do not fit in 1–3 *Please note: For the purpose of this code, it is helpful to include both the goal itself and steps that students took/are taking to reach that goal.*	External, categorical, descriptive
Self-efficacy	1. High self-efficacy 2. Low self-efficacy	Coded when a student discusses a topic (e.g., major, leading advising conversations) that they feel (or do not feel) confident doing.	External, descriptive

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Table A1. Codebook for Student Interviews (cont.)

Parent Code	Child Code	Definition	Code Type
"Advisor Talk"		Coded when a student discusses hearing something from an advisor they perceive an advisor is "mandated" to say because of their role as a support figure. *Example in context: "When [my advisor] told me not to take that seminar because it might be a little bit too much on my work-load and I might not get enough sleep, might be stressful. It kind of sounded like, I'm not sure if it was mandated, but this seems like 'advisor talk,' they have to tell you because they're going to be the only ones to caution you." - Jeremy*	In vivo, interpretive
Immigration		Coded when a student discusses their own or their parent(s') experiences with immigration.	External, interpretive
Culture		Coded when a student discusses their ancestry, ethnicity, or other unifying beliefs/behaviors/ norms that could be construed as culture.	External, interpretive
Mental Health		Coded when a student notes or references mental health struggles (current or past experiences)	Internal, interpretive
Racism or Xenophobia		Coded when a student discusses either experiencing or witness-ing racism or xenophobia (against their own community or other students)	External, descriptive
"The Real World"		Coded when a student discusses a "real world" concern, such as visa status, job preparation, or finances. *Example of this in vivo code for context: ". . . that sort of feeling that I understand a concept and I can use it practically and 'in the real world' is just what moti-vates me to kind of understand something." – Aliya*	In vivo, interpretive

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Table A1. Codebook for Student Interviews (cont.)

Parent Code	Child Code	Definition	Code Type
Socioeconomic Status		Coded when a student discusses anything about socioeconomic status (e.g., their own or others')	External, descriptive
First-generation Status		Coded when a student discusses being a first-generation student *(they do not have to be low income)*	External, descriptive
Enjoyment	1. Discussions about enjoyment 2. Feelings of enjoyment	1. Coded when the student recalls discussing enjoyment with others (e.g., advisors, peers) 2. Coded when the student recalls experience(s) that brought them enjoyment (e.g., certain classes, activities)	Internal, descriptive
Friction		Coded when a student discusses feelings of friction or misunderstanding between themselves and other(s) at their HEI (e.g., advisors, peers).	Internal, descriptive

Note. These codes, along with the advisor codes in Table A2, were inserted into NVivo for coding and analysis.

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Table A2. Codebook for Advisor Interviews

Parent Code	Child Code	Definition	Code Type
Exploration		Coded when an advisor discusses exploration (e.g., encouraging students to explore)	Internal, descriptive
Perceptions of Student Academic Decision-Making	1. Collaborative 2. Individual	1. Collaborative decision-making is when an advisor perceives that the student is/has been consulting others (e.g., themselves, parents, faculty, other students) 2. Individual decision-making is when an advisor perceives a student (or group of students) is making decisions without input orinfluence from others	External, interpretive
Expectations	1. Of self 2. Of students	1. Coded when an advisor discusses perceptions and expectations of their role (e.g., advising "success" definition) 2. Coded when an advisor discusses expectations they have for their advisees (e.g., student "success" definition)	External, categorical, descriptive
Topic of Advising Conversation	1. Academic 2. Extracurricular 3. Career 4. Social/ Emotional	1. Discussions of student academics (e.g., courses, grades) 2. Discussions of extracurricular topics (e.g., clubs) 3. Discussions of career topics (e.g., internships) 4. Discussions of student personal issues (e.g., mental health, fitting in socially)	Internal, categorical, descriptive
Comfort in Engaging with Topic	1. High comfort 2. Low comfort	1. Advisor implies they are comfortable/ knowledgeable engaging certain topics or discussions with students 2. Advisor implies they are not comfortable/ knowledgeable in engagement	Internal, interpretive

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Table A2. Codebook for Advisor Interviews (cont.)

Parent Code	Child Code	Definition	Code Type
Desire for Advising Relationship		Coded when an advisor implies a desire for a close advising relationship with students *Please note: This definition is different from the student version of this code.*	Internal, interpretive
Advising Interaction		Coded when an advisor discusses any advising interaction (e.g., a meeting, an individual or group email)	External, descriptive
Interaction Type	1. Advisor-led 2. Student-led	Coded when an advisor discusses either leading the conversation themselves or that an advisee led the conversation	Internal, interpretive
Support from HEI	1. Feeling supported 2. Feeling unsupported	1. Coded when an advisor describes feeling supported by the HEI or well-prepared for their role 2. Coded when an advisor describes feeling unsupported in their role	External, descriptive
Liberal Arts		Coded when an advisor discusses any element of a liberal arts educational approach (e.g., curriculum, educational ethos, HEI mission)	Internal, descriptive
Influence		Coded when an advisor discusses students' interactions with other influential figures (e.g., themselves, parents, faculty, other staff, students) that compelled students to think or act in a certain way	Internal, interpretive
Goal (Goals for . . .)	1. Their advising 2. Their student	1. Coded when an advisor discusses a goal for their own advising 2. Coded when an advisor discusses their goal(s) for their students (e.g., ensuring students graduate, ensuring students succeed)	External, categorical, descriptive

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Table A2. Codebook for Advisor Interviews (cont.)

Parent Code	Child Code	Definition	Code Type
		Please note: For this code, it is helpful to include both the goal itself and the steps that advisors took/are taking to reach that goal.	
Culture		Coded when an advisor discusses either their own culture (e.g., ancestry, ethnicity, or other unifying beliefs) or the culture(s) of their advisees	External, interpretive
Mental Health		Coded when an advisor discusses student mental health	External, descriptive
Racism or Xenophobia		Coded when an advisor discusses racism/ xenophobia (e.g., students raising the issue, the advisor's thoughts on the issue, the advisor's personal experiences)	External, descriptive
First-generation and/ or low-income		Coded when an advisor discusses anything about first-generation or low-income students	External, descriptive
Enjoyment	1. Discussions about enjoyment 2. Feelings of enjoyment	1. Coded when an advisor recalls discussing enjoyment with others (e.g., students, colleagues) 2. Coded when an advisor recalls experience(s) that brought them enjoyment (e.g., in advising interactions)	Internal, descriptive
Friction		Coded when an advisor discusses feelings of friction or misunderstanding between themselves and other(s) at their HEI (e.g., students, other staff)	Internal, descriptive

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