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Intersecting Identities: Culture, Race and Gender in the Experiences of Chinese and Japanese International Students in Contemporary Italy

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ABTRACT

This study delves into the intricate transformations of cultural, racial, and gender identities among Chinese and Japanese international students in contemporary Italy, against the backdrop of globalization. Employing Social Identity Theory and Intersectionality, this study examines the multifaceted ways these students navigate their identities within a new cultural milieu, underscoring the complex interplay between cultural adaptation, self-formation, and social integration.

Through qualitative analysis, incorporating interviews and personal narratives, the research reveals the dynamic adaptation of cultural identity, marked by challenges such as language barriers, differences in gender norms, and the negotiation of dual cultural identities. It further investigates the nuanced experiences of racial identity amidst encounters with discrimination and stereotypes, highlighting how societal perceptions significantly influence students' sense of belonging and self-identity.

An integral part of this analysis is the application of Intersectionality, which provides a deeper understanding of how cultural, racial, and gender identities intersect, affecting students' experiences and identity formation processes in unique ways.

Recommendations for educational institutions, policymakers, and communities are proposed to create a more inclusive environment that respects and acknowledges the diversity of student identities. These include enhanced language support services, anti-discrimination education, streamlined residency procedures, and initiatives to promote cultural exchange and understanding.

This study contributes to the discourse on international student experiences, offering a nuanced perspective on the interplay of cultural, racial, and gender identities in the context of international education. It highlights the need for supportive, inclusive environments that facilitate the successful adaptation of international students and enrich the cultural dynamics of host countries.

Key words: Cultural identity; Racial identity; Gender identity; International students; Intersectonality

はじめに

この研究は、グローバリゼーションの下、イタリアにおける中国と日本からの国際学生が経験する文化、人種、そしてジェンダーのアイデンティティの複雑な変化に焦点を当てている。社会アイデンティティ理論と交差性理論を駆使し、これらの学生が新しい文化環境において自らのアイデンティティをどのように多角的に航海するか、文化的適応、自己形成、そして社会統合の複雑な相互作用を探求する。

質的分析を通じて、インタビューと個人の物語を取り入れることで、言語の壁、性別規範の違い、そして二重文化アイデンティティの交渉など、文化アイデンティティのダイナミックな適応過程を浮き彫りにします。さらに、差別やステレオタイプとの遭遇を通じた人種アイデンティティの繊細な体験を探り、社会的認識が学生の帰属感と自己アイデンティティに重大な影響を及ぼすことを明らかにする。

交差性理論の応用は、文化的、人種的、そしてジェンダーのアイデンティティがどのように交錯し、学生の経験とアイデンティティ形成プロセスに独自の影響を与えるかについての深い理解を提供する、この分析の重要な部分である。

学生のアイデンティティの多様性を尊重し、認識するより包括的な環境を構築するために、教育機関、政策立案者、そしてコミュニティに向けて提案される推奨事項があります。これには、言語サポートサービスの充実、差別に対する教育の推進、居留許可手続きの簡素化、そして文化交流と理解を促進する取り組みが含まれる。

この研究は、国際教育の文脈における文化的、人種的、そしてジェンダーのアイデンティティの相互作用に関する洞察を提供し、国際学生の成功した適応を促進し、受け入れ国の文化的ダイナミクスを豊かにするための支援が行き届いた包括的な環境の必要性を強

調する。

キーワード: 文化的アイデンティティ; 人種的アイデンティティ; ジェンダー・アイデンティティ; 国際学生; 交差性理論

DEDICATION

To my youth, and all my friends who have left their homes to chase their dreams in a foreign land. A special thanks to all the Chinese and Japanese international students who participated in this study, sharing their voices and allowing me to write their stories.

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“Be grateful.” was the most is the greatest insight I've gained from this thesis writing process.

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During my writing journey, where doubts and pressures were constant, the tender support of my friends and the warmth from my family became my guiding light. Their belief in me was a reminder that I wasn't alone, turning the challenging moments into opportunities for growth. This journey, though filled with obstacles, was made beautiful by their presence. I owe them immense gratitude. Their support and love were the strength I needed to push through. They showed me, beautifully, that with support, no challenge is too big to overcome.

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1. CHAPTER Ⅰ: INTRODUCTION

In the wake of globalization's ever-accelerating pace, the international spotlight has increasingly focused on East Asia, not just for its economic prowess but also for its rich cultural exports that resonate globally. The widespread acclaim of films like "*Everything Everywhere All at Once*" and "*Parasite*" along with television series such as "*Beef,*" underscores the growing attention for East Asian cultural narratives within the global community. This burgeoning interest extends beyond entertainment, fostering a deeper understanding and curiosity about the complexities of East Asian identities and experiences in a multicultural world.

Amidst this backdrop, the experiences of Chinese and Japanese international students in Italy emerge as a compelling focal point for exploring the intersections of culture, race, and gender identity in a globalized educational context. Italy, with its distinct cultural heritage and educational excellence, presents a unique setting for these students, who navigate the intricacies of adapting to a new cultural environment while maintaining connections to their own cultural roots. This dynamic interplay between the local and the global, the familiar and the foreign, offers a rich terrain for investigating how cultural and identity negotiations unfold for international students from East Asia. Please note, the term "international students" in this study refers to individuals of non-Italian nationalities who are presently enrolled in higher education institutions within Italy.

1.1 Background

Four years ago, driven by a thirst for freedom and a yearning for a more promising tomorrow, I made the bold decision to depart China for Italy. Yes, it was an escape. I've struggled to stand out from the intense competition from the *gaokao* (national undergraduate admission exam of China). Instead, I found myself enrolled in an average university, with the looming prospect of an ordinary job awaiting me upon

graduation. If I were to adhere to China's conventional value system, the next step would be to settle down with an average man, get married, and start a family. This predictable future, prescribed by societal norms, felt stifling and suffocating. Please note, that my intention is not to disparage the concept of “ordinary”; rather, in China, the mundane is more of an obligation, a destined path that I felt unable to escape. So, I chose to break away from the norm and embark on a new journey.

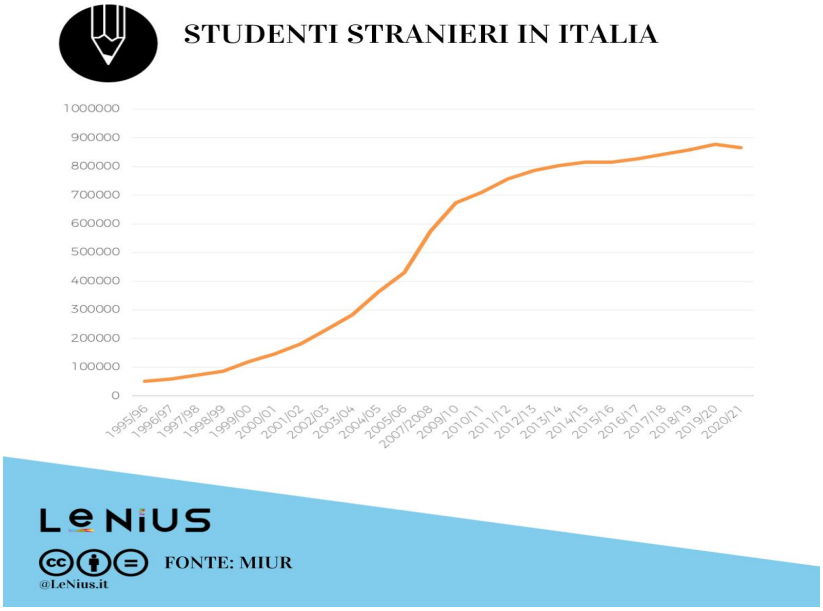
During my university years, having studied Japanese for four years and interned in Japan for three months provided me with an epiphany - a realization that I am constantly evolving, almost as if I were endowed with another personality. It's precisely this change in identity that made me feel out of place in Chinese society.

However, upon arriving in Italy, things took a different turn. I began to develop a more enriched sense of self. Being seen as an outsider in Italian society made my sense of not belonging feel natural, and instead of struggling with my identity, it brought forth many contemplations about who I am. Hence, I wonder, do other Japanese international students, similarly transitioning from one cultural background to another, share the same insights as I do?

1.1.1 Why Choose Italy?

While Italy may not command the same level of global attention as prominent study destinations like the UK, USA, or Australia, its rich historical background, vibrant cultural atmosphere, and culinary excellence attract a specific group of international students. According to the report “*Studenti Stranieri in Italia: Quanti Sono, Da Dove Vengono, Dove Studiano*” (Foreign students in Italy: How many are they, Where are they from, where do they study at) written by Genzone (2022) on the web page called “LeNius“, the number of international students flocking to Italy has seen a significant increase. The following chart shows the trend in the number of international students in Italy.

Figure 1.

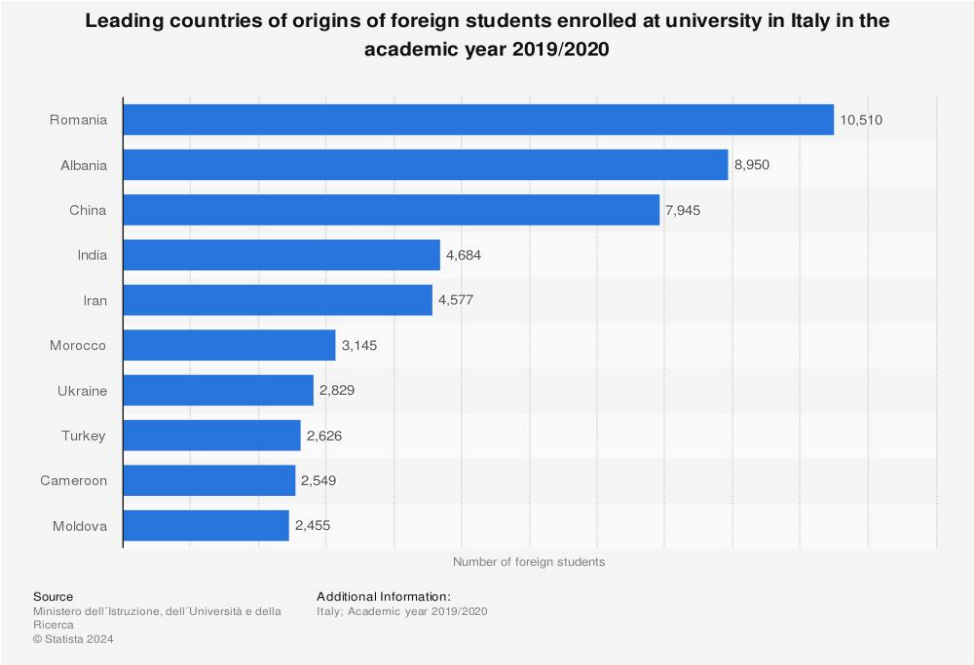


(Source:Minister of Institution of Italy; LeNius, 2022)

We can see that from 1995 to the present, the number of international students in Italy has grown exponentially. However, for the first time since records began, in the 2020/2021 academic year, there was a decrease compared to the previous year: from 877,000 to 865,000. “Despite the drop of 11,000 students, the presence of pupils with non-Italian citizenship remains the same in percentage terms because the total number of students also decreased by nearly 121,000 units (-1.4%). This slowdown could be temporary and linked to the Covid-19 pandemic” (Genzone, 2022).

According to the Minister of Institution of Italy's report “G*li alunni con cittadinanza non Italiana*“(The alumni without Italian citizenship) for the academic year 2019/2020, Italian institutions hosted 54,855 international students, including 7945 Chinese students and 141 Japanese students.

Figure 2.



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We can see that among the countries of origin for international students in Italy, China ranks third in the chart above.

As a Chinese student immersed in the realm of international education, I am deeply curious about the experiences of my peers from similar cultural backgrounds and feel a responsibility to share their stories and experiences. Italy, not predominantly an English-speaking country, poses the formidable challenge of learning a new language for East Asian students. This complexity adds to the tapestry of challenges shaping their study abroad experiences. What, then, are the primary motivations driving students towards Italy?

The decision to choose Italy as a study destination for Chinese and Japanese students can be substantiated through several compelling arguments, reflecting Italy's unique educational, cultural, and economic advantages:

Affordable Educational Costs: Italian public universities offer the significant benefit

of low or no tuition fees for international students. This affordability, compared to the high tuition and living costs in other developed countries, makes Italy an economically viable choice, especially for students from working-class families aspiring to study abroad. The minimal upfront investment required for studying in Italy is a key factor that attracts many international students.

Lower Admission Requirements: Through programs like Marco Polo/Turandot, Chinese students can pre-enroll in Italian universities without demonstrating prior knowledge of the Italian language, followed by a mandatory 10/11-month Italian language course(Marco Polo/Turandot Program, 2019). Additionally, the requirement for Chinese Gaokao (National Entrance Exam) scores is relatively lower for admission in Italian universities compared to other foreign countries. This lower barrier to entry opens up opportunities for students who may not meet the higher score requirements of universities in other countries.

Simplified Visa Application Procedures: These programs facilitate easier access to student visas, simplifying the often complex and daunting process of international study. The streamlined visa application process is a significant advantage for students seeking a hassle-free route to studying abroad.

Diverse Academic Programs: Italian universities offer a wide array of academic programs, especially prestigious in fields related to Arts, Music, Dance, and Design. Being the birthplace of the Renaissance, Italy holds a global preeminence in the arts, drawing numerous Chinese students with aspirations in these fields. The diverse range of programs caters to a broad spectrum of academic interests and career aspirations.

Increased Career Opportunities: As noted by Lan (2019), studying in Italy represents a less conventional path amidst the growing cultural and trade exchanges between China and Italy. This emerging dynamic might offer better career opportunities for graduates, making Italy an attractive destination for forward-thinking students.

In conclusion, the major advantages that study abroad agencies highlight to attract students to Italy include low costs, minimal upfront investment, lower admission requirements, simplified visa procedures, and a diverse range of academic programs,

particularly in prestigious art institutions. Additionally, the potential for enhanced career opportunities due to increasing Sino-Italian interactions adds to Italy's allure as a study destination. These factors collectively contribute to Italy's unique appeal as a destination for Chinese and, probably, Japanese students seeking international education.

1.1.2 Historical Background

Italy and China

According to the Ambassador of Italy in China, since 2004, diplomatic relations between Italy and China have been framed within what is referred to as a "*global strategic partnership*." In other words, the scope of existing collaborations extends beyond the strictly bilateral realm, encompassing political, economic, commercial, and cultural aspects, while also involving discussions on global issues, the EU-China relationship, and multilateral matters. Additionally, 2020 marked the 50th anniversary of bilateral diplomatic relations between Italy and China, and in 2022, the Year of Culture and Tourism was celebrated with a rich schedule of cultural activities, including the prestigious "*Tota Italia*" exhibition from the Scuderie del Quirinale, held at the National Museum of Beijing.

Over the past few years, despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, Italian-Chinese relations have remained steady, with annual governmental meetings and dialogues strengthening institutional interaction and enabling numerous joint initiatives across various sectors.

Italy and Japan

According to the section "Cultural Diplomacy" on the Ambassador of Italy in Tokyo's website, the formal establishment of relations came with the signing of the "*Treaty of Friendship and Commerce*" in 1866, a significant milestone that laid the foundation for future diplomatic and cultural exchanges. The arrival of the first Italian Ambassador in Japan in 1867 symbolized a new era of bilateral engagement, which

was further enhanced by the diplomatic mission led by Tomomi Iwakura in 1873. This mission was crucial in presenting the credentials of the new Imperial government and in studying modern systems of Euro-American countries.

Cultural exchanges continued to flourish, with artists, sculptors, and architects from Italy contributing significantly to the Japanese artistic and architectural landscape. The establishment of the Italian Studies Society in the year 1888, later known as the Japan-Italy Association, was a testament to the growing interest and mutual appreciation of each other's cultures.

The post-World War II period saw both countries experiencing significant economic growth, which further facilitated cultural and educational ties. The establishment of cultural institutes in Tokyo and Rome, scientific exchanges, and the strengthening of economic and commercial bonds were indicative of the deepening relationship.

Today, the legacy of these historical connections is evident in various aspects of cultural and educational exchanges between Italy and Japan.

Understanding this rich historical backdrop is essential in comprehensively grasping the contemporary experiences of Chinese and Japanese international students in Italy, as these ties have laid the groundwork for ongoing cultural and academic collaborations.

1.1.3 Racial Discrimination in Italy

Italy's approach to immigration and its history of racial discrimination are complex and multifaceted, evolving over different historical periods. These phenomena, deeply rooted in the nation's cultural, legislative, and political fabric, have shaped unique forms of discrimination and attitudes toward immigrants (Simoni, 2022). Within this context, international students, categorized as short-term immigrants or new immigrants, are not exempt from these challenges. Their experiences in Italy are significantly influenced by the broader dynamics of immigration policies and societal attitudes toward newcomers.

As they navigate their academic and social lives in Italy, these students encounter various forms of discrimination and biases, reflecting broader issues of integration and acceptance within Italian society. Despite their temporary residency status, the impact of these societal attitudes can profoundly affect their experiences, influencing their sense of belonging, identity formation, and overall well-being in the host country. This underscores the need for a nuanced understanding of how Italy's complex immigration landscape and historical racial discrimination extend their influence to encompass not just long-term immigrants but also the international student population, highlighting the broader implications for policies and practices aimed at fostering a more inclusive and welcoming environment for all immigrants.

According to Simoni, historically, Italy's engagement with racial issues can be seen in its legislative language and practices. The use of the term "*razza*"(race) in constitutional debates, for instance, highlights how racial issues have been handled at the institutional level. This is further exemplified by historical events such as the persecution of Jews and stereotypical portrayals of African and Asian immigrants. These events reflect deep-seated racial prejudices that have been ingrained in Italian society.

The post-World War II era introduced new dynamics to Italy's racial discourse. The myth of 'Italians as good people' (*Italiani brava gente*), which emerged during this period, portrayed Italians as kind and humane, contrasting with the racist policies of Nazi Germany. However, this narrative also obscured Italy's responsibility as a former colonial and fascist nation, leading to oversimplified perceptions of 'others' and a lack of comprehensive policies to address mobility, immigration, and racism effectively.

In recent times, Italy continued to grapple with issues of racism and discrimination, evident in attitudes towards immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa, Muslim women, and the Chinese community. These attitudes manifest in various sectors of daily life, including the media, public discourse, and political rhetoric. The persistence of these phenomena underscores the ongoing struggle with understanding and respecting diversity in Italian society.

The research by Patriarca & Deplano (2018) provides a comprehensive analysis of racial and racist issues in Italy from the 20th century to the present. They discuss the nuances of Italy's approach to racism from multiple perspectives, including constitutional framework, citizenship laws, political discourse, social behavior, culture, media, and historical narrative. For instance, Italy's citizenship law, based on the principle of *ius sanguinis*, poses challenges for second-generation immigrants seeking Italian citizenship. Moreover, right-wing political parties often exploit racial and immigration issues, further entrenching xenophobic sentiments.

However, it is important to acknowledge that the immigrant experience in Italy is not monolithic. Each immigrant group brings its distinctiveness, and Italy's attitudes towards different groups are not uniform. As Phinney (1996) discusses, the perception and response to discrimination vary among individuals, influenced by personal traits such as self-esteem. The experiences of ethnic minorities in Italy are shaped by numerous complex factors, including historical and current societal status, personal experiences of prejudice, and individual responses to perceptions of stereotypes and discrimination.

In summary, Italy's attitude towards immigration and its history of racial discrimination provide a crucial context for understanding the experiences of international students in the country. These historical and contemporary dynamics play a significant role in shaping the social integration and identity formation of Chinese and Japanese international students in Italy.

1.2 Problem Statement

In the context of globalization, Chinese and Japanese international students in Italy encounter a complex web of challenges and opportunities that significantly impact their cultural adaption, social integration, and identity formation.

Existing research, as Koo and Mathies (2022) have noted, often lacks depth in exploring the unique, multidimensional identities of international students, especially within the framework of their diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences. This gap

highlights the need for a more nuanced understanding of international students as individuals with rich, intersecting identities that extend beyond their status as students from their home countries.

This study seeks to address this gap by focusing on the intersectional identities of Chinese and Japanese international students in Italy, exploring how these identities evolve and intersect within both their native and host country environments. The research will be conducted through qualitative methods, utilizing in-depth interviews with thirteen Chinese and Japanese international students in Italy. These students have been carefully selected to represent a diverse range of backgrounds, including two students who were born in Italy but still hold Chinese or Japanese nationality. This diverse sample will provide a rich tapestry of experiences and perspectives, shedding light on the complex dynamics of identity formation among international students.

The primary aim is to explore how culture, race, and gender - as three key factors - shape the social identity experiences of these students. By delving into their personal narratives, the study will examine how they navigate racial and cultural disparities, forming unique identities amidst the challenges and opportunities presented by their transnational experiences. The research will focus on understanding how these students integrate into Italian society, manage cultural differences, and how their multifaceted identities influence their social interactions, academic experiences, and personal growth.

Furthermore, this study will investigate the role of gender in the social experiences of international students, exploring how different genders cope with societal expectations in Italy. Additionally, it will examine the impact of being born in Italy on their identity and sense of belonging, considering the influence of growing up in a multicultural environment.

By concentrating on the individual stories of these eight students, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the intricate ways in which race, nationality, and gender interplay to shape the social identities of international students in Italy. This research intends to offer deep insights into the identity formation of Chinese and Japanese international students, contributing to the broader discourse on

cross-cultural exchange and international education. The findings will also provide practical recommendations for supporting international students in their cultural adaptation and identity development processes.

1.3 Research Question

1. How do cultural, racial, and gender identities transform among Chinese and Japanese international students in a cross-cultural context?

2. How do intersecting identities of culture, race, and gender influence the experiences of Chinese and Japanese international students in Italy, particularly in terms of their cultural adaptation and identity formation?

1.4 Research Objectives and Expected Outcomes

Research Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the identity formation process among Chinese and Japanese international students in Italy. The research aims to explore the multifaceted nature of their identities, focusing on how elements such as race, nationality, and gender intersect and influence their experiences as international students. Specifically, the study will:

- **Examine Cultural Identity and Adaptation**: Investigate how these students navigate the complexities of cultural identity, balancing their heritage with the influences of Italian culture.
- **Analyze Language and Communication Barriers**: Explore the impact of language proficiency and communication challenges on their social integration and identity.
- **Assess Academic and Social Integration**: Assess how academic environments and social interactions in Italy contribute to or hinder their identity formation and sense of belonging.
- **Explore Psychological Well-being**: Understand the psychological challenges faced by these students due to cultural displacement and identity negotiation.

Expected Outcomes

The research is anticipated to yield several key outcomes that will contribute to the broader understanding of international education, cultural integration, and identity formation. These outcomes include:

- **Detailed Insights into Identity Formation**: Providing in-depth insights into the ways Chinese and Japanese international students in Italy construct and negotiate their identities across multiple dimensions.
- **Enhanced Understanding of Cultural Adaptation**: Offering a nuanced understanding of how these students adapt to a new cultural environment while maintaining ties to their cultural roots.
- **Recommendations for Educational and Support Services**: Developing practical recommendations for educational institutions, policymakers, and support services to enhance the experiences and support structures for international students.
- **Contribution to Academic Discourse**: Enriching the academic discourse on international education by highlighting the unique experiences of Chinese and Japanese students in Italy, adding depth to the current understanding of international student challenges and opportunities.
- **Foundations for Future Research**: Establishing a foundation for future research in the field of international education, particularly in studies related to identity formation among diverse student populations.

Through these outcomes, the study aims to not only add to the academic literature but also provide tangible benefits to the stakeholders involved in international education, including students, educators, and policymakers. The ultimate goal is to foster a more inclusive and supportive environment for international students, facilitating their cultural adaptation and identity development.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

The concept of collective identity which arises from recognizing homogeneity in socialization plays a crucial role in shaping students' self-identity. As Licona(2021) notes, collective identity is rooted in belonging to a social group and subjective 'us' factors. While it forms a framework for individuals within a group, it doesn't

overshadow individual experiences and interpretations of reality. Individual identity is influenced by shared elements of collective identity, positioning oneself within 'us' based on similar attributes and differentiating from 'them'. Individuals, as both creators and products of culture, maintain unique personal identities within the wider social identity spectrum, despite sharing collective identity elements. Thus, collective identity shapes individual identity by offering a context for self-perception and societal differentiation.

1.5.1 Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory (SIT), as developed by Henri Tajfel and further expanded by John Turner, offers a vital lens through which to view the identity formation of international students. Originating from social psychology, SIT explores how individuals define themselves through their social group memberships, such as ethnicity, culture, and profession(Hogg, 2016; Tajfel, 1982). This theory is particularly relevant in the context of international education, where students often navigate multiple cultural identities.

In the cross-cultural setting of studying abroad, SIT becomes increasingly significant. For Chinese and Japanese international students in Italy, this theory helps explain the identity conflicts arising from cultural differences. Marginson (2013) and Nada (2013) underscore that international education is not just an academic journey but a process of self-formation, where students actively shape their evolving identities. This aligns with Licona, N.E.A. (2021), who argues that identity is dynamically shaped by individual experiences and societal influences.

When examining the social identity of these international students, it's crucial to consider their unique cultural traditions and social norms. For example, the Confucian emphasis on social harmony, prevalent in Chinese and Japanese cultures, might clash with the more individualistic educational environments in Italy, influencing their identity formation processes (Ai, 2015). These students must navigate a complex interplay between maintaining their cultural identity from their home country and adapting to the new cultural norms of their host environment (Izumi, 2010; Osborne, 2012).

SIT also sheds light on the complexities international students face in multicultural interactions. Hammack (2015) highlights that this process involves not just personal

identity development but also group identity formation. The multicultural context of Italy presents both challenges and opportunities for these students to negotiate and redefine their social identities amidst diverse cultural influences (Ng NWK, Haslam SA, Haslam C, Cruwys T, 2018).

This study will employ SIT to deeply explore how Chinese and Japanese international students in Italy form and develop their social identities in a multicultural environment. By focusing on their experiences, the study aims to uncover how their group affiliations influence their self-esteem and self-worth, and how these affiliations transform in the context of international education. This exploration will provide a deeper understanding of the identity issues faced by these students, contributing to the broader discourse on multicultural identity formation.

Through the lens of Social Identity Theory, this research seeks to provide a nuanced perspective on the identity formation and development of Chinese and Japanese students in diverse cultural contexts. It aims to highlight how these students navigate their belonging and identity within various groups, and how they manage the complex interactions between individual, group, cultural, and societal dynamics.

1.5.2 Intersectionality

Intersectionality, a framework originally conceptualized by Kimberlé Crenshaw, offers profound insights into how overlapping social identities, such as gender, race, class, religion, disability, appearance, height, age, and even marital status, contribute to unique forms of discrimination and oppression. This theory is crucial in understanding the complex nature of inequalities and disadvantages, often invisible in traditional analyses(Runyan, 2018).

A classic example illustrating intersectionality involves the experience of Black women seeking employment in the USA. In a notable case, a Black woman and four others were rejected from a company, so they suspected there was gender and racial discrimination behind it, yet, the company denied the existence of discrimination. The company claimed that they have both Black men and White women employees, which can demonstrate the diversity of their workforce (Crenshaw, 1989). However, the absence of Black women in the company highlighted a unique intersection of racial

and gender discrimination that neither group faced separately. This case demonstrates how intersectionality reveals unique disadvantages arising from the combination of multiple oppressed identities.

The concept of intersectionality serves as a metaphor to understand various forms of inequality or disadvantage, which often compound and create barriers (Crenshaw, 1989) that traditional thinking cannot comprehend. It is used to explore numerous inequality phenomena, effectively explaining many contemporary issues. For instance, when a person possesses more than one marginalized identity, they may face inequality not just based on their gender but due to a unique system of disadvantages formed by the overlap of multiple oppressed identities.

Critiques highlighting the good conditions of women, exemplified by citing successful women, often overlook other critical aspects such as social class and educational background. Intersectional analysis reveals the inadequacy of such conclusions, as they fail to consider whether these women possess multiple marginalized identities and whether women with similar backgrounds have equal rights and resources.

In this logic, inequality is not merely a gender or class issue but a problem formed by the combination of various circumstances and identities. Intersectionality helps in discussing and understanding inequality and how it arises. The combination of various marginalized identities poses unique challenges. Now, many fields use intersectional analysis to assess public needs, extending beyond gender issues(Collins, 2015).

In the context of Chinese and Japanese international students in Italy, applying intersectionality enables a comprehensive understanding of their experiences. It helps to dissect how their layered identities - nationality, gender, socio-economic status, and more - interplay to shape their unique experiences in a foreign educational setting (Harper, 2011). By embracing this multifaceted approach, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the diverse challenges and needs of these international students, guiding more effective and inclusive educational policies and practices.

While Social Identity Theory offers insights into the navigation of national and cultural identities, intersectionality complements this perspective by illuminating the

multifaceted nature of identity. It posits that the interplay of different identity dimensions can amplify or mitigate the challenges faced by international students. For example, the experiences of a Chinese international student may significantly vary based on their gender, socio-economic background, or academic status, adding layers of complexity to their social identity (Ai, 2015).

Employing an intersectional approach requires a thoughtful and nuanced method of data collection and analysis. It is essential to acknowledge the diverse identities of Chinese and Japanese students and understand how these identities intersect and influence their experiences. Qualitative methods, particularly in-depth interviews, are apt for unraveling the intricate narratives that emerge from these intersections (Atewologun, 2018).

Intersectionality teaches us that Chinese and Japanese students do not experience their host culture in a monolithic manner. The background of each student significantly shapes their coping mechanisms and adaptation strategies. Gender norms from their home countries, for instance, might influence their engagement with Italian culture, impacting their adaptation and identity formation (Martin, 2014; A.Le, B.Lacost, Wismer, 2016).

Understanding the intersectional identities of Chinese and Japanese international students can provide valuable insights for educational institutions and policymakers. By recognizing the multifaceted nature of students' identities, more tailored and inclusive support systems can be developed. Future research should continue exploring these intersections, possibly expanding to include other nationalities or contexts, to build a more comprehensive understanding of international student experiences.

2. CHAPTER II : LITERATURE REVIEW

This review aims to synthesize current research on the challenges faced by international students, including cultural adaptation, identity transformation, gender bias, and racial stereotypes. By examining the ways in which these students navigate their identities across cultural boundaries, this paper seeks to provide insights into their complex experiences in global educational settings. The focus will be on

understanding the multifaceted process of cultural integration and the additional layers of complexity introduced by issues of gender and race.

The objective is to highlight the critical need for policymakers and academic institutions to recognize and address the diverse challenges international students encounter. Through this analysis, the paper intends to contribute to the creation of more inclusive and supportive educational environments that facilitate the success and well-being of international students worldwide.

2.1 Identity Construction and Transnationalism

Identity construction plays a central role in the experiences of international students. Their identity is influenced not only by personal experiences but also by the era and social environment in which they live. Phinney (2000) emphasized that identity is a dynamic, multi-layered process involving personal, social, and historical dimensions. This process is particularly complex for international students as they must find a balance between their native culture and the host country's culture. This is not just cultural adaptation but a deeper exploration and reshaping of self.

In a multicultural environment like Italy, the identity construction of Chinese and Japanese students is significantly influenced by theories of transnationalism. Transnationalism highlights individuals' cross-border lifestyles in the context of globalization, involving identity construction and social participation in multiple cultures (Clavin, 2005). For Chinese and Japanese international students, this means maintaining their cultural characteristics while integrating into and adapting to Italian culture and social structures. Ghosh & Wang (2003) and Poteet & Gomez (2015) suggest that the construction of a transnational identity is a process involving multiple cultures and social structures. International students must adapt to new lifestyles and educational systems in new cultural environments while balancing connections with their native culture.

Furthermore, the study of Rabaglietti (2012) offers in-depth insights into the personal identity of Italian adolescents and emerging adults. This research reveals the impact of a delayed transition to adulthood on identity exploration and formation, particularly affecting immigrant adolescents, school dropouts, youths from impoverished areas, and emerging adults who are unemployed or engaged in unstable employment. This is particularly relevant for understanding the similar challenges that

international students from China and Japan may face in the process of identity construction in Italy.

These studies underscore the need to consider the interactions among various factors such as learning stages, academic choices, and gender when researching the identity construction of international students. These factors interact within different cultural and social contexts, collectively influencing the identity formation and development of international students.

This process of identity transformation is not linear but a continuous and interactive process. The experiences of Chinese and Japanese students abroad reveal the complexity of identity construction in a cross-cultural background. They not only face challenges in language and cultural adaptation but also learn to appreciate and integrate into Italian culture and social customs while maintaining their cultural characteristics. This process resonates with Raffaetà's (2016) and Pedone's (2011) discussions on the importance of maintaining ethnic identity and transnational affiliations, reflecting the multi-dimensionality and dynamic nature of identity construction in a transnational context.

Despite the discussions surrounding identity construction and transnationalism offering important perspectives for understanding the complex identities of international students, there remains room for critique and reflection. Firstly, current literature predominantly focuses on individual-level identity exploration, potentially overlooking the broader societal and political structures' impact on individual identity construction. For instance, the systemic barriers and societal biases international students encounter in their host countries often do not receive sufficient consideration concerning their influence on identity construction.

What's more, discussions about transnationalism tend to emphasize cultural differences and conflicts while falling short in exploring cultural interactions and integration. This may result in an oversimplified understanding of the process of international students adapting to and integrating into a new culture. For Chinese and Japanese students, the topic of how they creatively blend Italian culture while maintaining their own cultural characteristics is worth in-depth exploration.

Additionally, research on transnational identity often adopts static cultural viewpoints, failing to fully capture the fluidity and diversity of cultures and identities. This perspective may limit our understanding of the diversity and fluidity of international student identities.

Therefore, future research should place greater emphasis on exploring how societal and political structures affect the identity construction of international students, as well as the role of cultural interactions and integration in this process. Additionally, it is important to incorporate more dynamic and diverse cultural perspectives into the study of transnational identities.

2.2 Cultural Adaptation: Challenges and Opportunities

Cultural adaptation is a key aspect of the international student experience, especially for Chinese and Japanese students in Italy. This process often begins with the initial novelty of culture shock, followed by challenges and eventual adaptation. As illustrated in Ai's (2015) study, cultural shock experiences an initial phase of novelty, followed by challenges, and finally adaptation. The emotional fluctuations in this process are crucial for understanding individual responses to culture shock.

Lai Yan Vivyan (2017) points out that culture shock often prompts international students to rethink and reconstruct their identities. Ghosh & Wang (2003) further emphasize that culture shock is not just a challenge but an opportunity for identity exploration and reconstruction. In new cultural environments, Chinese and Japanese international students must confront and resolve conflicts between their native culture and the host country's culture, prompting deep reflection and reconstruction of their identity.

Moreover, the social networks of international students in new cultural environments are crucial to their cultural identity. Poteet & Gomez (2015) state that establishing cross-cultural friendships helps them better integrate into local environments. However, Chinese and Japanese students in Italy often struggle between being part of familiar cultures and being the "other" in international communities. Jibreel (2015) mentions the challenge of cultural identity for international students in a foreign land. They need to find a sense of belonging in new social environments while maintaining their identification with their native culture.

In the process of cultural adaptation, Chinese and Japanese students not only have to cope with changes in language and lifestyle but also find ways to adapt to new educational systems in new cultural environments, profoundly impacting their cultural identities. As shown in Le, Lacost, and Wismer's (2016) study, the learning experiences of international female graduate students in the United States not only

affect their academic development but also promote the transformation of their identity and the formation of a sense of belonging.

The research of Heng (2019) provides us with more detailed insights into the cultural adaptation experiences of international students. Chinese international students' experiences in American universities vary based on factors such as their duration of study, field of study, and gender. First-year students primarily face challenges in English written expression and classroom participation, which tend to diminish gradually over time. Second-year students, on the other hand, become more focused on future internships and job opportunities, demonstrating a heightened awareness of career prospects. Different academic disciplines influence students' social and academic experiences, with business students more likely to establish close connections with local American classmates. Gender also plays a role in social experiences, with female students tending to participate in campus organizations, while male students expand their social circles more through sports activities.

These research findings underscore the importance of considering the interaction of various factors such as stage of study, choice of major, and gender when studying the cultural adaptation of international students. These discoveries offer us a richer understanding of the diversity and complexity of international students' experiences in different cultural environments.

Although the aforementioned studies have provided profound insights into understanding the cultural adaptation of international students, there are several key limitations and areas for further consideration. Firstly, most research has focused on the individual experiences of students, possibly neglecting a comprehensive exploration of the broader societal and institutional influences on students' cultural adaptation. For instance, factors such as the socio-cultural atmosphere of the host country, educational policies, and immigration laws may play pivotal roles in the process of international students' adaptation, but these elements are often overlooked in existing studies.

Secondly, existing literature in the discourse of cultural adaptation often emphasizes challenges and difficulties, while giving less attention to how students leverage their own resources and strengths to overcome these challenges. For instance, international students may proactively address cultural adaptation challenges by developing new social networks, engaging in campus activities, or cultivating specific skills. Such proactive adaptation strategies and coping mechanisms are frequently

underemphasized in existing literature.

Furthermore, although research has identified the influence of factors such as learning stages, academic disciplines, and gender on cultural adaptation, the interactions and interrelationships between these factors still warrant further investigation. For example, how learning stages and academic choices jointly affect the construction of international students' social networks and career planning, and how these factors intertwine with gender to influence students' sense of identity and self-esteem remain areas in need of further exploration.

Thus, future research should delve deeper into the multiple factors at play in the process of cultural adaptation and how these factors interact within different social and educational contexts. Additionally, there should be a greater emphasis on how international students effectively utilize personal and societal resources to actively address the challenges of cultural adaptation, as well as how to better support this process within the realms of educational and societal policies.

2.3 Gender Bias and Stereotypes

Exploring gender bias and stereotypes is essential for understanding the multidimensional identity of international students, particularly for Chinese and Japanese female students in Italy. The differing understandings of gender roles and the existence of social biases in various cultural environments further complicate the identity formation process of international students.

Cultural background has a profound impact on the perception of gender roles. In different cultures, the differences in gender roles and expectations can lead to specific challenges and biases faced by women (Wong, 2007). International female students may redefine their gender roles and reassess their expectations of these roles while adapting to new cultures (Soong, 2017). In Le, Lacost, and Wismer (2016), the experiences of international female graduate students in American universities revealed how gender identity affects their cultural adaptation process. These women, while pursuing educational and career goals, also face challenges from gender role expectations in both their native and host cultures. Martin (2014) delved into how Chinese female students shape themselves through international education. Studying abroad is seen not only as a path to education but also as an opportunity for female students to escape traditional gender roles and family pressures.

Although research on gender bias and stereotypes provides important perspectives for understanding the experiences of female international students, these studies often focus too much on negative impacts, overlooking how these students actively confront and transform these challenges. Additionally, the discussion on the diversity and complexity of gender roles in different cultural contexts is relatively limited. Future research should more deeply explore how female international students reconstruct their gender identity in a multicultural environment.

2.4 Racial Discrimination and Stereotypes

Ethnic minorities often have lower social status and power, related to the discrimination and prejudice they experience. This status not only limits their opportunities in society but can also affect their self-identity and self-esteem. For example, negative stereotypes may limit others' views of ethnic minority members and make the members themselves more likely to believe or act according to these stereotypes, possibly leading to underperformance in situations like job interviews (Phinney, 1996). Thus, stereotypes and prejudices also influence the identity construction process of international students, a minority group with diverse cultural backgrounds. Yeo, Mendenhall, Harwood & Huntt (2019) explored the experiences of Asian American students mistaken for Asian international students, providing insights into potential racial micro-aggressions faced by international students. The study found that both American students and Asian international students suffer from apparent racial discrimination and micro-aggressions, including discrimination against their English accents, appearance, intelligence, etc. Wong (2007) thoroughly explored the prejudices and stereotypes faced by Japanese female students in predominantly white university environments. These stereotypes are not limited to race but also include expectations of gender roles. The study shows that racial and cultural stereotypes not only affect their social interactions but also influence their views and the development of their own identities. Gender and race are important factors affecting identity construction. The study also shows how biases are interwoven at multiple levels, affecting students' daily lives and mental health. In the face of stereotypes and discrimination, international students need to find their comfortable place in new environments and deal with the societal expectations and challenges related to gender and race.

While existing literature explores stereotypes and racial discrimination, it often neglects the broader social and cultural context in which these biases are formed. Moreover, the research lacks a focus on how international students maintain their cultural characteristics and identity in the face of these challenges. Future research should more deeply investigate the strategies and mechanisms international students use to cope with racial discrimination and stereotypes, and how educational institutions and societies can take steps to mitigate these impacts.

2.5 Conclusion

This literature review investigates the experiences of international students, with a focus on their challenges and experiences in identity construction, cultural adaptation, gender bias, and racial stereotypes within cross-cultural contexts. The process of identity construction is crucial for these students, requiring them to navigate between their cultural heritage and the culture of their host countries. This involves a dynamic and multilayered approach to understanding how students maintain their cultural identity while integrating into new cultural settings, highlighting the importance of transnationalism in their lives. Transnationalism emphasizes the need for balancing between different cultures, underscoring the complex nature of identity formation that involves personal, social, and historical dimensions.

The journey of cultural adaptation for international students spans from the initial shock of encountering a new culture to finding ways to adapt and integrate. This process presents both challenges and opportunities for identity exploration and reconstruction. Students often grapple with conflicts between their cultural backgrounds and the cultures of their host countries, impacting their sense of self and cultural identity significantly. Establishing social networks is crucial to their adaptation process, but the struggle between remaining connected to familiar cultures and being perceived as “other” in a new environment poses significant challenges.

Gender bias and stereotypes play a significant role in affecting the experiences of international students, impacting their multidimensional identities. The perception of gender roles varies across different cultural backgrounds, leading to specific challenges and biases, particularly for female students. Although studies on gender bias offer insights into the experiences of international students, they often focus on the negative impacts, overlooking the ways in which students actively confront and

transform these challenges.

Racial stereotypes and discrimination are also critical issues affecting the identity construction of international students. Experiences of racial discrimination, including biases against language, appearance, and intelligence, not only affect students' social interactions but also influence their identity development and self-esteem.

Despite the valuable insights provided by existing research, there is a notable lack of exploration regarding the experiences of domestic students, limiting a comprehensive understanding of the cultural adaptation process. Future research should broaden its scope to include the impact of social and institutional factors on students' cultural adaptation, delve more deeply into the effects of gender bias and racial stereotypes, and consider the experiences of domestic students to provide a more holistic view of the challenges and opportunities faced by international students in cross-cultural contexts.

3. CHAPTER Ⅲ: RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Methodology

The integration of Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Intersectionality in this research offers a comprehensive approach to exploring the experiences of Chinese and Japanese international students in Italy. These theoretical frameworks provide a dual lens to examine not only the group affiliations and cultural identities of these students but also the multifaceted nature of their personal experiences shaped by overlapping identities.

This study utilizes a qualitative research approach, focusing on in-depth interviews with Chinese and Japanese international students in Italy. The methodology is aligned with Social Identity Theory and Intersectionality, aiming to explore the diverse experiences of identity formation among these students.

3.1.1 In-Depth Interviews

Interviews are categorized into face-to-face interviews and online interviews. Except

for the one conducted with Sun, which was done online, all 12 interviews were conducted face-to-face. The online interview was carried out through Zoom, with the entire process being recorded on video. For the face-to-face interviews, times were scheduled in advance. Given that two of the interviewees currently reside in Milan, I chose to personally travel to Milan for better communication. The remaining ten interviewees live in Venice. The length of the interviews exceeded half an hour, with the specific duration depending on the interviewee's interest in the topic. The face-to-face interviews were recorded in their entirety, and the recordings were later transcribed into text using the application Quark for subsequent analysis.

Participant Details:

A table organizes the participants by nationality, gender, age, background, and duration of stay as follows:

Participant	Nationality	Gender	Age	Background	Duration of Stay in Italy
Rio	Japanese	Male	21	Exchange student, high school in Australia; Major in English (Bachelor)	3 months
Sena	Japanese	Male	21	Exchange student; Major in International Relation (Bachelor)	3 months
Shyu	Japanese	Male	20	Exchange student; Major in English (Bachelor)	3 months
Moe	Japanese	Female	20	Exchange student; Major in International Relation (Bachelor)	5 months
Ami	Japanese	Female	20	Exchange student; Major in Politic (Bachelor)	5 months
Wei	Chinese	Male	25	Bachelor degree student; Major in Urban planning	6 years
Sun	Chinese	Male	27	Master degree student; Major in Art of Decoration (Master)	4 years
Bella	Chinese	Female	27	Major in Philosophy (Master)	4 years

Anna	Chinese	Female	22	Major in Art Management (Bachelor)	3 years
Kang	Chinese	Female	25	Major in Digital Media (Bachelor)	6 years
Ice	Chinese	Female	27	High school in Germany,; Major in Architecture in Italian University (Bachelor)	4 years
Serena	Chinese	Female	25	Born in Italy; Major in Economic (Master)	20 years
Mei	Japanese	Female	22	Immigrated following mother's remarriage; Major in Stage Art design (Bachelor)	14 years

These participants offer a range of perspectives, from short-term cultural adaptation to long-term integration experiences. Please note, that the duration of stay in Italy was calculated up to the date of the interview proceed.

Profile

Rio a freshman majoring in English from a university in Yokohama, Japan, spent four years of high school in Australia. Motivated by the desire to experience a non-English-speaking country, Rio believed that diverse international experiences at the crucial age of 21 would significantly benefit his personal development.

Sena a 20-year-old student from Tokyo, is studying English at Waseda University. He aims to enrich his overseas experience in Italy to enhance his Japanese skills and secure a job in a foreign company in Japan after graduation.

Shyu opted for Italy due to a more pragmatic reason. Although he studies English, he did not meet the minimum language requirements for universities in English-speaking countries, leading him to choose Italy, located in Europe.

Moe's mother is Japanese, and her father is Bangladeshi. Initially, she considered choosing a university in Hawaii or Paris. However, after considering various factors, including her future living environment, she realized that she wanted to live in a place

with abundant culinary delights. Consequently, she chose Italy as her destination, as it is renowned for its rich and diverse cuisine.

Ami's choice of Italy wasn't based on academic reasons. Her parents had spent their honeymoon in Italy, and they told her it was a beautiful place where the locals were friendly, and the food was delicious. Therefore, when choosing a destination for her exchange program, she chose Italy.

Wei mentioned that her purpose in coming to Italy was to fulfill a vow for his grandfather. His grandfather is a Catholic priest registered in the Vatican. During the Cultural Revolution in China, to ensure his survival, he made the decision to marry and have children, leading to the birth of Wei's mother. After the Cultural Revolution ended and the situation stabilized, Wei's grandfather returned to the church. As a result, Wei has only met his grandfather twice since his birth. However, her grandfather has always cared for him from afar and expressed his desire for him to visit the Vatican. Due to his unsatisfactory performance in the college entrance examination (*gaokao*), which prevented him from entering prestigious universities in China, Wei chose to come to Italy, a country deeply connected to Catholicism, after graduating from high school.

Sun due to his enduring passion for art, Sun has planned to continue his graduate studies in Italy since his undergraduate years. He learned about the vibrant artistic atmosphere in Italy, with Florence being the birthplace of the Renaissance. The Florence Academy of Fine Arts, being recognized as the world's top art academy, became his dream destination for further studies. Three years ago, he successfully enrolled and is now preparing to graduate in July 2024.

Bella is from China, pursued her dream of studying abroad after completing her undergraduate degree. She chose Italy for its tuition-free public universities. Initially applying to schools in the UK, the high tuition fees and one-year program duration, coupled with the need to return to China if she didn't find a job, led her to opt for another European country. She believed that studying in Italy would allow her to learn a new language and broaden her future opportunities.

Anna feeling out of place in Chinese society due to her sexual orientation, sought a more inclusive environment. Interested in arts and humanities, she considered art-rich France and Italy as her top choices, eventually being admitted to an Italian university.

Ice has always dreamt of studying abroad, attending an international school from a young age. Her love for a German band led her to Germany for high school, followed by studying architecture at a German university. Finding the architectural education in Germany too rigid, she considered changing countries. With various countries on her list and due to family circumstances limiting her ability to afford high tuition fees, she chose Italy, weighing the benefits of learning a new language and having more options for the future.

Kang hailing from the southwestern region of China, stumbled upon an opportunity during her high school years as an art student when she casually participated in the selection process organized by an Italian art academy professor recruiting students in China. The selection process involved both written and oral examinations. Despite being unsuccessful in the oral interview, Kang initially planned to pursue higher education in China before studying abroad. However, her mother insisted on her going abroad as soon as possible, contrary to Kang's objections. As a result, she reluctantly embarked on her studies in Italy against her own wishes.

Serena, was born in Italy to Chinese parents. To preserve her Chinese heritage and language skills, her parents sent her to China for kindergarten before returning to Italy for primary school. Since then, she has lived in Italy and is now studying an economics-related major at a university in Milan. Initially majoring in Japanese, Serena switched to a program offering a "part-time" option due to health reasons.

Mei, was born in a rural area of Japan and moved to Italy at the age of seven due to her mother's remarriage. She has a younger brother from the same parents and a younger half-sister from her mother's subsequent relationship. Currently, Mei is studying at a well-known art school in Milan that offers accommodation and scholarships.

Language Proficiency

Rio, Sena, Shyu, Moe, and Ami are native Japanese speakers who came to Italy through a one-year exchange study program. None of them had any Italian language skills upon arrival. Furthermore, their admission requirements did not include Italian language proficiency, so they arrived in Italy without knowing a single word of Italian. At first, they assumed that being a Western country, everyone in Italy would speak English, and since they were all English majors, they did not anticipate significant communication issues.

Bella, Anna, Ice, Kang, Wei, and Sun are native Chinese speakers. Unlike the Japanese students, Bella, Ice, Kang, Wei, and Sun came to Italy through the Marco Polo or Turandot programs, initiated by the Chinese and Italian governments to strengthen mutual communication and cooperation. These programs have mandatory Italian language requirements for Chinese students. They had the option of either arriving in Italy and studying the language at a local language school for ten months to obtain at least a B1 level certificate before applying to an Italian university or, as international students, showing at least a B1 level certificate when applying for a visa to directly enroll in an Italian university. Anna, as an international student, chose a program taught in English, so like the three Japanese students, she did not need to have an Italian language certificate.

Serena and Mei grew up in Italy and are native Italian speakers. Serena rated her Chinese language skills at about the level of a Chinese junior high student, while Mei rated her Japanese at the level of a Japanese elementary school student. Serena mentioned that there are many Chinese language schools in the Chinese community in Italy. Although many Chinese parents send their children to learn Chinese there, her parents did not require this of her. She spent her kindergarten years in China but did not learn formal Chinese grammar during that period. Her Chinese skills were mostly acquired through conversations with her parents at home. She went back to China to learn Chinese during her summer break of junior high school years, but as her classmates were elementary students and her Chinese was much more advanced, she did not learn much during that period. Mei moved to Italy with her mother during her elementary school years and entered an Italian primary school. Since there were no other Japanese-speaking students around, her Japanese was only used when communicating with her mother, so her proficiency remains similar to that of her early years.

3.1.2 Interview Structure and Data Collection

As previously outlined, semi-structured interviews were conducted both face-to-face and online, allowing for in-depth exploration while providing the specific areas of interest as they emerged. The interviews focused on their experiences of cultural adaptation, identity formation, and the influence of their unique cultural backgrounds and current environments.

It is important to emphasize that the interviews were recorded. After the interviews, transcription software (Quark) was used to transcribe the recordings into text, in order to facilitate later research analysis.

3.2 Interview Questions

The interview questions are broadly divided into three parts: cultural adaptation, identity formation, and intersectional experiences. Here are some sample questions for each category:

Cultural Adaptation

- What were your expectations when you first came to Italy? Did your initial experiences match these expectations?
- What cultural differences have you encountered in your daily life? Have these differences posed any challenges for you?
- How has your experience in Italy influenced your plans and expectations for the future?

Identity Formation

- Do you feel that living in Italy has affected your personal identity? If so, how did this change occur?
- How do you integrate Italian culture while maintaining your original cultural identity?

Intersectional Experiences

- How do you view the intersection of your gender, racial, and cultural

background in the new environment?

- Have you experienced any gender, racial, or cultural discrimination or stereotypes in Italy? How have these experiences affected you?

Additionally, specific questions were asked regarding the sexual minority status of Chinese Students Anna and Kang:

- Has your sexual orientation influenced your experiences in different cultural environments? How have you dealt with challenges related to your sexual orientation?

3.3 Ethical and Language Barrier Considerations

The study adhered to ethical standards, with informed consent obtained from all participants. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured, respecting the sensitive nature of personal experiences shared during the interviews.

As for the language barrier, the interviews were conducted in the language that the interviewees preferred. The interviewer is a native speaker of Chinese and passed the Japanese-Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) N2 level in 2017. Since then, the interviewer has continued studying Japanese. Therefore, conducting interviews in Chinese and Japanese did not present significant barriers.

3.4 Limitations and Mitigation Strategies

The sample size and diversity, while providing rich qualitative data, may limit the generalizability of the findings. To address this, future research could include a larger and more varied group of participants.

The unique backgrounds of the participants (e.g., a student born in Italy but raised up until primary school in China) offer specific insights but may not represent the broader population of Chinese and Japanese students in Italy. This limitation can be mitigated by including more participants with varied experiences in subsequent studies.

In conclusion, the methodology, with its focus on in-depth interviews of a small, diverse group of Chinese and Japanese students in Italy, offers valuable insights into the dynamic and multifaceted nature of identity among international students,

enriching our understanding of cultural adaption and intersectional identity in a globalized world.

4. CHAPTER Ⅳ: FINDINGS

PART ONE

4.1 Culture

4.1.1 Cultural Background

The cultural backgrounds of international students significantly shape their perceptions, values, and behaviors, underscoring the profound impact of their native cultures on their identities. Through interviews, students shared insights into how their upbringing and cultural heritage inform their sense of self and worldview.

Rio, born and raised in Japan until his mid-teens before studying abroad in Australia, encapsulates the enduring influence of his Japanese heritage. Despite spending formative years abroad, Rio asserts,

> Well, since my parents are Japanese, I was born and identified as Japanese. I lived in Japan until I was 15, so I believe that the fundamental part of me is Japanese. However, after moving to Australia and living there from the age of 15 to 19, I'm not entirely sure about myself, my friends sometimes say that they can feel a bit of Australian in me. But in my own view, I am completely Japanese.
>
> (Rio, Interview, 2023, Venice)

This statement highlights the deep-rooted connection to his cultural origins, further emphasized by his admiration for Japanese respectfulness, a value instilled from childhood.

Moe, with a Bengali father but raised in Japan, identifies strongly with Japanese culture, attributing her principles of “don’t bother others”(他人に迷惑をかけない) to her Japanese upbringing. This principle has become a guiding ethos in her life, showcasing the integration of cultural values into personal identity.

Sena and Am’s narratives reinforce this theme, with both expressing an intrinsic connection to Japanese culture, shaped by their lifelong experiences within Japan. Ami’s reflection on the introverted nature of Japanese and her personal challenges in

expressing emotions illustrate how cultural norms influence individual behavior and self-perception.

The appreciation for Japanese culture among these students is profound. Rio praises the extraordinary service and respectfulness characteristic of Japanese society, while Shyu recognizes Japan's safety and community kindness, idealizing it as a place for living and raising a family.

From the perspective of Chinese students, Wei identifies closely with Han culture, reflecting the dominant cultural influence of the Han ethnic group in China. Kang's deep influence by Confucianism highlights how traditional philosophies continue to shape ethical and social conduct, emphasizing etiquette and decency.

Anna expresses a nuanced relationship with Chinese culture, admiring its historical richness in cuisine, clothing, and architecture but finding a disconnect with contemporary societal norms. Yet, she acknowledges that ancient Chinese philosophy remains a part of her.

Bella's life philosophy, inspired by Taoism, reflects her regional heritage and the Taoist principle of effortless action, emphasizing acceptance and adaptability. Ice's experience in Germany introduced her to a culture of precision, influencing her academic and professional aspirations, while her Chinese background profoundly impacted her familial values, prioritizing maternal advice.

Wei discussed the value systems of Chinese and Italian youth, stating:

> One aspect I appreciate about Italians is that they don't let external factors become internal pressures. In contrast to China, there's less comparison and more enjoyment among them. Among the many classmates I've encountered, this shared sentiment fosters a closeness. Materially, they have a relaxed vibe. For instance, if I find something expensive, I can straightforwardly express that I might not afford it, and they would say, "We can't afford it either." With them, I can freely discuss my financial situation, the inadequacy of my material conditions, and my aspirations for certain things, including expressing my desire for something while acknowledging my inability to afford it. However, in China, I might pretend otherwise, claiming that I'm not interested in something unaffordable by "it's not worth my money."
>
> (Wei, Interview, 2024, Venice)

Wei's observations highlight a distinct appreciation for the Italian ethos, which prioritizes enjoyment and personal well-being over external pressures and material competition, a notable departure from the more comparison-driven and materialistic tendencies observed in China. This cultural divergence fosters a sense of closeness

and mutual understanding among peers, as Wei notes the ease with which he can discuss financial limitations and desires openly, an interaction that contrasts sharply with his experiences in China where material possessions often dictate social standing and self-worth.

Serena also touched upon the value systems among Chinese in Italy, remarking, “Chinese people put too much value on money, which I am not supporting at all.” She observed that most Chinese-owned bars have slot machines, and many customers become addicted, neglecting work to spend their earnings on these machines. “Despite knowing the harm, these Chinese bar owners still choose to place such devices in their establishments for profit, which I find incomprehensible.”

The answers from Wei and Serena on the value systems of Chinese and Italian youth offer insights into the cultural adaptation and identity formation of Chinese students in Italy. Wei appreciates the Italian approach to life, which emphasizes enjoyment over material comparison, contrasting with the competitive and materialistic culture prevalent in China. This interaction with Italian peers encourages Chinese students to reassess their values, promoting a shift towards more liberating societal norms and impacting their identity formation process.

Serena’s critique of the emphasis on monetary gain among Chinese in Italy, especially the operation of slot machines in Chinese-owned bars, highlights the challenges of navigating cultural values within the host society. This tension between economic motivations and ethical considerations reflects the broader struggle for cultural integration, influencing Chinese students’ perceptions and prompting reflections on their values and identity in the Italian context.

These narratives collectively reveal how cultural background forms a foundational aspect of students' identities, influencing their perspectives, values, and interactions. The enduring impact of native cultures is evident across diverse domains, from interpersonal conduct and societal engagement to professional aspirations and personal principles, illustrating the complex tapestry of cultural identity among international students.

4.1.2 Identity Reaffirmation and Negotiation

International students in Italy, such as Shyu, Bella, Sun, and Kang, experience a

profound reaffirmation and negotiation of their cultural identities through the lens of cross-cultural interaction.

Shyu mentioned that after arriving in Italy, he felt a deeper connection to Japanese culture. This feeling came not only from his personal experiences but also from feedback from Italians who are passionate about Japanese culture.

> People who study Japanese here seem to love Japan more than I do. They think Japan is cool and want to live and study there. Seeing this really surprised me.
>
> (Shyu, Interview, 2023, Venice)

Shyu's deeper connection to Japanese culture, fueled by the enthusiasm Italians show towards Japan, exemplifies how exposure to foreign admiration can strengthen one's identification with their native culture. This phenomenon is not unique to Shyu; both Bella and Sun have encountered similar experiences, leading to a reinforced sense of cultural identity and a heightened responsibility to accurately represent their cultures abroad.

Similar to Shyu, before coming to Italy, this identification was not as strong. However, after coming to Italy and comparing it with other cultures, as well as feeling the gap between himself and Italian culture, he became more determined in his identification with Chinese culture.

Bella also held the same view and mentioned the sense of responsibility brought about by her cultural identity. After coming to Italy, she strengthened her identification with Chinese culture. She said that before coming to Italy, she did not understand many things about China. However, because her friends were interested in Chinese culture, she started to explore and understand many things she didn't know before. This not only enhanced her understanding of Chinese culture but also made her feel a stronger sense of responsibility to represent Chinese culture.

Sun also felt a sense of responsibility. As he claimed, being a Chinese person in Italy, he will definitely bring Chinese culture to Italy, so he considers himself a carrier of Chinese culture. He said:

> Italian people can see the image of China from us, so it is our responsibility to show Chinese culture to Italy.
>
> (Sun, Interview, 2023, Online)

Bella's journey of cultural discovery, initiated by her friends' interest in Chinese

culture, highlights the role of intercultural curiosity in enhancing one's understanding and appreciation of their heritage. This newfound knowledge not only deepens Bella's connection to Chinese culture but also instills in her a sense of duty to serve as a cultural ambassador in Italy. Similarly, Sun embraces the responsibility of showcasing Chinese culture, viewing himself as a conduit through which Italians can gain insights into China.

The process of identity reaffirmation is also accompanied by negotiation between the inherent culture and the newly encountered Italian culture. Kang's experience illustrates this dynamic. Kang mentioned that although she discovered many differences between what she originally identified with and what she newly discovered after coming to Italy, and realized the limitations of her old thoughts, she now feels about 80% identification with Confucian culture, with the remaining 20% in constant struggle and integration with new thoughts. However, overall, she still considers herself a very traditional Chinese person.

Despite recognizing differences and confronting the limitations of previously held beliefs, Kang maintains a substantial identification with her traditional Chinese roots, reflecting an ongoing integration of new ideas into her cultural identity.

These narratives underscore a dual process among international students: the reinforcement of cultural identity through comparison and admiration from others, and the internal negotiation that occurs when faced with divergent cultural values. This complex interplay between reaffirmation and negotiation reveals the adaptive nature of cultural identity, which is continually shaped by external influences and personal reflections in a multicultural context.

4.1.3 Food Culture

In the realm of cultural identity, food culture emerges as a poignant reflection of the internal landscape of individuals navigating between international students' native and adopted cultures. Serena and Mei, who have spent considerable time immersed in Italian culture, still find authentic expressions of their Chinese and Japanese heritage through culinary traditions.

For Serena, the food culture of China is what she feels most connected to. She mentioned,

> I really like spicy food, like stir-fried eggplant. But the Italian way of cooking is very different from the Chinese method. Every time I crave Chinese food, I feel a part of me is definitely Chinese.
>
> (Serena, Interview, 2023, Milan)

This sentiment underscores how food preferences and practices are deeply intertwined with cultural identity, serving as a tangible link to her heritage.

Moreover, Serena's preference for chopsticks over forks and knives not only highlights a practical aspect of cultural habituation but also signifies a deeper cultural allegiance. She found eating certain foods, especially fried chicken, "It is challenging to eat them with a fork and knife." She thinks that chopsticks are a great invention:

> Forks and knives are so impractical, that I think chopsticks are more flexible to use. However, they (referring to Italians) think they have the best way to do things.
>
> (Serena, Interview, 2023, Milan)

Contrasting her comfort with chopsticks against the Italian preference further illustrates the nuances of cultural identity expressed through everyday choices.

Mei"s experience with food culture echoes this theme of cultural connectivity and identity. Her reminiscence of eating *udon* in her childhood and her mother's daily preparation of rice anchor her identity to her Japanese origins. Despite integrating Italian foods like pizza and sandwiches into her meals, Mei notes, "I only feel like I have had a proper meal when I eat rice," signifying the profound impact of food on her sense of belonging and self.

The narratives of short-term international students like Bella and Anna introduce an additional layer to the discussion of food culture and cultural identity. Bella's adaptation to Italian dietary preferences and her subsequent estrangement from the oil-heavy cooking of her Chinese hometown reflect a transformative process where food habits influence and are influenced by cultural integration. "Oh, I have indeed become partly Italian," Bella reflects upon realizing her shifted dining preferences, illustrating how cultural identity can evolve through the lens of food culture.

These stories collectively highlight the dynamic interplay between food culture and

cultural identity among individuals living at the intersection of multiple cultures. Food acts as a medium through which cultural heritage is remembered, practiced, and sometimes redefined. The enduring attachment to certain foods and culinary practices from one's culture of origin, alongside the gradual incorporation of elements from the adopted culture, reveals the multifaceted nature of cultural identity. Through their culinary experiences, Serena, Mei, Bella, and Anna navigate the complexities of belonging, heritage, and self-perception, offering valuable insights into the role of food culture in shaping and expressing their evolving identities in a multicultural context.

4.1.4 Culture Shock

Safety Issues: Sena experienced an unfortunate incident within three months of arriving in Italy. One evening, around 10 PM, while walking home from the train station which was crowded and chaotic all the time, a group of people approached him and snatched his phone. Being slender and outnumbered by a larger group, Sena couldn't fight against it. He reported the theft to the Carabinieri, but his phone was still missing till the day we had the interview. He noted that the crime rate in Italy was unexpected. Compared to life in Japan, he realized the need to be more careful in Italy.

He reflected,

> I really felt the poor safety situation here, which was a shock. In Japan, it's common to take a walk alone even at 1 or 2 AM, or to go to a convenience store, which is open 24 hours. Even in central areas like Tokyo, it's safe to hang out late at night with friends, and neither I nor my friends ever experienced any dangerous incidents. But here, the situation is completely different, and it's surprising. I also heard that the increase in crime rates across Europe might be influenced by the acceptance of immigrants, which I think is a major difference between European and Japanese societies.
>
> (Sena, Interview, 2023, Venice)

Shyu also mentioned that in Italy, most stores close around 8 PM, which, compared to the brightly lit and bustling night scene in Japan, makes the streets feel desolate and unsafe. Sena's experience has made them cautious, they now prefer not to go out late and to stay in groups when they do.

Mei, living in Milan, faced similar issues. Once, while standing near a subway door using her phone, someone snatched it just as the doors were closing, leaving her helpless and speechless. Another time, her phone was stolen from a table while she was dining out, " I will never lose the third phone, Let's see ." she said.

Women's Safety: Serena discussed the issue of women's safety,

> I'm sure you're unfortunately familiar with the term 'catcalling'. In some suburban areas where I used to live, it's not rare for a girl alone in the dark to be catcalled, making me feel immediately unsafe. No one catcalls when I'm with a male, which infuriates me as it seems like they have more respect for men, and I'm considered merely an object of that man rather than an individual.
>
> (Serena, Interview, 2023, Milan)

Bella also expressed her fear of going out alone late at night, which has led her to miss many gatherings.

> One time, around 2 or 3 AM, I was walking home from a friend's party and felt like someone was following me, but I wasn't sure. I hurried and called my roommate to meet me downstairs. Fortunately, she was awake and came down just as a man quickly approached me from behind and started talking. I couldn't understand him; he wasn't speaking Italian and didn't seem trustworthy. My heart was in my throat. Luckily, my roommate arrived just in time, and the man walked away when he saw her.
>
> (Bella, Interview, 2023, Venice)

Immigration Issues: Sena noted, "In areas with a high number of African immigrants, it's a scene you don't see in Japan, and it was quite shocking."

Shyu was particularly surprised to see African immigrants openly selling drugs on the streets, which was an eye-opening experience for him.

Drug Issues: Speaking of the thing that shocked Moe the most, she said that Marijuana is no wonder the first thing she can come up with. Since Marijuana is illegal in Japan, she never imagined it could be this popular in Italy. The fact that most of her classmates smoke it makes her astonished. However, she claimed she wouldn't judge if people smoke it, but she won't touch it at all.

Hygiene Issues: Sena was shocked by the hygiene standards in Italy. He expected a developed Western country like Italy to be clean but was surprised to find streets

filled with garbage.

Mei, despite living in Italy for many years, still finds the necessity of adapting to Italian hygiene habits. In Japan, people usually blow their noses discreetly as they think the snot is dirty, whereas in Italy, people tend to do it loudly and even put the tissue which was used to clean the snot in their pockets, which she finds embarrassing.

Convenience of Life: Rio pointed out that one of the biggest adjustments in Italy was the absence of 24-hour convenience stores. In Japan, it's easy to find food at any hour, but in Italy, most stores close by 8 PM, it's hard to find late-night meals.

Transportation: Rio also mentioned issues with public transportation, such as the lack of timely buses and unclear bus stop indications. Sena echoed this sentiment, noting that public transportation in Japan is always on schedule, unlike in Italy.

Ice commented on the high cost of transportation in Italy compared to China, where a taxi ride for ten kilometers costs only a few euros, whereas in Italy, even a one-kilometer ride can cost the same.

Work Efficiency: Sena was puzzled by the inefficiency of Italian public institutions like post offices, as they often not answer phones, and he wondered if they were really that busy.

Ice also noted that even public service officials did often chat or take coffee breaks during work. At first, she found it unbelievable, but over time, she adapted and even began to appreciate this laid-back attitude, now she thinks it's interesting to take things slower.

Service Attitude: Sena had to adapt to the Italian service attitude, which is less polite and attentive compared to Japan. He observed that in Japan, customer service is very courteous, with lots of greetings and consideration for the customer. In Italy, however, the approach is more casual and minimalistic, which he thinks is an interesting system.

Rio and Shyu also noticed similar differences in service attitudes.

The phenomenon of culture shock, experienced by international students when adapting to a new cultural environment, encompasses a broad spectrum of challenges

that significantly influence their adaptation process. These challenges range from heightened concerns for personal safety due to incidents such as theft and harassment, to the necessity of adjusting daily routines in response to different operational hours of stores and services. Such safety concerns contrast sharply with the safer environments of their home countries, leading to increased vigilance and altered behavioral patterns. This shift not only restricts their social activities but also necessitates a reconfiguration of daily activities, including meal planning and shopping habits, due to the absence of 24-hour convenience stores and the early closure of shops.

Moreover, navigating the host country's public transportation system, which often suffers from irregular schedules and unclear fare structures, further impacts students' mobility and access to amenities. Adapting to the host country's social norms and service attitudes also requires students to re-calibrate their expectations and social strategies. The casual or minimalistic approach to customer service, significantly differing from the courteous and attentive standards they are accustomed to, necessitates an adjustment period where students learn to appreciate new social dynamics and service culture as part of their cultural adaptation process.

Additionally, encounters with differing hygiene practices and societal norms around drug use prompt reflections on personal habits and value systems. This aspect of culture shock compels students to navigate the balance between maintaining their cultural identity and integrating into the host society. The psychological impact of culture shock is profound, encompassing feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and a sense of dislocation. Establishing a new sense of belonging and identity in the host culture is a pivotal challenge, requiring the development of coping mechanisms, seeking social support, and engaging with the host culture to foster personal growth and understanding.

In conclusion, the adaptation process for international students is a complex and dynamic journey marked by a series of adjustments to new cultural norms, safety considerations, and social practices. Successful adaptation involves not only navigating these challenges but also embracing the opportunities for personal development they present. Educational institutions and social service providers play a critical role in supporting international students through this transition by offering guidance, resources, and support to facilitate their cultural adaptation and enhance their overall experience abroad. This comprehensive approach to understanding and

addressing the multifaceted impacts of culture shock is crucial for a successful transition and integration into the host culture.

4.1.5 Religious Beliefs

Serena discussed the difference in religious beliefs. Born in Italy to Chinese parents with no religious affiliation, she never adopted any religion herself, which she felt set her apart from Italians. She recalled feeling out of place in kindergarten during the prayer procedure before class, she couldn't understand the prayers or where the other classmates learned them. This lack of religious knowledge made her feel disconnected from Italian society and meanwhile highlighted the cultural differences.

Ice also encountered curiosity about her religious beliefs when interacting with foreign classmates. Having no prior exposure to religion in China, she was surprised to find religion a significant part of Italian and other cultures. She often faced surprise from others when she said she had no religious beliefs, which makes her wonder why people have to believe in something, she jokingly said, "I will say that I have faith in the Communist Party next time."

Serena and Ice's narratives offer a nuanced perspective on how religious beliefs, or their absence, can profoundly influence cultural identity and the sense of belonging in a new cultural setting. Their experiences reflect the challenges and reflections triggered by the intersection of cultural and religious identities, emphasizing the multifaceted nature of cultural integration in a globalized world. Through their stories, we gain insight into the subtle yet significant ways in which religious beliefs can demarcate cultural differences and shape individual experiences of identity and community.

Wei's perspective adds a compelling layer of complexity. As someone who identifies as Catholic, with deep familial ties to the Catholic Church, Wei navigates the interplay between his religious and national identities with thoughtful consideration. He stated that his national identity always takes precedence over his religious identity. He cited the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as an example, noting that although it involves aspects of both Judaism and Islam if the Chinese government were to support Palestine, he would unhesitatingly choose to support Palestine, which represents Islam, even if his own religious affiliation were Jewish.

4.1.6 Language Barrier

Language barriers significantly impact the cultural adaptation and identity formation of Chinese and Japanese international students in Italy, manifesting in daily life, social interactions, and self-perception.

a. Daily life

Upon arriving in Italy, Rio, Sena, and Shyu immediately encountered the challenge of language barriers. Their first task, scheduling an appointment at the post office for their residency permit, proved difficult as the staff spoke limited English, complicating mutual understanding. This language barrier extended to daily life activities, such as shopping, where product labels in Italian were indecipherable, making even the use of translation apps insufficient for understanding item specifics. Despite these hurdles, there was a noticeable reluctance to learn Italian among them. This decision was mirrored by other Japanese students in the study, including Moe, who faced communication issues at the police station after her phone was stolen, and Ami, who, despite showing interest, found the process of learning Italian daunting.

The Japanese students, all participating in a one-year exchange program, expressed various reasons for their reluctance to learn Italian. Shyu prioritized improving his English, viewing himself as incapable of learning another language, while Sena cited his heavy coursework as a barrier to language acquisition. Conversely, Rio showed interest in learning Italian but was unsure where to begin. This varied response to learning Italian highlights a strategic preservation of their original social identities as Japanese students abroad, prioritizing existing linguistic skills over the adoption of a new cultural identity.

This tendency not to learn Italian, despite the evident daily challenges posed by language barriers, suggests a complex interplay between maintaining their original cultural identities and adapting to their host society. The students' strong identification with their national group and the temporary nature of their stay appeared to significantly influence their adaptation strategies. This strategic choice, emphasizing immediate academic and personal priorities, reveals a nuanced process of identity negotiation and highlights the role of language in cultural adaptation and identity formation. The students' experiences underscore the pivotal role language

plays not just in daily survival but also in the broader context of integrating into the host culture and forming a multicultural identity.

The initial challenge of language barriers faced by Rio, Sena, Shyu, Moe, and Ami upon their arrival in Italy underscores the complex interplay between daily survival and broader identity formation processes among Japanese exchange students. Their encounters with administrative hurdles, daily inconveniences, and the decision against learning Italian, despite clear challenges, are insightfully framed within the Social Identity Theory. This perspective suggests that their strong identification with their national group and the temporary nature of their stay significantly influence their adaptation strategies, favoring the preservation of their existing social identities over the acquisition of a new linguistic and cultural identity. This strategic choice, driven by a focus on immediate academic and personal priorities, not only shapes their daily experiences but also plays a pivotal role in their cultural adaptation and identity construction in Italy. By navigating these challenges, the students engage in a dynamic process of identity negotiation, balancing between maintaining their original cultural identities and integrating into their host society. The reluctance to learn Italian, therefore, is not merely a practical decision but a reflection of deeper processes of social identity maintenance and adaptation in a multicultural context.

b. Social interaction

In exploring the social interactions of international students in Italy, it's evident that despite a general consensus that the lack of Italian proficiency did not significantly hinder their ability to form friendships, this finding subtly highlights the impact of language skills on social choices

When asked if their lack of Italian hindered their social interactions, Rio, Sena, and Shyu responded that it did not pose a significant barrier. This was because most residents in their student accommodation were international students with a certain level of English proficiency, which facilitated communication and friendship building. Shyu, in particular, mentioned that he was pleasantly surprised to find many Italian students interested in him and Japanese culture, often approaching him for conversations and questions. Their student residence, resembling a community with facilities like a communal kitchen, dining area, and gym, provided ample opportunities for international students to socialize.

Moreover, the residence also serves as accommodation for external guests and has

a reception with English-speaking staff, creating a multicultural, English-dominated environment where language barriers are almost invisible.

However, even in such a multicultural and English-dominated environment, a clear tendency emerged among Japanese students to primarily socialize with peers sharing similar linguistic or cultural backgrounds. This preference not only mitigated feelings of isolation but also somewhat restricted their integration into the wider Italian or international communities. For instance, despite opportunities for interaction with students from around the globe, Rio, Sena, and Shyu still preferred spending time with other Japanese students, reflecting a natural inclination to seek familiarity and comfort in a foreign cultural setting.

Both Moe and Ami don't think the language barrier stops them from socializing. They think that Italian students are always welcoming and happy to help, especially those who are studying Japanese. So besides Japanese fellow students, they can also make friends with local students.

Similarly, Bella and Anna find it more natural to socialize with other Chinese students. Bella initially wanted to step out of the Chinese circle and make international friends. She shared a house with an Israeli man because she thought it would be fine as they only had to share the kitchen and bathroom. However, differences in living habits, hygiene practices, and dietary preferences led to many conflicts. She has asked for help from her Italian landlord, but she was told that she needed to resolve these issues herself, this made her feel isolated and helpless. Eventually, she chose to move out and live with other Chinese students, because she found it much easier to resolve conflicts due to the lack of a language barrier and cultural differences.

Sun and Ice both claimed that they don't have a preference for people who they want to socialize with. Sun said at school, he mostly socializes with other Italian students and professors, other than that he basically only hangs out with his roommates, among both Italian and Chinese. Sun and Ice demonstrated flexibility in their social preferences, showing no particular bias towards socializing with people of any specific cultural background, indicating individual differences among international students in their socialization strategies.

These observations reveal that despite facing language barriers, international students are still able to forge friendships within the diverse student community. However, their tendencies in social choices, especially the preference to interact with students of similar cultural backgrounds, may impact their process of cultural adaptation and the expansion of their social networks in Italy. These findings lay the groundwork for subsequent discussions on how these social strategies affect students' cultural adaptation and identity formation.

c. Self-perception

In the self-perception domain, language emerges as a pivotal element influencing international students' academic engagement, professional opportunities, and self-esteem.

All Chinese students except Anna know Italian, and though they all admit they still have problems communicating with professors, they can handle most of the problems that happen in life. Some of them are currently having part-time jobs, such as teaching Chinese at Chinese language schools or being salespersons in shopping malls. These kinds of working experience may influence them when they consider their future career path. Since the Chinese community is huge in Italy, knowing both Chinese and Italian can be a big advantage for them. Bella is considering looking for a job at a Chinese company after graduation.

However, for students who cannot speak Italian, it is hard for them to work. Anna found a job at a bar owned by Chinese, but, as she cannot speak Italian, most of the time she can only wash cups and dishes, which makes her doubt her value of herself. Thus, the employment barriers faced by students lacking local language skills are affecting their self-worth.

The academic and professional realms presented further complexities. Limited Italian proficiency constrained students' engagement in class discussions. Anna mentioned that since her program was taught in English, group discussions were initially conducted in English but it wouldn't last long. Although her major was taught in English, the majority of her classmates were Italian, with almost half the class

being native Italian speakers. Therefore, discussions naturally shifted back to Italian when they became intense.

> I understand that it's easiest to express oneself in one's mother tongue, and I know they mean no harm, so in such situations, I choose to remain silent. It's not that I don't want to join the discussion, but I feel guilty asking them to switch back to English.
>
> (Anna, Interview, 2023, Venice)

Ami is attending Italian language courses at school but she said students from other countries are learning too fast, which makes her hard to catch up during class. Plus she feels shy to ask teacher questions, so she said it is way more difficult than she has expected and she has not been making any progress now.

Bella also faced language barriers. Even though she had studied Italian in China, she found both daily life and academic study in Italy challenging. Like the Japanese exchange students, language was a significant barrier in administrative processes. At school, during group discussions in class, she finds it hard to participate.

Sun mentioned that although his Italian proficiency has reached the B2 level, he still struggles to fully understand the content taught by professors during classes, especially when it involves specialized vocabulary and extensive historical materials. He often feels his vocabulary is insufficient, and he frequently encounters difficulty expressing himself when communicating with professors. Language barriers prevent him from fully expressing himself, and for students who are studying art, expressing their ideas is of vital importance.

Ice, Kang, and Wei also expressed the objective existence of language barriers in their academic studies, which hinder their academic progress. Kang and Wei are currently in their third year of being "*fuori corso*" (delayed graduation). Wei mentioned that though language is a huge obstacle, students' motivation and efforts were put for study are more important. However, not knowing when they can manage to graduate sometimes leads to self-doubt.

Language proficiency also influenced self-identity and esteem, with students experiencing varying degrees of insecurity and motivation regarding their language skills. Challenges in communication led to self-doubt and social reticence.

For Shyu, the obstacles of language have not entirely disappeared. While the

pressure on the Italian language has decreased, the pressure on English has increased. Despite majoring in English, he claimed his English proficiency was below that of a native speaker. Shyu noted that, in Japan, he considered his English to be quite good, but in Italy, he started to doubt his proficiency, he often struggles to keep up with the pace and content of conversations he has with other international students. To avoid being seen as foolish or interrupting others' conversations, he often pretended to understand and kept his responses short and simple. He humorously remarked,

> I came here to improve my English, but now it seems my English has gotten worse.
>
> (Shyu, Interview, 2023, Venice)

Bella initially found speaking Italian very difficult, she often met with puzzled expressions from others. Unsure if she was making mistakes or had incorrect pronunciation, she doubted her Italian proficiency, with each attempt increasing her fear of speaking. However, at the same time, this also motivated her to improve her Italian. Eventually, her Italian reached a level sufficient for everyday communication, but she found it inadequate for academic purposes as she is often unable to understand lectures, she resorted to recording them for later review after class but still found many aspects difficult to understand.

Ice also shared an interesting psychological insight. Having just returned to Italy from China, she found it difficult to adapt to everyone's understanding of her language.

> In Italy, when I'm with friends, we freely make comments in Chinese, knowing others won't understand. But back in China, everyone understands what I'm saying, and I feel a lack of freedom. Sometimes, knowing a foreign language can be a significant advantage.
>
> (Ice, Interview, 2023, Venice)

However, in regards to speaking Chinese in Italy, Serena mentioned that it is because Chinese always talk to each other in Chinese that makes Italians confused. For example, when an Italian customer goes to a Chinese store to get the nails polished, Chinese workers there would sometimes chat with each other in Chinese. When they chat and laugh, the Italian customer might think they are judging or

mocking her/him. Thus, this kind of situation may create misunderstandings between each party and lead to boundaries. Ice provides a unique perspective on the psychological benefits of speaking a foreign language, contrasting the freedom of expression in Italy with the transparency of communication in China. Yet, Serena's observation about Chinese speakers in Italy highlights potential misunderstandings arising from language use, affecting cross-cultural interactions.

4.1.7 Gender Norms

In exploring the dimensions of cultural identity, the insights from Moe and Ami regarding the divergent expressions of femininity and self-presentation among Japanese and Italian women enrich our understanding of how cultural norms shape gender identities.

Moe articulates a prevalent expectation in Japan for women to adhere to strict beauty standards, encapsulated in the imperative, "You have to be beautiful. You have to wear makeup." This reflects a broader societal pressure that values conformity and aesthetic appeal in women's self-presentation. In contrast, Italian women are perceived as embodying a more empowered and individualistic approach to gender expression. Moe admires Italian women for their confidence in self-expression and acceptance of their sexuality, highlighting a cultural landscape that encourages authenticity and boldness.

Ami expands on this theme by discussing the differences in clothing choices between Japanese and Italian university students. She observes a tendency among Japanese students to dress uniformly, following trends to fit a collective standard of cuteness while often avoiding overly flashy attire. This uniformity contrasts sharply with the individualistic fashion sense observed in Italy, where personal style, innovative hairstyles, and unique accessories are celebrated. Ami notes, "Everyone truly expresses their individuality through clothing...And their makeup is very cute," emphasizing the cultural value placed on personal expression and individuality in Italy.

These reflections offer a window into the complex ways cultural identity influences gender norms and expectations, particularly regarding appearance and self-expression. The comparison between Japanese and Italian contexts illustrates the significant impact of cultural background on shaping individuals' approaches to gender identity, highlighting a spectrum of attitudes from conformity to individualism. Through the lens of Moe and Ami's experiences, we gain insight into the dynamic interplay between culture and gender, underscoring the variability of cultural norms and their influence on personal identity and social expression within different societies.

4.1.8 Double Identity

Navigating the complexities of double identity, individuals like Serena, a second-generation immigrant, experience the intricate dance between embracing one culture at home and another in the outside world. This duality often leads to moments of confusion regarding one's cultural identity. Serena's own words capture this sentiment,

> When I'm with Italian friends, they know I am both Chinese and Italian, so they don't question me, especially while I was studying in Venice. I think Venice is welcoming, and maybe because my friends were from the same major, studying foreign languages and culture, we are more open-minded and don't judge others. They don't question me, so I feel safe. In Milan, sometimes people ask me dumb questions, like about Japanese cultures, which I am not part of. So I'm like 'What the hell?' and they don't even realize it could be hurtful. In these cases, I feel more Chinese, as if Italian people are attacking me. At home, I feel more Italian, mostly because I think in Italian, and feel like an outsider when my mother and sister talk in Chinese. Since I'm the only one who speaks Italian at home, I'm always seen as 'the Italian' by them.
>
> (Serena, Interview, 2023, Milan)

Serena's journey from grappling with her dual identity to viewing herself as a mosaic - each piece a testament to her diverse cultural heritage - illustrates the evolution of cultural identity. This evolution is not always spontaneous; it can emerge from moments of reflection, often triggered by external perceptions or misunderstandings. Serena's experience of feeling more Chinese when faced with insensitive inquiries in Milan, versus feeling more Italian at home, underscores how social environments and interactions play pivotal roles in shaping one's sense of self.

Similarly, Mei shares her struggle with her dual identity, especially when engaging

with Japanese media. She expresses a connection to her Japanese roots while recognizing differences in thought processes,

> I realize I understand and I'm capable of speaking Japanese, and I also look like Japanese. But when it comes to some ways of thinking between Japanese and me, I feel myself different from Japanese and more like an Italian.
>
> (Mei, Interview, 2023, Milan)

Yet, her initial resistance to embracing her Japanese identity highlights the impact of societal fear on self-perception,

> I didn't want to be associated with Japan... I was afraid of that difference, scared of being treated differently or isolated from them.
>
> (Mei, Interview, 2023, Milan)

Both Serena and Mei's stories reflect the dynamic and often challenging process of identity formation for individuals navigating multiple cultural landscapes. Their narratives reveal that identifying with one's cultural heritage is a journey marked by external influences, self-reflection, and the search for belonging. Through their experiences, we gain insights into the fluid nature of cultural identity, which, while influenced by upbringing and social context, ultimately evolves as individuals reconcile their diverse backgrounds to form a coherent sense of self.

Just as Serena and Mei grapple with their cultural and national identities, Moe's journey adds a unique dimension to the exploration of double identity. Unlike Serena, who navigates the Chinese-Italian dichotomy, or Mei, who reconciles her Japanese heritage with Italian influences, Moe's awareness of her Bangladeshi roots was awakened not by internal conflict but through the curiosity and surprise of others in Italy.

Moe recounts,

> It wasn't until I arrived in Italy that I deeply became aware of my Bangladeshi heritage. When foreign classmates asked where I was from, they were often surprised to learn that I was from Japan because my facial features appeared different from what they expected of Japanese people.
>
> (Moe, Interview, 2023, Venice)

This external questioning prompted Moe to reflect on her own identity, highlighting how societal perceptions and interactions can act as catalysts for self-discovery and

the recognition of a multifaceted cultural identity.

Moe's narrative illustrates how external environments and social encounters in a new cultural setting can challenge and deepen individuals' understanding of their own identities. In Italy, a country markedly different from Japan in both societal expectations and cultural norms, Moe confronts and embraces the complexity of her identity, acknowledging her Bangladeshi heritage as an integral part of her self-concept alongside her Japanese upbringing.

4.2 Racial Identity

In the racial identity section of the findings, the experiences of Japanese and Chinese students in Italy offer insights into the multifaceted nature of racial discrimination and social integration. These narratives reveal a spectrum of encounters, from subtle linguistic exclusions to overt racial stereotyping, each impacting the students' sense of belonging and identity.

4.2.1 Racial Discrimination

Regarding racial issues, Rio recalled an incident on a tram where a group of middle school students muttered something at him and his friend. Not understanding Italian, he couldn't be sure of what they said, but their facial expressions and body gestures made him feel it was negative, possibly even heard the word "*chingchong.*" He commented,

> People who discriminate based on race are poorly educated. University students wouldn't do that. It's sad but, in a way, I feel sorry for them. They discriminate due to a lack of knowledge.
>
> (Rio, Interview, 2023, Venice)

Rio's encounter exemplifies the casual racism that can occur in public spaces. His inability to fully understand the derogatory term "*chingchong*" due to the language barrier does not diminish the negative impact of the encounter. Rio's reflection that such discrimination stems from ignorance and poor education underscores a broader societal issue where stereotypes and lack of knowledge fuel racial biases.

Sena was shocked to hear other clients talking about "*Hiroshima and Nagasaki*"

after he walked into a bar in Venice, even couldn't understand what exactly they said, he found it hard to believe such people still exist. He said, "It's sad that there's still a lack of understanding about Asians." Sena's shock at hearing references to Hiroshima and Nagasaki in a derogatory context highlights the persistence of historical prejudices and the shock of encountering such attitudes in modern settings.

Moe mentioned that she often hears people shouting "*cinese cinese* (Chinese) *nihao* ('hello' in Chinese)" towards her. Moe's encounter with people mockingly greeting her with "*cinese cinese nihao*" highlights the trivialization of her cultural identity, reducing it to stereotypes associated with her racial background. This form of racial insensitivity, though seemingly benign, underscores a lack of respect for cultural diversity and individual dignity.

Anna revealed that she indeed encountered an incident of racial discrimination. The incident occurred at a discounted shoe store on Venice Island, where the shoes were priced lower than the official retail value. She had been eyeing a pair of shoes but hesitated to buy them. After having tried them on several times without making a purchase, eventually, she brought a Chinese friend who can speak Italian along to get a second opinion. Upon entering the store, she overheard someone, possibly a staff member or the owner, uttering the word "*cinese*". Later, when her friend expressed her dislike for the shoes and was about to leave, the person who had referred to them as Chinese approached and said something to them. Anna noted that at that moment, she observed her friend becoming visibly upset and responding furiously to the person. After leaving the store, Anna asked about what had happened, and at first, her friend hesitated to share, perhaps out of concern for Anna's feelings. However, upon Anna's insistence, her friend explained that upon entering the store, the person had said, "Oh, it's that Chinese person again," and after seeing them only trying on shoes without purchasing, he said, "If you can't afford it, don't bother trying. You've tried three times already. Such cheap items." Towards this, Anna initially expressed that it was okay, but she admitted that the incident had deeply wounded her sense of self-esteem.

Serena, who studied related courses in university, elaborated on racism:

> I think racism here is still very high. It can stem from ignorance about your culture.

> For example, people ask me about sushi or kimono, which are Japanese, not Chinese. Racism sometimes comes with ignorance. There is also legal discrimination. Foreigners face more bureaucracy, and they're more likely to be stopped by police for random checks, suspecting they might be involved in illegal activities. This shows Italians, at least the police officers, tend to see foreigners as more likely to be criminals.
>
> (Serena, Interview, 2023, Milan)

Her academic perspective reinforces the prevalence of racism, attributing it to ignorance about other cultures and legal discrimination, such as heightened bureaucracy and police scrutiny faced by foreigners. This systemic aspect of racism points to a deeper societal challenge in recognizing and respecting cultural diversity.

Mei, living in Italy for over a decade, immediately thought of linguistic discrimination. She claimed that Italians often assume foreigners don't speak Italian well, so they are not willing to communicate with foreign-looking persons. She recalled a hospital visit with her mother, where the doctor was impatient until Mei started speaking Italian, he changed his attitude instantly. She compared this with Japan, where people are always outwardly polite regardless of their inner thoughts. Mei's experience of linguistic discrimination in a healthcare setting, where the attitude of a doctor changes upon realizing she speaks Italian, illustrates the prejudices that can affect even the most basic interactions.

This was coupled with Ice's frustration during the COVID-19 pandemic, where discrimination intensified. She spoke Italian, but at times people pretended not to understand her or refused to communicate. The thing that frustrated her the most was that during the COVID-19 pandemic when there was an increasing number of discrimination against Chinese people. She felt insecure walking outside as people would stare at her, and point at her saying, "Look, a Chinese!" and even spat at her. Her experience highlights the vulnerability of Asian communities to scapegoating and xenophobia during global crises.

Sun shared his perspective on racial discrimination:

> Before going abroad, I hadn't truly experienced racial discrimination, only regional biases at most, such as stereotypes about people from Hebei (a northern province in China) being prone to theft. However, after moving to a country inhabited by diverse ethnicities from around the world, the issue of racial discrimination became apparent. While a minority cannot represent an entire country, their actions can influence the overall perception of their nation, thus creating stereotypes. These stereotypes are further perpetuated by the media and are often accepted without critical thinking, leading to prejudiced views towards individuals or groups.

(Sun, Interview, 2023, Online)

Sun's reflections provide a deeper insight into the transition from facing regional biases within China to confronting racial discrimination abroad. His observation that the actions of a minority can skew perceptions of an entire nation illustrates the powerful role of stereotypes in shaping attitudes towards different racial and ethnic groups.

Sun also recounted their own encounter with racial discrimination:

> I remember during a trip to a city in the southern part of Italy, after having dinner and walking on the street, a few people passed by and shouted derogatory remarks about Chinese people, suggesting it was during the pandemic and telling us to go back to China and not to come out.
>
> (Sun, Interview, 2023, Online)

However, Sun's attitude towards these incidents is measured:

> I personally don't pay much attention to these matters as they are not something that can be changed overnight. Most people aim to progress towards positivity, but there will always be those who cause disruption. What's important is to focus on being the best version of oneself.
>
> (Sun, Interview, 2023, Online)

These measured responses to such incidents, focusing on personal growth and positivity, signify resilience in the face of racial adversity. This perspective not only highlights an individual's coping mechanism but also suggests a broader strategy for navigating racial identity in a multicultural setting. By emphasizing self-improvement and the pursuit of positivity, Sun articulates a constructive approach to dealing with the challenges posed by racial discrimination.

4.2.2 Stereotype

Bella discussed the stereotype of "Chinese people eating dogs." She remembered once on a bus where a group of high school students began murmuring and repeatedly saying the word "*cane*" (dog) upon seeing her. She has also been directly asked if she eats dogs. Bella expressed her frustration, acknowledging that while some regions in China have a tradition of eating dogs, these are not pet dogs, and this practice does not represent all Chinese people or imply universal support for the practice. She pointed

out the difference in pet culture between China and Italy, noting that only in the past decade has there been a significant shift in China towards keeping dogs as pets and a growing awareness of animal protection. She also questioned why this stereotype seems specifically attached to Chinese people, humorously suggesting, “Is it because we have a large population?”

Mei shared similar experiences, often hearing remarks like “foreigners smell bad” or “their food smells bad,” and particularly targeting Chinese people with comments about eating dogs. In the past, she would get angry but choose to ignore such comments. Recently, however, her approach has changed. She would now play along, saying, “Yes, yes, it’s fine. I eat dogs. It’s delicious.” She explained this shift in attitude by observing that some Italians, especially older generations, are set in their ways, believing they are the best and the world runs around them. She concluded that it’s best to let them live in their own world and say what they want.

Bella and Mei’s discussion of stereotypes sheds light on the specific cultural misunderstandings that can perpetuate racial stereotypes. Bella’s humorous yet poignant response and Mei’s attitude shift to such stereotypes indicate a coping mechanism developed over time, reflecting a strategic choice to navigate societal prejudices without internalizing the negativity.

4.2.3 Social Integration & Sense of Belonging

In the context of racial identity, Mei and Ice’s experiences underscore the impact of racial and ethnic backgrounds on their sense of belonging in Italy. These narratives reveal how racial identity can influence international students’ integration into and acceptance by the host society.

a. Overcoming Intimidation: Mei’s Journey

Mei’s initial feelings of intimidation and alienation upon arriving in Italy highlight the challenges that racial and ethnic differences pose in fostering a sense of belonging. “Initially found it intimidating that people around her looked different, and the children her age were much bigger,” Mei’s account reflects the visible markers of racial identity that can exacerbate feelings of being an outsider. However, her gradual integration into Italian society, facilitated by increased interactions with Italians and Italian culture, showcases the potential for overcoming these barriers, illustrating the

dynamic nature of racial identity and belonging.

b. Bureaucracy and Discrimination: Ice's Struggle

Ice's struggle with the Italian immigration system further exemplifies how racial identity can compound the challenges faced by international students. Her recounting of the dehumanizing experience while applying for her residence permit - " I recalled feeling a strong sense of not belonging to the country while queuing outside the immigration office" - underscores the systemic barriers that can alienate individuals based on their racial or ethnic background. The unfriendly attitude of the immigration office staff and the indifference shown to her and other foreigners' plight illuminate the intersection of racial identity with institutional practices, reinforcing feelings of exclusion and non-belonging.

By focusing on the interplay between racial identity and the sense of belonging, this section underscores the nuanced ways in which racial and ethnic backgrounds shape the experiences of international students in Italy. It brings to light the importance of acknowledging and addressing the racial dimensions of integration and belonging in multicultural societies.

c. Political Conversations and Racial Belonging

Furthermore, Ice's discomfort during discussions about political conflicts in China among her social circle highlights the predicament faced by individuals when their racial or ethnic background becomes a subject of scrutiny or debate, often leading to a reinforced sense of otherness.

Despite having many Italian friends and being good at socializing, Ice finds it hard to develop a strong bond with them. While she can resonate with Italians on many topics, there are things they just can't understand about each other. She thinks that explaining herself is exhausting, so she prefers to socialize with Chinese people. She recalled being uncomfortable when asked about her views on political conflicts in China, such as the Hong Kong protests or the situation in Xinjiang. Ice, not a fan of politics at all and never having been to Xinjiang, felt uneasy when hearing people discussing whether to include another Chinese person in their social circle based on their political standpoint in front of her face.

These experiences underscore the complex dynamics at play in the formation and perception of racial identity among international students. The administrative hurdles

and social interactions laden with racial undertones not only affect their day-to-day experiences but also influence their broader engagement with the host society.

In sum, the racial identity experiences of these students underscore the ongoing challenges of racial discrimination and the quest for social integration in a foreign cultural context. The diversity of their encounters - ranging from verbal harassment to systemic biases - highlights the need for greater cultural awareness and inclusivity within host societies. These narratives not only contribute to our understanding of racial identity among international students but also call attention to the broader societal efforts required to foster a more welcoming and inclusive environment for all individuals, regardless of their racial or cultural background.

4.3 Gender Identity

Wei, when asked about gender issues, expressed their confusion with some agitation:

> This is something I've been unable to understand recently. First of all, I have no intention of being offensive or discriminatory, but isn't it true that there were originally only two genders in the world? Why are there now so many genders, especially with gender political correctness in the United States? I really don't get it. From both a sociological and biological perspective, there are two genders - female and male. Intersex people do exist, but they are the exception. I believe that there are two physiological structures, and at the very least, this is how it should be presented in biology textbooks. Moreover, I should be allowed to express this view in public spaces as well.
>
> (Wei, Interview, 2023, Venice)

In the section on gender identity, the reflections and experiences shared by students like Wei, Rio, Shyu, Bella, Anna, and Serena provide a multifaceted view of how gender roles, expectations, and societal norms from their cultural backgrounds influence their perceptions and interactions in Italy.

4.3.1 Gender Roles

a. Japanese Men: Across Cultural Boundaries

Rio spoke about his gender role, saying,

> The image of Japanese men is often one of hard work and seriousness, and I think

> I fit this to some extent. However having spent time in Australia during high school, I was exposed to different cultures, and I feel I have some Western traits contrary to the typical Japanese male image.
>
> (Rio, Interview, 2023, Venice)

Shyu noted the traditional Japanese notion of men as breadwinners and women as homemakers, a model followed in his own family. He feels a strong responsibility to earn for his future family, in this regard, he considers himself a typical Japanese male.

Rio and Shyu discuss the impact of their cultural background on their perception of gender roles. Rio's image of Japanese men as hardworking and serious, tempered by his exposure to different cultures in Australia, showcases the personal negotiation between traditional gender norms and the influence of multicultural interactions. Similarly, Shy's adherence to the traditional Japanese notion of men as breadwinners highlights the deep-rooted cultural expectations that shape his identity and aspirations.

b. Contrasting Cultures: Gender Expression in Japan and Italy

Within the gender identity exploration among international students in Italy, Moe and Ami's observations provide a compelling contrast in gender expression and roles across Japanese and Italian cultures. Moe highlights the stringent beauty standards imposed on Japanese women, where the societal expectation is not just to be presentable but to adhere to a narrowly defined concept of beauty, encapsulated in practices like wearing makeup. This societal pressure underscores a broader cultural norm where women's appearances are heavily scrutinized and regulated, reflecting a specific gender identity expectation within Japanese society.

Ami's commentary on fashion and clothing further illustrates the cultural nuances of gender identity. In Japan, the trend among university students to dress in a similar fashion, aiming for a collective aesthetic of cuteness, signifies a culture of conformity where standing out through one's dress is often eschewed. This behavior contrasts with the individualistic approach observed in Italy, where personal style is not only a form of self-expression but also a celebration of one's unique identity. Italian women, as described by Ami, confidently navigate through a spectrum of fashion choices, embracing diversity in appearance and breaking away from monolithic beauty standards.

These narratives from Moe and Ami underscore the varying cultural influences on

gender identity, particularly in the realm of self-presentation and societal expectations. The dichotomy between Japanese conformity and Italian individualism offers insights into how cultural backgrounds shape individuals' perceptions of gender roles and their expression of gender identity. In Japan, gender identity is often intertwined with collective norms and expectations, while in Italy, there's a notable emphasis on personal autonomy and the expression of individuality.

The comparison not only highlights the impact of cultural norms on gender expression but also reflects the broader societal attitudes towards gender roles and identities. Through the experiences of Moe and Ami, we observe the complex interplay between cultural identity and gender identity, revealing how deeply cultural context influences personal expression and societal perceptions of gender.

c. Exploring Masculinity: Wei's Cross-Cultural Reflections

Wei believes that men, not just Chinese men, can have a rough exterior but must embody masculinity.

> A man may not possess the meticulousness or sensitivity often associated with women. I'm not saying men are superior to women, everyone has their strengths and weaknesses. However, I believe that masculinity, or the ability to take responsibility is a defining trait of men.
>
> (Wei, Interview, 2024, Venice)

Regarding Chinese men, Wei thinks,

> Most Chinese men often play a role where they are passively needed and consider many things. This includes myself; it's not necessarily about external expectations, but rather the pressure from the broader environment that forces us to think about many issues. I don't believe men are the dominators or the leaders anymore. It used to be about male chauvinism, but now I feel there's an unfair trend against men. It's not because of the rise of feminism, but rather the pressures of material life and the solidification of class that increasingly burden Chinese men. The competition among men is getting fiercer, and women are becoming more independent. For a man to have better options in marriage and mating, he needs more capital and confidence. This competition is not healthy.
>
> (Wei, Interview, 2024, Venice)

Wei's struggle to grasp the concept of multiple gender identities beyond the traditional male and female highlights the cultural differences in understanding gender, pointing to a clash between his background and the more fluid notions of gender identity prevalent in Western discourse. His views reflect a broader confusion and

discomfort with the expanding definitions of gender, emphasizing a biological and sociological perspective rooted in his upbringing.

d. Femininity in Flux: Navigating Cultural and Familial Norms

Bella commented on the social conditioning of Chinese women, they frequently hear that "girls should act like girls," with expectations about speaking softly and covering their mouths when laughing, etc., something rarely expected of boys.

> I've always been tomboyish and got scolded for fighting with boys. After my parents divorced and I started living alone, they had less control over me. My father sometimes urges me to find a boyfriend because he thinks I will be more safe if I have someone around me always. I went back to China a few months ago, everyone was discussing marriage and buying houses. I wondered why they wanted to get married, and they answered 'What else can we do then?'. You know, the term 'leftover women' in China, referring to unmarried women over 30, really disgusts me. I'll soon be categorized as such, unfortunately. In China, women are truly pathetic, being treated like commodities to be selected and chosen.
>
> (Bella, Interview, 2023, Venice)

Anna talked about body and appearance anxieties. Being larger than other girls at her height, she faced mockery from boys and comments from girls since she was a kid.

> In primary school, boys chased after me, calling me 'the Great East African Rift Valley' because of my big butt. Girls wouldn't do that, but sometimes when dining with them, they'd wonder how I could eat so much. So I became afraid to order much with them in public, I'd rather go home hungry and eat alone. Chinese girls' anxieties about body and appearance are severe, and social media is filled with makeup and weight-loss tutorials. I want to tell every girl, 'You're beautiful as you are.' In Italy, I find the women stunning, not just for their physical features but also for the confidence they show, which is very attractive to me.
>
> (Anna, Interview, 2023, Venice)

Bella and Anna share insights into the social conditioning around femininity in China, touching on the pressures to conform to certain behaviors and the stigma attached to women who defy these norms. Bella's experiences of being labeled "tomboyish" and facing pressure to find a boyfriend for safety reflect societal expectations that prioritize male protection and control over women's independence. Anna's struggles with body image and societal pressures further illuminate the challenges faced by women in navigating expectations around appearance and behavior.

Serena, compared with her sister who was born and raised in China, has noted how her upbringing shaped her more “feminine” identity, she dreamed of being a princess and learning ballet and piano as she thought those are what a princess should know. On the contrary, her sister, growing up with less parental control and among boys in China, developed a more “masculine” or “aggressive” attitude.

Serena’s comparison of her and her sister’s upbringing illustrates the impact of environmental and familial influences on gender identity formation, highlighting how cultural expectations around femininity can vary significantly even within the same family, shaped by different experiences and exposures

Mei’s reflections on her relationship with her mother and the contrasting perceptions of femininity in Japan and Italy add depth to the discussion on how cultural and familial expectations shape gender identity. Mei’s narrative provides insight into the pressures of conforming to traditional gender roles and the impact of these expectations on individual identity and cross-cultural understanding.

Mei recounts the expectations placed on her from a young age to embody a certain image of Japanese femininity, one characterized by perpetual friendliness and meticulous attention to domestic presentation. “Since I was young, my mother insisted that I should smile more, every day,” Mei recalls, highlighting the weight of societal norms that dictate a woman’s demeanor and appearance. This expectation, deeply ingrained through her mother's example, underscores the pervasive cultural norms that inform femininity in Japan, where women are often encouraged to maintain a facade of politeness and agreeableness.

Contrasting these experiences with her perceptions of Italian women, Mei observes a distinct difference in the expression of femininity. She perceives Italian women as embodying a freer version of femininity, unburdened by the strictures of politeness and domestic perfection that she associates with Japanese women. “Italian women could sometimes behave rudely and impolitely without any consequences,” Mei notes, acknowledging both the positive and negative aspects of this freedom. This comparison not only reflects Mei’s personal struggle with the rigid expectations of

Japanese femininity but also highlights the broader cultural differences in how gender roles are constructed and perceived.

Mei's decision to distance herself by attending university in Milan signifies a deliberate step towards forging her own identity, away from the familial and cultural pressures of Japan. Her story illustrates the complex interplay between cultural norms, familial expectations, and individual agency in the formation of gender identity.

4.3.2 Cross-Cultural Reflections on LGBTQ+ Identities

In the discourse on gender identity among international students in Italy, reflections from interviewees on their LGBTQ+ journeys shed light on the internal and external navigation required to understand and accept diverse sexual orientations.

a. Anna's Path to Self-Acceptance

Since middle school, Anna recognized her attraction to the same sex, initially feeling marginalized. At that time, she felt like an outsider, but she found solace online among people with similar struggles. After gaining more understanding of sexual minority groups, she accepted her own differences and committed to helping others who experienced similar confusion. She initially thought that Europe, with its more inclusive attitudes towards gender and sexual orientation, would provide a greater sense of belonging. However, due to language barriers, she found it challenging to find communities to join and didn't know what she could do. She felt increasingly insignificant and her voice less important, leading her to express herself less than before.

Despite her anticipation of a more inclusive environment in Europe, language barriers impeded her ability to connect with like-minded communities, diminishing her sense of significance and self-expression.

b. Kang's Exploration of Sexual Orientation

Kang noticed her strange feelings towards girls since elementary school. Initially, she couldn't distinguish whether it was just platonic friendship or admiration. It wasn't until she grew older and learned about the existence of LGBTQ+ groups that she realized sexual orientation wasn't binary. She attributed her assertiveness and

independence from a young age to her sexual orientation and her mother's influence on her personality. Although she could do everything boys could, she firmly decided against coming out to her parents as she still hoped to have children in the future, seeing no necessity in telling them.

Kang's early confusion over her feelings towards girls evolved into a clear understanding of her sexual orientation through exposure to LGBTQ+ narratives. This realization, coupled with her mother's influence, contributed to her self-perceived assertiveness and independence. Despite her capabilities and self-awareness, familial and societal pressures influenced her decision to keep her sexual orientation private, especially considering future familial aspirations.

c. Navigating Gender Sensitivity and Diversity

Rio, Shyu, and Wei provided perspectives on the visibility and acceptance of LGBTQ+ communities in Italy compared to their home countries.

Rio mentioned being cautious about gender sensitivity in Europe, especially in the choice of pronouns like 'he/she' to avoid offending anyone. About the differences in gender issues between Japan and Italy and their impact on him, he said,

> I find Italians more open about sexuality and more considerate of others' feelings, which sometimes tires me. If my friends are homosexual, I also feel a bit troubled as I'm not sure how to interact or behave around them.
>
> (Rio, Interview, 2023, Venice)

Shyu mentioned that after coming to Italy, he noticed a significantly higher number of sexual minority groups compared to Japan. He tried to understand this community through news and other sources.

Wei stated that he wouldn't judge a person's worth based on their sexual orientation. However, he admitted feeling uncomfortable around gay men, particularly those who display excessive femininity, which he couldn't accept. He believed masculinity was a fundamental quality of men.

Rio's cautious approach to gender sensitivity and Shyu's educational pursuit to comprehend sexual minority groups underscore the learning processes involved in embracing diversity. Wei's discomfort with certain expressions of gay identity highlights the ongoing challenges in reconciling personal biases with broader definitions of masculinity and gender norms.

d. Moe and Bella's Insights on Sexuality and Solidarity

Moe praised Italian women for their self-acceptance and expression of their sexuality, contrasting them favorably with Japanese women. Bella noted that most of her friends in Italy were from sexual minority groups, which deepened her understanding of them. Although she wasn't a member of such groups herself, she found it more comfortable to be friendz with them. She speculated that as a woman belonging to another marginalized group, she could better empathize with them, which led to mutual respect.

Moe's admiration for the self-expression and confidence of Italian women, juxtaposed with her critique of Japanese conservatism, and Bella's meaningful friendships within LGBTQ+ circles in Italy, emphasize the transformative potential of cross-cultural and cross-identity interactions. These experiences not only enrich their understanding of gender and sexual orientation but also foster a sense of solidarity and mutual respect among individuals from diverse backgrounds.

Collectively, these narratives underscore the multifaceted experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals and their allies, navigating the intersections of sexual orientation, cultural identity, and gender expression. They underscore the critical role of supportive communities, the intricacies of cross-cultural engagement, and the continuous journey toward self-acceptance and inclusivity in a global context.

4.3.3 Mother-Daughter Relationships

The interviews surprisingly revealed a theme of complex mother-daughter relationships among Chinese and Japanese female students.

Serena described a strained relationship with her mother. Due to her health issues, she needs someone to take care of her as she will sometimes faint. Thus, her mother quit her job and stayed at home. Despite her mother's sacrifices, Serena longs for independence and freedom. She feels her mother sometimes would emotionally blackmail her by saying, "Look how much I did for you!" but "That's not what I asked for."

Mei shared her mother's struggles with abusive relationships since she was born.

Her mother has already divorced three times. All three men have more or less violence issues. Her mother always blindly believed in men which makes her feel pity and hard to understand towards her mother's choices. Thus, Mei prefers living alone.

Ice talked about high expectations from her mother, who invested a lot in her education since young and hoped she would be outstanding. However, the lifestyle in Europe has influenced Ice significantly, which induces a sense of guilt inside for not being able to meet her mother's expectations. She understands her mother's concerns but still feels pressured by them.

The complex mother-daughter relationships explored in the interviews reveal another layer of gender identity, where cultural influences and personal experiences intersect to create a nuanced understanding of femininity and maternal roles. Serena's description of her strained relationship with her mother, who sacrifices her career for caregiving, underscores the conflicting emotions tied to familial expectations and the desire for independence. Mei's reflections on her mother's struggles with abusive relationships and her own desire for autonomy highlight the impact of witnessing gender dynamics within the family on personal attitudes towards relationships and independence. Ice's narrative of feeling guilty for not meeting her mother's high expectations, influenced by her European lifestyle, further exemplifies the tension between cultural expectations and individual aspirations.

These narratives highlight the conflicting emotions East Asian women have towards their mothers. While empathizing with their mothers, they often find certain behaviors incomprehensible, reflecting a complex interplay of cultural influences and personal experiences.

PART TWO

4.4 Intersections of Personal Experiences

The experiences of international students in Italy are often shaped by their appearance and ethnicity, leading to a collective identity. However, even students from the same nationality and cultural background encounter different challenges and tests due to their unique personal and social interactions. This shift from a macro societal

perspective to a micro individual explores the distinctiveness of each student's journey.

4.4.1 I Got More Workload but Less Credit

When discussing her experience as an Asian woman in Italy, Serena highlighted the inequity in responsibilities and recognition in her part-time job. She expressed frustration over the unfair burden of responsibilities, saying, “We are seen as ‘those in charge’ more often, yet less credit comes to us.” This mirrors the familial dynamic where mothers typically shoulder the responsibility of caregiving. Furthermore, she noticed that while women often represent organizations or classes, men tend to receive more recognition. In her workplace, despite having the same contract as another male colleague and dealing with difficult clients more frequently, she felt unrecognized and underappreciated. This perception was compounded by her Asian appearance, which she believed made customers see her as more trustworthy, but didn’t result in any additional credit or recognition.

> When I was working at a shopping mall in Venice during summer break, even though I had the exactly same contract with another male colleague and we started working there together at the same time, I had to deal with difficult clients more often than him. There might be a reason that since my parents are all Chinese, the customers tend to see me as more trustworthy, but I got no credit for that. However, there’s another Chinese male colleague who already graduated from university, he would be totally qualified when he has done some tough work.
>
> (Serena, Interview, 2023, Milan)

Serena’s situation illustrates the challenges Asian women face in the workplace, often burdened with more responsibilities due to gender and racial stereotypes without corresponding recognition or compensation. This issue is exacerbated for part-time workers and students with temporary contracts, who lack the legal protections and bargaining power of full-time employees. Her experience reflects the broader societal dynamics where women, particularly those from minority backgrounds, often face unequal treatment and expectations.

4.4.2 If I Was Loved for Who I Am...

Serena expressed her dilemma in personal relationships and was uncertain whether

her partners were attracted to her as an individual or merely because of her Asian ethnicity. This uncertainty has deeply troubled her.

She mentioned her experience with past relationships, where she questioned her partners about their reasons for loving her. The responses she received were often confusing and contradictory. They would insist they loved her for who she was, yet also admit to having an "Asian fetish." Learning that an ex-partner had moved on to another Asian girl made her question if she was just seen as a "random Asian girl," which led to feelings of frustration and anger.

> Since I'm old enough, I've had several relationships. I've always asked them why they loved me if they only loved me just because I'm Chinese, and they always answered, "OF COURSE NOT AND I LOVE YOU AS A PERSON, AS WHO YOU ARE! But yes, I do have an Asian fetish." Once, my ex got together with another Asian girl after we broke up and the girl was Asian too. After knowing this, I was like " Really? Am I just a random Asian girl?" But, what can I do about this?
>
> (Serena, Interview, 2023, Milan)

Serena's situation highlights a significant issue: the objectification of individuals based on race or ethnicity, often referred to as "racial fetishization." In her view, this reduces a person's identity to a mere stereotype and ignores their unique qualities and individuality. She also pointed out the role of pornography in perpetuating these stereotypes and fetishes, suggesting that such media can influence perceptions and expectations in personal relationships.

This phenomenon, where a person's racial background overshadows their individual identity in intimate relationships, is a form of dehumanization. It not only affects the person on the receiving end but also reflects broader societal attitudes toward race and ethnicity. Serena's experience and reflections offer a glimpse into the complex interplay of race, identity, and relationships in a multicultural context.

4.4.3 Sorry, I'm Not What You Imagined

Mei's journey in Italy began with significant language barriers that hindered her ability to keep up with schoolwork. She found solace and a sense of accomplishment in drawing, a skill that garnered admiration and acceptance from her classmates. Their praise for her artwork ignited her desire to pursue art.

During her primary and secondary education, Mei faced unfair treatment. Though she couldn't recall specific instances, the impact of those experiences remained profound. She strived to excel academically, aiming for top grades to earn respect and fair treatment from her teachers. Her efforts seemed to pay off, as she didn't feel markedly different due to her hard work. Moving to Milan, a more cosmopolitan city improved the environment, but it also brought its challenges along. Mei sensed that people approached her with various motives. Some, assuming she was Japanese based on her appearance, approached her with preconceived notions about Japanese people. When they realized she didn't fit their stereotypes, they often withdrew and went away from her.

At first, Mei found those experiences hurtful, but over time, they only disgusted her. She learned to distance herself from those with ulterior motives, as interacting with them was emotionally draining. Her current philosophy is, "Sorry, I can't meet your expectations." She believes that if someone finds her different from what they had imagined, it's their problem, not hers. This mindset reflects her self-acceptance and refusal to conform to others' misconceptions.

4.4.4 I Can't Be A Lesbian

Anna's story highlights the challenges she faced as a lesbian in a conservative and often discriminatory environment. Her struggle for self-acceptance began in middle school when she realized her attraction to girls. Having searched for help and support, she found solace in the LGBTQ community online, which helped her understand that she was not alone. However, the stigmatization of homosexuality in China made her feel oppressed and led her to make up her mind to study abroad, where she hoped for a more accepting environment.

Initially, Anna did find the freedom she sought, but financial constraints forced her to take part-time jobs, mostly within the Chinese community due to language barriers. Her preference for a masculine look, combined with her clearly feminine features, often led to intrusive questions about her gender identity. She remarked on the lack of boundaries among Chinese people but noted that these questions didn't bother her as much as the discrimination she faced regarding her sexual orientation.

Anna shared a particularly disheartening experience with her employer, who expressed a belief that homosexuality was a disease and indicative of a psychological

disorder. This statement deeply angered her, but she finally chose not to confront her boss for fear of confirming the suspicions toward her sexual orientation and losing her job. The job was crucial for her financial stability, forcing her to endure such discriminatory attitudes silently.

Eventually, as Anna's social network in Italy expanded, she found more opportunities and left the job. She expressed a reluctance to work with the Chinese community due to the prevalent homophobic attitudes, stating, "Changing their perceptions about homosexuality is a long road, and I don't want to waste my energy on it."

Anna's experience underscores the complex intersection of cultural, economic, and social factors that influence the lives of LGBTQ individuals, particularly those from conservative backgrounds. Her story is a testament to the resilience required to navigate such environments while maintaining personal integrity and identity.

4.5 Changes in Self-Perception

Rio felt that living abroad during his teenage years broadened his perspective and made him more tolerant and open-minded. His experiences overseas taught him to accept different thoughts and cultures.

Sena noticed an increase in his self-reliance skills after moving to Italy, where he had to cook, clean, and manage his finances independently, tasks he didn't need to worry about while living with his parents in Japan.

Shyu observed a change in his attitude towards learning. He was inspired by the enthusiasm of Italian students, who actively took notes and even asked him about aspects of Japanese culture he hadn't considered. This motivated him to study harder and not be complacent.

Moe, after coming to Italy, has been influenced by the laid-back lifestyle of the Italians, realizing the beauty of such a way of life. She aspires to live a relaxed and carefree life in the future.

Ami believes that studying abroad has given her more time for self-reflection. Being in a foreign land with few friends and limited activities other than studying has increased her solitude, allowing her ample time to contemplate her existence in this world and how she should exist in the future.

Ice sees herself as undergoing no significant changes; she has always considered

herself a fluid individual, with every moment's thoughts shaping a brand-new version of herself. Therefore, the self is constantly evolving, and the experience of studying abroad merely provides a new environment. Even without international studies, she believes the environment she is in will continually change.

Bella spoke about her improved emotional management. Facing numerous challenges in Italy, she experienced moments of despair. With help from the psychiatrist at her school, she feels stronger and more in control of her emotions now, compared with pthe revious anxiety she had earlier.

Anna thinks she has become more timid than before, feeling helpless in many situations. For instance, facing racial discrimination, she doesn't know how to resist; being financially constrained, she is forced to take multiple part-time jobs, which affects her studies. Part-time employers refuse to sign contracts, leaving her rights unprotected, but she feels powerless to change the situation. These experiences make her deeply aware of her own insignificance and she dislikes the current version of herself, yet she is unsure how to make a change.

Kang thinks that during her years in Italy, she has learned to allow others to express their opinions. Previously, she viewed the world in black-and-white terms, always attempting to persuade others whenever encountering differing opinions. Now, when faced with different opinions, her initial response is not to argue but to listen. If others hold different views, she reflects on why they might think that way and whether their ideas are valid. If their thoughts make sense, she is open to accepting them.

Wei claims that studying abroad has brought more negative impacts. Initially full of determination upon arrival, the experience has gradually worn down her edges, especially during the pandemic. Even though she hasn't personally experienced discrimination, witnessing friends facing it has imposed significant stress and fear on her. As a result, she has become more cautious and hesitant in her actions. While she acknowledges having these issues before, studying abroad has exacerbated them.

Sun believes that her problem-solving abilities have significantly improved. Abroad, every issue requires personal attention, such as dealing with immigration, banking, and finding accommodation. While these tasks might be age-appropriate responsibilities even in China, the language barrier and different systems here have caused her various troubles. Nonetheless, she has successfully tackled each one, boosting her confidence in handling challenges calmly.

The experiences of these students living in Italy have led to various

self-transformations, both positive and negative. On the positive side, Rio's teenage years abroad made him more tolerant and open-minded, while Sena developed increased self-reliance skills through independent living. Shyu witnessed a change in his attitude towards learning, inspired by the enthusiasm of Italian students. Moe embraced the laid-back lifestyle in Italy and aspires to adopt it in the future. Ami gained more time for self-reflection in a foreign land with limited social interactions. Bella spoke about improved emotional management with support from her school's psychiatrist. Kang learned to allow others to express their opinions, moving away from a black-and-white worldview.

However, there are also negative aspects. Anna became more timid and felt powerless in the face of racial discrimination and financial constraints. Wei experienced negative impacts, feeling worn down and cautious, especially during the pandemic. Despite Sun's improved problem-solving skills, studying abroad brought its share of challenges due to language barriers and different systems.

In summary, these students' lives in Italy brought about a mix of positive and negative self-transformations, highlighting the diverse and complex nature of the impact of studying abroad on individuals.

5. CHAPTER Ⅴ: DISCUSSION , RECCOMENDATION & CONCLUSION

5.1 DISCUSSION

The discussion section of this research will be divided into two parts to address the questions:

1. How do cultural, racial, and gender identities transform among Chinese and Japanese international students in a cross-cultural context?

2. How do intersecting identities of culture, race, and gender influence the experiences of Chinese and Japanese international students in Italy, particularly in

terms of their cultural adaptation and identity formation?

The first part will explore the transformation of cultural, racial, and gender identities among Chinese and Japanese international students, drawing on Social Identity Theory. This section will examine how these identities evolve in a cross-cultural context, focusing on the individual and collective aspects of identity transformation.

The second part will discuss the intersecting influences of culture, race, and gender on the experiences of these students in Italy, with a particular focus on cultural adaptation, social integration, and identity formation. This analysis will incorporate specific examples from several findings, using Intersectionality Theory and Social Identity Theory to provide a detailed examination. By exploring the interplay between these three types of identity, the research aims to uncover the complex dynamics at play in the cross-cultural experience of Chinese and Japanese international students in Italy, highlighting how these intersecting identities shape their adaptation and integration processes.

5.1.1 Identity Transformations in a Globalized Context: Navigating Cultural, Racial, and Gender Dimensions

Given the complexity and dynamism of individual identity changes in a cross-cultural environment against the backdrop of globalization, the perspective of Social Identity Theory offers deep insights into this process, especially through the experiences of international students in new cultural settings. These experiences reflect not only the challenges of cultural adaptation but also how individuals negotiate and reshape their identities under different cultural influences.

a. Cultural Dimension

International students encounter several key factors that shape their cultural identity, such as language barriers, differences in gender norms, and challenges related to dual

cultural identities. Language serves not just as a tool for communication but also as a foundation for cultural adaptation and social integration. As students strive to overcome language barriers, they also learn to express their identity and cultural background through new languages, reflecting the dual process of maintaining their original cultural identity while attempting to integrate into the host culture.

Differences in gender norms, such as between Japanese and Italian perceptions of aesthetic standards and personal expression, further complicate the process of identity negotiation in cross-cultural environments. Students must adapt to new cultural surroundings and find their place within new gender norms and expectations, prompting a reassessment of their gender identity and a search for balance among various cultural gender norms.

For those with dual cultural backgrounds, like Serena and Mei, their stories reveal the complexities of forming and identifying with a personal identity under the influence of two cultures. Serena's negotiation of identity between Italian and Chinese cultures, alongside Mei's reflections on the differences between Japanese and Italian cultures, demonstrates how individuals explore and construct their identities within a multicultural environment. These narratives emphasize the critical role of the social environment and interactions in forming cultural identity and how individuals adjust and reshape their identities through self-reflection and external interactions.

b. Racial Dimension

Today, the transformation of racial identity recognition experienced by international students in the host country is a complex and multidimensional process. It involves how individuals while facing challenges of racial discrimination, stereotypes, social integration, and belonging, seek self-identification and growth. Through the lens of Social Identity Theory, we can explore this process in depth, analyzing how international students in Italy cope with and adapt to these challenges based on their specific experiences.

Racial discrimination and the internalized identity crisis mark the experiences of international students in the host country, ranging from subtle linguistic exclusion to

overt racial stereotyping. For example, Rio's experience of being mistaken for a person from another Asian country and being negatively labeled not only was unpleasant but also deepened his introspection on racial identity. Such encounters with racial stereotyping reinforce the distinction between “us” and “them” for international students, leading to obstacles in social integration and belonging. Social Identity Theory proposes that an individual's social identity is defined by belonging to specific social groups, and experiences of racial discrimination may weaken international students' sense of belonging in the host society, prompting them to connect more closely with their racial or cultural group.

Despite facing racial discrimination and cultural barriers, many international students like Mei and Ice gradually overcome these challenges and achieve deeper social integration. Mei’s increased interactions with Italians gradually overcame her initial fear and sense of being an outsider. Ice, when facing institutional barriers and public discussions of racial categorization, experienced the complexity of identity recognition. These experiences show that an individual’s identity in a new cultural environment is dynamic and can be reshaped and strengthened through positive social interactions and cultural participation.

In the face of racial stereotypes, international students need to negotiate their identity to maintain their cultural dignity while finding their place in the host culture. Bella and Mei’s responses to the incorrect notion that “Chinese people eat dogs” reflect how international students adjust and reshape their racial identity through social interactions. This negotiation process exemplifies the balance between maintaining self-identity and adapting to societal expectations, illustrating how individuals define and reshape their identity through social interaction, as proposed by Social Identity Theory.

The racial identity recognition of international students is influenced not only by their own experiences and the culture of the host country but also by compatriots and other cultural groups. As Sun's experience shows, international students may truly experience racial discrimination for the first time in the host country, prompting them to reflect on their racial identity and their position in the context of globalization.

These experiences highlight the fluidity and diversity of racial identity in the lives of international students, revealing the dynamic construction process of individual identity as proposed by Social Identity Theory.

c. Gender Dimension

Cultural differences and the redefinition of gender roles are highlighted in the stories of students like Rio, and Shyu, and the contrasts observed by Moe and Ami between Japanese and Italian cultures. These narratives illustrate how cultural backgrounds shape individual perceptions of gender roles. The differences underscore the need for international students to reassess and redefine their gender roles within a cross-cultural context, with Social Identity Theory emphasizing how individuals negotiate their gender identity through interactions with diverse cultural norms.

The journey of self-acceptance and exploration of sexual orientation by Anna and Kang, along with the obstacles they face in seeking belonging and community support, reveals the complexity of LGBTQ+ identity recognition in a cross-cultural environment. Language barriers and cultural differences exacerbate their difficulties in finding acceptance and support in the host country. Here, Social Identity Theory provides a framework for explaining how individuals explore and affirm their gender and sexual orientation identities through social belonging in different cultural contexts.

Reflections on mother-daughter relationships by Serena, Mei, and Ice show how family backgrounds and interactions influence the gender identity recognition and personal growth of international students. These stories unveil the profound impact of cultural norms and family expectations on female role identification and how students negotiate these expectations in their pursuit of independence and self-realization. Social Identity Theory here highlights how individuals form and reshape their gender identity under the dual influence of family and culture.

In summary, the changes in identity recognition among international students in a new cultural environment result from the interplay of multiple factors. This process involves not only the individual's reflection and adjustment to their roles across

different cultures but also reflects their efforts and choices between maintaining their original cultural identity and adapting to the new cultural environment. Through the perspective of Social Identity Theory, we can better understand how individuals negotiate and reshape their identities in a cross-cultural background, and how this process affects their cultural adaptation and personal growth.

In conclusion, the transformation of racial identity recognition of international students in Italy reflects the core views of Social Identity Theory, namely, that an individual's social identity is continuously constructed and reshaped through interactions with the surrounding society and personal introspection. Through the real experiences of these international students, we see how individuals seek self-identification and belonging while confronting racial discrimination, cultural differences, and identity crises, thereby growing and developing in a cross-cultural environment.

Cross-cultural experiences, such as Rio's background in Japan and Australia and the insights into gender diversity by Moe and Bella within their social circles in Italy, demonstrate how cross-cultural interactions foster an understanding and acceptance of gender identity diversity. These experiences not only enrich the student's understanding of gender and sexual orientation diversity but also encourage them to explore their gender identity in a globalized context. Social Identity Theory reveals how cross-cultural experiences act as catalysts for the recognition and expression of individual gender identities.

5.1.2 Intersectionality Analysis

This analysis of intersectionality emphasizes the multifaceted experiences of international students, illustrating how gender identity intersects with cultural and racial identities, as well as personal experiences, to influence their adaptation, integration, and identity formation in Italy. By delving into these intersections, we gain a more comprehensive understanding of the diverse challenges and opportunities faced by international students, pointing towards the importance of recognizing and addressing the multiple dimensions of identity in fostering an inclusive and

understanding multicultural society.

a. Intersection of Cultural Identity and Racial Identity

The section on cultural identity illustrates how international students perceive and express themselves through their cultural backgrounds. Conversely, the racial identity section reveals how these cultural backgrounds are interpreted and stereotyped based on appearance and racial characteristics by the external world. For instance, Serena's experiences at work are influenced not only by her gender but also by her racial identity as an Asian woman, leading to a disproportionate burden of responsibilities and a lack of recognition in her workplace. This intersectionality indicates that cultural and racial identities together shape her social experiences, particularly in terms of career development and societal acknowledgment.

The racial identity section reveals how international students encounter specific challenges and discrimination in Italy due to their appearance and racial background. For instance, Anna faces barriers in finding community and addressing discrimination because of her Asian appearance, intertwining with her racial identity, cultural identity, and personal values. Her aspiration for a more inclusive society in Italy reflects her understanding of gender and sexual orientation diversity from her cultural background. This indicates that racial and cultural identities mutually influence how individuals are perceived by others and how they perceive themselves, shaping their social experiences and self-identification process in a multicultural context.

b. Intersection of Cultural Identity and Gender Identity

The discussion on cultural identity, where international students define themselves through cultural traditions and values, complements the content on gender identity, which explores how gender roles and expectations are constructed and experienced across different cultures. For example, the Japanese student Shyu’s identification with traditional gender roles demonstrates how his cultural identity profoundly affects his perceptions of gender roles. Simultaneously, Moe’s appreciation for the Italian lifestyle illustrates her process of cultural adaptation in terms of gender expression and personal values, showcasing the interaction between cultural and gender identities

in forming personal identity and life choices.

The section on gender identity reveals how international students navigate and express their cultural identity through their gender roles and expectations. For instance, Moe's admiration for the laid-back Italian lifestyle, juxtaposed with her critique of stringent Japanese feminine aesthetics, illustrates her quest for self-identification between cultural and gender identities. This intersectional analysis suggests that cultural background plays a crucial role in shaping gender roles and expectations, significantly influencing international students' self-perception and behavior. It highlights the intricate ways in which cultural norms and gender identity converge, shaping how individuals understand themselves and their place within different cultural contexts.

c. Intersection of Racial Identity and Gender Identity

Discussing racial identity, Serena's experiences particularly highlight the impact of the intersection between racial and gender identities on her personal relationships. Her doubts about whether her partners love her for her personality or merely her racial background exemplify how racial stereotypes intertwine with gender expectations, affecting personal relationships and self-perception. This intersectionality analysis reveals that racial and gender identities not only shape the ways individuals interact socially but also profoundly affect their emotional lives and sense of self-worth.

Serena's experiences in personal relationships, particularly her doubts about whether her partners were attracted to her personality or her Asian racial background, underscore how gender and racial identities jointly influence one's emotional life and sense of self-worth. Her narrative reveals how racial stereotypes interweave with gender expectations, affecting personal relationships and self-perception. This analysis sheds light on the profound impact of the intersection between racial and gender identities on the social integration of international students, demonstrating how these combined identities shape interactions and personal experiences in a multicultural setting.

d. Intersection of Personal Experiences

The personal experiences section highlights how international students adapt and

reshape their cultural identities through their life experiences in Italy. For instance, Rio's increased openness and tolerance, fostered by his encounters with Italian culture, suggest that cultural identity is fluid and malleable, deeply influenced by cross-cultural experiences. At the same time, Anna's experiences demonstrate how her cultural identity provides a framework for understanding and addressing challenges related to racial discrimination and gender identity.

Kang's narrative illustrates how she navigates challenges brought by her racial identity through the exploration and acceptance of her sexual orientation. Her experiences indicate that racial identity intersects with gender identity and sexual orientation exploration, collectively influencing her self-identity and social interactions. Additionally, Kang's openness to differing opinions reflects how her cross-cultural experiences in Italy have fostered her understanding of inclusivity and diversity. These experiences are filtered through her lenses of racial and cultural background, as well as gender identity, demonstrating the complex interplay between these identity dimensions.

Anna's experience as an openly lesbian individual facing stereotypes and discrimination related to her sexual orientation showcases how the intersection of gender identity with sexual orientation identity shapes her life experiences in Italy. This intersectional analysis not only reveals how gender identity and sexual orientation interact to influence individual social interactions and internal worlds but also highlights the complexity of exploring and expressing gender identity within a multicultural environment. It underscores the challenges and nuances of navigating gender and sexual orientation in a context that may hold different norms and expectations from one's home culture.

This analysis of intersectionality reveals that an individual's experiences cannot be fully understood through a single dimension of identity, such as culture, race, or gender. Instead, it is the interplay among these identities, shaped by personal experiences in a multicultural context, that forms the complex tapestry of an individual's life. By exploring these intersections, we gain a deeper understanding of how international students navigate their cultural adaptation, social integration, and identity formation, highlighting the importance of considering multiple dimensions of identity in the study of multicultural experiences.

5.1.3 Intersecting Identities

a. Racial Identity and Political Conversations: Unveiling Ice's Struggle through Intersectionality

Ice's discomfort during discussions about political conflicts in China provides a compelling case to be dissected through the lens of Intersectionality. This analysis aims to unravel the intricate interplay between racial and political identities and how political conversations influence the self-formation process within the broader context of racial belonging.

Intersectionality, emphasizes the interconnected nature of social categories, such as race, gender, and class. It examines how these categories intersect and mutually shape an individual's experiences, highlighting the complexity of identity.

Applying Intersectionality involves scrutinizing Ice's experience, and recognizing the multifaceted nature of her identity shaped by the convergence of racial and political factors.

Ice's racial identity, as an Asian individual, intersects with her political identity, particularly in the context of discussions about China. Intersectionality emphasizes that these identities are not separate but interconnected aspects of her lived experience. As a Chinese international student, political conversations about China become a crucial dimension influencing how she is perceived and, subsequently, how she perceives herself.

Ice's discomfort in political discussions points to the influence of external perceptions and conversations on her self-formation process. Intersectionality suggests that these conversations are not solely about politics; they intersect with her racial identity, contributing to the construction of her sense of self. Political opinions about China, when discussed in her presence, might evoke feelings of being scrutinized or judged based on her racial background.

Intersectionality sheds light on how political conversations can reinforce a sense of otherness. Ice's discomfort might stem not only from the political disagreements themselves but also from the potential impact on her racial identity. Being part of a racial group associated with a particular country can lead to feelings of alienation or being perceived as representative of that political stance, even if it doesn't align with her personal views.

Intersectionality allows us to consider how stereotypes associated with Chinese

individuals might intersect with political discussions. Ice's racial identity could become a lens through which her political views are interpreted, potentially reinforcing stereotypes about a homogenous stance within her racial group.

In analyzing Ice's discomfort during political discussions through the prism of Intersectionality, we uncover the intricate dynamics at play. The interconnectedness of racial and political identities highlights the need to approach discussions with an awareness of the nuanced ways in which individuals navigate their identities within political conversations. This analysis contributes to a deeper understanding of how intersectional factors shape the self-formation process, emphasizing the importance of fostering inclusive environments that acknowledge and respect the complexities of individual identities.

b. Racial Fetishization and the Complex Intersection of Identities: Unveiling Serena's Dilemma through Intersectionality

Serena's dilemma in personal relationships, particularly her experience with racial fetishization, provides a poignant example to be explored through the lens of Intersectionality. This analysis aims to delve into the complex intersection of race, gender, and romantic relationships, shedding light on how racial fetishization contributes to the objectification of individuals and, subsequently, impacts self-perception.

Intersectionality, as a theoretical framework, underscores the interconnectedness of social categories and identities. In Serena's case, the intersection of race, gender, and romantic relationships becomes a pivotal aspect of her lived experience.

Examining Serena's experience involves recognizing the intersection of her racial and gender identities. As an Asian woman, Serena navigates societal expectations and stereotypes associated with both her race and gender. Intersectionality emphasizes that these aspects are intertwined and cannot be separated in understanding her experiences.

Serena's experience with racial fetishization brings to the forefront the objectification of individuals based on their racial background. Intersectionality prompts an analysis of how this objectification is not only influenced by her race but is deeply entwined with societal expectations regarding gender. Racial fetishization often perpetuates stereotypes and reduces individuals to a narrow, often exoticized,

understanding of their identity.

Delving into Serena's dilemma requires an exploration of how racial fetishization influences her self-perception. Intersectionality suggests that her internalization of these experiences is shaped not only by her racial identity but also by societal expectations related to gender. The intersection of race and gender complicates her self-perception, as she grapples not only with being racially objectified but also with the gendered dynamics.

Intersectionality allows for an examination of how cultural stereotypes associated with her race intersect with gendered expectations. Serena, as an Asian woman, might contend with specific stereotypes that are both racial and gendered. These stereotypes can influence not only how she is perceived in romantic relationships but also how she perceives herself.

An intersectional analysis also invites a consideration of Serena's resilience and potential empowerment strategies. It explores how she navigates and challenges these intersectional dynamics, highlighting the agency individuals can exert in shaping their identities despite societal pressures.

Analyzing Serena's dilemma in personal relationships through the lens of Intersectionality unravels the intricate web of interconnected identities. This exploration contributes to a deeper understanding of how racial fetishization, rooted in the intersection of race and gender, impacts self-perception. It underscores the importance of recognizing and dismantling the harmful dynamics associated with racial fetishization within the broader context of intersectional identities.

c. Navigating Intersectional Challenges: Anna's Journey Towards Personal Growth

Anna's struggles as a lesbian in a conservative environment provide a compelling example to be explored through the lens of Intersectionality. This analysis aims to delve into how intersectional factors, encompassing cultural, economic, and social aspects, shape the process of self-formation. Additionally, it explores the resilience required to navigate challenging environments while maintaining personal integrity.

Intersectionality, as a theoretical framework, emphasizes the interconnectedness of various social categories and identities. In Anna's case, the intersection of her sexual orientation, cultural background, and economic circumstances becomes crucial in

understanding her experiences.

Anna's experience involves navigating the intersection of her sexual orientation as a lesbian and her cultural background. In conservative environments, cultural attitudes towards LGBTQ individuals can significantly impact how Anna perceives herself and is perceived by others. Intersectionality highlights the interplay between cultural norms and sexual identity.

Examining Anna's journey requires acknowledging the economic constraints she faces. Intersectionality prompts an exploration of how financial limitations intersect with her identity as a lesbian. Economic factors can influence her choices, opportunities, and the extent to which she can express her identity freely.

Anna's story brings attention to the role of the social environment in shaping her resilience. Intersectionality allows for an analysis of how societal attitudes, particularly within the Chinese community, intersect with her sexual orientation. The social context can act as both a source of support and a challenge, influencing Anna's ability to maintain personal integrity.

Exploring Anna's experiences through an intersectional lens unveils the discrimination she faces. Intersectionality prompts an analysis of the strategies she employs to cope with the intersecting challenges of being a lesbian in a conservative environment. This might involve negotiating her identity within specific cultural and economic constraints.

An intersectional examination delves into the cultural dynamics that impact Anna's sense of self. It explores how cultural expectations intersect with her lesbian identity and how she negotiates these intersections. This analysis sheds light on the agency individuals like Anna exercise in maintaining their identity within challenging cultural contexts.

Analyzing Anna's struggles as a lesbian in a conservative environment through the lens of Intersectionality reveals the multifaceted nature of identity formation. It underscores how various intersectional factors, including cultural, economic, and social aspects, shape an individual's journey. Anna's resilience in navigating these challenges becomes a testament to the importance of recognizing and addressing the intersectional dimensions of identity within diverse and complex social landscapes.

d. Workplace Dynamics, Gender Norms, and Intersectionality: A Closer Look through Social Identity Theory

Serena’s experiences in her part-time job in Italy serve as a compelling case to explore the intersection of workplace dynamics, gender norms, and cultural identity through the lens of Social Identity Theory. Intersectionality, a critical framework, enables a deeper understanding of how overlapping social identities, including gender and ethnicity, compound the challenges faced by individuals in diverse work environments.

Social Identity Theory helps us understand the process by which individuals categorize themselves and others into distinct social groups. These categorizations, based on shared characteristics such as gender and ethnicity, significantly influence one's sense of belonging, self-concept, and the dynamics of in-group and out-group interactions. Serena’s narrative, when viewed through an intersectional lens, underscores the compounded inequities arising from her dual identity as an Asian woman, highlighting the multifaceted nature of workplace discrimination.

In the context of Serena’s workplace struggles, the intersectionality approach deepens our analysis by recognizing that her experiences are not solely shaped by her gender or cultural background but by the combination of these identities. This dual marginalization places her in a unique position within the social hierarchy of the workplace, affecting her self-perception and the recognition she receives.

Social Identity Theory posits that the social comparison process is vital in forming one's identity and self-esteem. For Serena, comparing her responsibilities and recognition with those of her male colleagues, considering both gender norms and cultural stereotypes, reveals the intersectional challenges she faces. The societal expectations embedded in these norms and stereotypes not only influence workplace interactions but also impact Serena's self-concept and well-being, as they dictate the dynamics of recognition and respect within the workplace.

Exploring Serena’s workplace experiences with an intersectional approach informed by Social Identity Theory allows us to untangle the complexities of navigating a work environment where gender and ethnicity intersect. This perspective highlights how societal expectations and stereotypes related to gender and cultural background shape workplace experiences, influencing how individuals like Serena perceive themselves and are perceived by others.

In sum, applying Social Identity Theory with an intersectionality lens to Serena’s experiences enriches our understanding of the nuanced challenges faced by

individuals at the intersection of multiple social identities. It reveals how the interplay between gender, ethnicity, and workplace norms shapes social interactions, belonging, and identity construction in culturally diverse settings. This analysis underscores the importance of considering multiple axes of identity in understanding and addressing the challenges within workplace dynamics.

e. Common Threads of Growth and Broader Implications: Collective Narratives of Self-Perception

Examining the changes in self-perception across narratives like those of Rio, Sena, Shyu, and Bella reveals common threads of personal growth, resilience, and self-acceptance. This collective analysis allows us to identify patterns that contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of cultural adaptation and self-formation.

Rio's broadened perspective, Sena's enhanced self-reliance skills, Shyu's newfound attitude towards learning, and Bella's improved emotional management collectively underscore a theme of personal growth. These individuals have transcended initial challenges, demonstrating adaptability, openness, and a willingness to learn from their experiences.

Resilience emerges as a common thread weaving through these narratives. Each individual faced distinct challenges, be it racial discrimination, linguistic barriers, workplace inequity, or cultural misconceptions. However, their resilience manifested in the ability to overcome setbacks, learn from adversity, and persist serves as a unifying element.

The narratives also reflect a shared journey towards self-acceptance. Mei's refusal to conform to others' misconceptions, Serena's questioning of partners' intentions, and Anna's determination to maintain personal integrity amidst discrimination collectively contribute to the theme of self-acceptance. These individuals navigate societal expectations, fostering a sense of identity that aligns with their authentic selves.

The collective understanding drawn from these narratives carries broader implications for cultural adaptation. It underscores that adaptation is not a linear process but involves dynamic shifts, challenges, and moments of growth. The experiences of these individuals contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the multifaceted nature of cultural adaptation.

Analyzing the collective narratives reveals diverse strategies employed for cultural adaptation. While some, like Mei, distance themselves from those with ulterior motives, others, like Sena, embrace newfound skills and independence. This diversity suggests that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to adaptation, emphasizing the importance of individual agency and resilience.

The common threads in self-perception also highlight that cultural identity is an evolving and dynamic concept. Individuals in these narratives grapple with their identities amidst changing environments, societal expectations, and personal growth. This realization challenges static notions of cultural identity, emphasizing its fluid and context-dependent nature.

The collective narratives of Rio, Sena, Shyu, and Bella contribute valuable insights into the common threads of personal growth, resilience, and self-acceptance. These threads weave together a narrative that extends beyond individual experiences, offering a nuanced understanding of cultural adaptation. Recognizing the diversity in adaptation strategies and the evolving nature of cultural identity contributes to a more comprehensive appreciation of the intricate interplay between individual journeys and broader implications for cultural understanding.

In synthesizing the key findings related to cultural adaptation and self-formation among international students, a multifaceted narrative emerges. The experiences shared by Rio, Sena, Shyu, Bella, Mei, Ice, Serena, and Anna provide a rich tapestry of insights into the intricate dynamics of navigating a foreign cultural context. The interconnectedness of cultural adaptation and self-formation is evident throughout these narratives, offering valuable lessons for fostering a more inclusive environment for diverse identities.

Key Findings

The narratives illustrate that cultural adaptation is a dynamic and evolving process. It involves not only overcoming linguistic, racial, and societal barriers but also a continuous negotiation of identity within a multicultural setting.

The application of Social Identity Theory and Intersectionality reveals the profound influence of societal expectations, gender norms, racial stereotypes, and political dynamics on individuals' experiences. These frameworks elucidate the complexities involved in the formation of social identity and the nuanced intersections that shape one's sense of self.

Across diverse challenges, resilience emerges as a common thread. The ability of these students to persist in the face of racial discrimination, workplace inequity, linguistic barriers, and stigmatization reflects a collective resilience that becomes a catalyst for self-formation.

The narratives challenge static notions of cultural identity, highlighting its fluid and context-dependent nature. The individuals grapple with, adapt to, and redefine their cultural identities amidst changing environments, contributing to a broader understanding of the complexity inherent in this aspect of self.

5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

To effectively support Chinese and Japanese international students in Italy, a comprehensive approach is needed that addresses both the administrative complexities of immigration policies and the critical social issue of racial discrimination. This approach should involve a collaborative effort among educational institutions, policymakers, local communities, and public institutions, aiming to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for these students.

Educational institutions play a pivotal role in easing the adaptation process for international students. By offering a diverse range of Italian language courses tailored to different proficiency levels, institutions can help students overcome language barriers, which are often the first hurdle in their cultural adaptation journey. Beyond linguistic support, integrating anti-discrimination training and cultural sensitivity programs into the curriculum for both students and staff will foster an environment of empathy, respect, and appreciation for all cultural backgrounds.

Additionally, developing clear mechanisms for reporting incidents of racial discrimination and providing counseling services can address the challenges of identity negotiation, adaptation, and coping with discrimination.

On the policy front, simplifying the process for obtaining and renewing residency permits is crucial. Reducing paperwork, decreasing wait times, and offering clear guidance can alleviate some of the bureaucratic challenges faced by international students. Strengthening and enforcing laws protecting against racial discrimination is equally important, ensuring that students have effective legal recourse for incidents of discrimination and bias. Policymakers should also promote multicultural education and awareness in schools and communities, encouraging programs that facilitate

cultural exchange and understanding.

Local communities and public institutions have a significant role in enhancing the living and learning environment for international students. Supporting outreach programs that connect international students with local communities can foster cultural exchange and mutual understanding. Providing training for employees in public services to ensure respectful and effective service to a diverse population is vital, particularly in healthcare, law enforcement, and social services. Ensuring that public institutions have staff with adequate language skills to assist international students in their native languages or in English will also improve the accessibility and quality of public services.

By addressing the administrative challenges and social issues of racial discrimination in a coordinated manner, Italy can significantly improve the experience of Chinese and Japanese international students. Creating a supportive, inclusive, and understanding environment not only aids in the students' cultural adaptation and personal development but also enriches the Italian cultural landscape with diverse perspectives and contributions. This holistic approach requires a collaborative effort among all stakeholders, underscoring the importance of collective action in fostering a welcoming atmosphere for international students. Through such efforts, we can ensure that international students not only succeed academically but also feel valued and included in their new cultural environment.

5.3 CONCLUSION

In examining the complex transformations of cultural, racial, and gender identities among Chinese and Japanese international students in Italy, it becomes evident that these identity dimensions are intricately interconnected and profoundly influenced by the broader context of globalization. This investigation, grounded in Social Identity Theory and Intersectionality, offers deep insights into the ways students navigate their multifaceted identities within unfamiliar cultural settings, shedding light on the significant impact these identities have on their cultural adaptation, self-formation, and social integration processes.

The journey of cultural identity transformation for these international students is marked by challenges such as overcoming language barriers and navigating differing gender norms. Crucially, this journey involves striking a delicate balance between

preserving their original cultural identities and assimilating into the host culture. This balance underscores the fluidity and diversity inherent in cultural identities and highlights the pivotal role that social environments and interactions play in shaping these identities.

In their navigation of racial identity, students confront and are often challenged by racial discrimination and stereotypes. These encounters not only intensify the struggle to find a sense of belonging within the host country but also illustrate the ways in which social identities are constructed through affiliation with specific social groups. This affiliation significantly influences students' self-perception and their integration into social fabric.

The exploration into gender identity further illuminates the complex processes by which students renegotiate and redefine their gender identities. This redefinition occurs against a backdrop of shifting gender roles and expectations, alongside the recognition of LGBTQ+ identities and the dynamics of complex family relationships. These experiences serve as a testament to the necessity of maintaining balance and consistency across the various dimensions of cultural, racial, and gender identities.

An intersectionality analysis enhances our comprehension of the international students' experiences, demonstrating how the interplay of cultural, racial, and gender identities intersects to shape individual self-identity and the broader process of social integration. Recognizing the intersecting nature of these identities underscores the importance of providing robust support systems for international students as they adapt and grow within their host countries. This analysis advocates for the creation of an inclusive and empathetic environment that respects and accommodates the diversity of identities, facilitating a smoother integration process for students navigating the complexities of identity transformation in a globalized world.

Thus, while resilience emerges as a notable attribute in these students' narratives, the emphasis remains on the broader processes of identity transformation, adaptation, and the critical need for inclusive support structures. This comprehensive approach to understanding the experiences of Chinese and Japanese international students in Italy highlights the complexities of navigating identity in cross-cultural contexts and underscores the importance of fostering environments that are conducive to their successful adaptation and development.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions (Chinese version)

本次采访将分为三部分。第一部分，文化适应； 第二部分，自我形成；第三部分，交叉体验。

文化适应

- 初来意大利时，你有什么期待？这些经历是否初步符合你的期待？
- 为什么选择了这所大学？
- 你喜欢你的专业吗？选择这个专业的决定因素是什么？
- 语言障碍对你有什么影响吗？
- 在意大利学习时，你认为来自中国的留学生面临哪些问题？
- 在日常生活中遇到了哪些文化差异？这些差异给你带来了哪些挑战？
- 如何管理适应新文化和社会的压力？你觉得自己能适应意大利的生活和文化吗？
- 对意大利的种族歧视或差别有何看法？
- 你是否与不会说中文的朋友交往？请详细说明。这些友情是如何建立的？
- 在意大利留学期间，需要适应的最大挑战是什么？
- 在意大利的经历对你未来的计划和期望有何影响？

身份形成

- 在保持原始文化身份的同时，你如何融入意大利文化？你的自我认知是怎样的？（文化、种族、性别是什么？）请解释。
- 在意大利的生活是否影响了你的个人身份？如果是，这种变化是如何发生的？
- 留学期间你的自我是如何改变的？改变了哪些方面？
- 在意大利的学习经历、居住、语言学习是否改变了你自己？有何变化？对身份的看法有变化吗？

交叉体验

- 在新环境中，你如何看待你的性别、种族和文化背景的交叉？
- 在意大利，你是否经历过性别、种族或文化歧视或刻板印象？这些经历对你有何影响？

Appendix B

Interview Questions (Japanese version)

インタビューの質問集

インタビューは 3 つの部分に分かれている。

文化適応

- イタリアに来た当初、どのような期待を抱いていましたか？初期の経験はこれらの期待と一致しましたか？
- なぜこの大学を選びましたか？
- 専攻はお好きですか？プログラムを選ぶ際の決め手は何でしたか？
- 言語の壁はどのように影響しましたか？
- イタリアで学んでいる際に、日本から来た留学生が直面する問題は何だと思いますか？
- 日常生活で遭遇した文化の違いは何ですか？これらの違いはあなたにとって何か課題をもたらしましたか？
- 新しい文化や社会に適応するストレスの管理はどうですか？イタリアの生活や文化に適応できていると思いますか？
- イタリアでの人種や差別についてどうお考えですか？
- 日本語が話せない友人や知人(ちじん)とは連絡を取っていますか？詳しく教えてください。これらの友情はどのように築(つ)かれましたか？
- イタリアに滞在する際に適応しなければならない最も大きな点は何ですか？
- イタリアでの経験は、将来の計画や期待にどのような影響を与えました

か？

アイデンティティ形成

- イタリアでの生活は、あなたの個人的なアイデンティティに影響を与えましたか？もしそうなら、この変化はどのように起こりましたか？
- 元の文化的アイデンティティを維持しながら、どのようにしてイタリア文化を取り入れていますか？自己認識はどのようですか？（文化、人種、ゲンダーは何ですか？）説明してください。
- 留学中に自分自身をどのように変えましたか？変化した点はどこですか？
- イタリアでの学習経験、滞在、言語習得(しゅうとく)はあなた自身を変えましたか？どのように変わりましたか？アイデンティティの見方は変わりましたか？

交差する経験

- 新しい環境において、あなたの性別、人種、文化的背景の交差はどのように感じますか？
- イタリアで性別、人種、または文化的な差別やステレオタイプを経験しましたか？これらの経験はあなたにどのような影響を与えましたか？

Appendix C

Interview Questions

Interview questions will be divided into three parts: Cultural Adaptation, Identity Formation, and Intersectional Experiences.

Cultural Adaptation

- What were your expectations when you first arrived in Italy? Did your experiences initially meet these expectations?
- Why did you choose this university?
- Do you like your major? What were the deciding factors in choosing this major?
- How has the language barrier affected you?
- What challenges do you think Chinese international students face while studying in Italy?
- What cultural differences have you encountered in your daily life? How have these differences presented challenges for you?
- How do you manage the stress of adapting to a new culture and society? Do you feel that you have adapted to life and culture in Italy?
- What are your thoughts on racial discrimination or biases in Italy?
- Do you interact with friends who do not speak Chinese? Please elaborate. How were these friendships formed?
- What has been the biggest challenge in adapting to your studies in Italy?
- How have your experiences in Italy influenced your future plans and expectations?

Identity Formation

- How do you integrate Italian culture while maintaining your original cultural identity? What is your self-perception? (What are your cultural, racial, and gender identities?) Please explain.
- Has living in Italy affected your personal identity? If so, how did this change occur?

- How has your self changed during your study abroad? What aspects have changed?
- Have your study experiences, living, and language learning in Italy changed you? How so? Have your views on identity changed?

Intersectional Experiences

- In the new environment, how do you view the intersection of your gender, race, and cultural background?
- In Italy, have you experienced any gender, racial, or cultural discrimination or stereotypes? How have these experiences affected you?