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Navigating Racialized Belonging: An Asian Critical Race Theory Analysis of Asian International Students' Experiences in U.S. Counselor Education

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Abstract. Asian international counseling students (ICS) contribute substantially to counselor education programs in the United States (US), yet their academic and professional development occurs within sociopolitical contexts shaped by racialization, exclusion, and immigration-related precarity. Guided by Asian Critical Race Theory (AsianCrit), this study explored how the contemporary US sociopolitical climate influences Asian ICS' adjustment and academic experiences within counselor education. Using interpretative phenomenological analysis, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 14 current or former Asian ICS enrolled in CACREP-accredited counselor education programs. Data were analyzed to capture participants' lived experiences and meaning-making processes. Four superordinate themes emerged: *Identity, Race, Nationality,* and *Religion*. Findings reflected experiences of Asianization, perpetual foreigner positioning, heightened performance expectations, and challenges to belonging across classroom, advising, supervision, and professional contexts. Participants also demonstrated resilience through cultural grounding, meaning-making, and selective support networks. Findings highlight the need for AsianCrit-informed counseling practice, culturally responsive counselor education, and reflexive, equity-oriented supervision that attends to systemic power, transnational stressors, and intersecting identities shaping Asian ICS' experiences.

Keywords: AsianCrit; international counseling students; counselor education; transnationalism; counselor professional identity; racialization

INTRODUCTION

International Students (IS) in Counselor Education

International students (IS) are individuals who travel from their home countries to pursue higher education in the United States (US; UNESCO Institute for Statistics, n.d.). These students contribute to a rich cultural diversity, representing a wide array of backgrounds (Perez-Rojas et al., 2021). The enrollment of IS in US higher education has surged from 34,000 in the 1948-1949 academic year to 1,057,188 in 2022-2023 (Institute of International Education [IIE], 2023). Currently, IS account for 5.6 percent of the total higher education population, with 21.3 percent of them graduate students. The majority hail from China (27.4 percent) and India (15.4 percent), followed by South Korea (4.1 percent) and Canada (2.6 percent; IIE, 2023).

The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) oversees the accreditation of counselor education (CE) graduate programs and tracks international counseling student (ICS) enrollment within these programs (Mascari & Webber, 2013). According to CACREP's latest data (2024), ICS constitutes 1.26 percent of master's students and 5.91 percent of doctoral students, amounting to 972 international students, or 1.48 percent of all enrollees in CACREP-accredited programs. While the percentage of ICS in these

programs has remained stable since 2012, the number of ICS enrolled in CACREP programs in 2023 has risen by approximately 214 percent compared to 2015 (CACREP, 2015; 2023).

Extant research is focused on understanding ICS's acculturative stress, transnational experiences, and needs in counseling programs (Behl & Harrichand, 2025; Behl et al., 2017; Lertora & Croffie, 2019). Still, scant research in CE exists on the impact of intersections of Asian ICS in the US, as determined by conducting a search using the terms "intersectionality" and "international counseling student(s)" in scholarly databases (EBSCO, ProQuest, JSTOR, Google Scholar). AsianCrit, an extension of Critical Race Theory (CRT; Crenshaw, 1989), centers the racialized experiences, cultural histories, and structural positioning of Asian and Asian diasporic communities in Western societies (Iftikar & Museus, 2018). Its seven key tenets include *Asianization, Transnational Contexts, (Re)constructive History, Strategic (Anti)Essentialism, Intersectionality, Storytelling and Counter-Storytelling, and Commitment to Social Justice* (Museus & Iftikar, 2013). When applied to CE, AsianCrit can help illuminate how Asian ICS navigate linguistic marginalization, invisibility, and the "model minority" myth, all of which often remain unaddressed in traditional multicultural frameworks (Ng, 2006). However, little empirical research has examined the developmental, supervisory, and advising experiences of international counseling students in the US using AsianCrit, underscoring the need for discipline-specific scholarship in counselor education (Behl & Harrichand, 2025; Yakunina, 2012). Note that a more detailed discussion of AsianCrit will follow the literature review.

The purpose of the current study is to utilize AsianCrit (Museus & Iftikar, 2013) to understand the experiences of Asian ICS within CE. Our guiding research question is: *How does the current US socio-political climate shape the adjustment and academic experiences of international counseling students, particularly in relation to the seven tenets of AsianCrit?* The subsequent section integrates literature on international students (IS) and ICS, acknowledging that ICS represent a subgroup within the broader IS community in the US.

Academic Experiences

ICS make important academic, cultural, and intellectual contributions to US higher education; however, their academic adjustment unfolds within sociopolitical contexts that can intensify institutional and psychosocial stressors (Amirova, 2025; Anandavalli et al., 2025; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Research consistently documents that ICS experience language barriers, sociocultural dissonance, isolation, and ongoing acculturation stress, all of which intersect with academic expectations and professional training demands (Anandavalli et al., 2025; Behl & Harrichand, 2025; Yakunina et al., 2013). Importantly, these challenges do not occur in a sociopolitical vacuum. Periods marked by anti-immigration rhetoric, restrictive visa policies, and racialized political discourse in the US have been shown to create a chilling effect for international students broadly, shaping perceptions of belonging, safety, and long-term professional viability (Song & Li, 2022). Such political shocks heighten uncertainty around visa stability, employment prospects, and postgraduation pathways, thereby compounding academic stress and professional identity development for ICS in counselor education.

While the broader literature on international students is robust, there is a growing call for discipline-specific inquiry within helping professions such as counselor education, where students are expected not only to meet rigorous academic standards but also to demonstrate advanced interpersonal, reflective, and multicultural competencies (Anandavalli et al., 2025; Behl & Harrichand, 2025; Behl & Laux, 2024). Within these contexts, sociopolitical hostility toward immigrants and international populations can amplify performance pressures and silence help-seeking, particularly when students perceive themselves as hypervisible, disposable, or contingent members of academic communities (Song & Li, 2022). ICS thus carry parallel and compounding pressures related to academic rigor, professional socialization, cultural adaptation, and immigration precarity (Amirova, 2025; Behl & Harrichand, 2025; Ng, 2006).

Advising further illustrates how sociopolitical context filters into everyday academic experiences. Faculty advisors may unintentionally assume familiarity with US academic norms or underestimate how shifting immigration policies and political rhetoric shape ICS' decision-making, stress levels, and future planning (Amirova, 2025; Anandavalli et al., 2025; Banjong, 2015). In counselor education programs, this can result in missed opportunities for culturally responsive mentoring and developmental advising that account for visa restrictions, employment uncertainty, and transnational obligations, factors that have been exacerbated during periods of restrictive federal policy and political volatility (Song & Li, 2022). Academic writing remains a particularly salient stressor, as ICS must navigate Western epistemological norms, disciplinary discourse, and evaluative standards while managing broader anxieties about legitimacy and belonging within US institutions (Amirova, 2025; Ng, 2006; Ravichandran et al., 2017).

Access to mental health resources is similarly shaped by sociopolitical climate. Intersecting stigma, cultural mistrust, financial barriers, and uncertainty about eligibility for care are intensified when international students perceive the US as an increasingly hostile or exclusionary environment (Sakız & Jencius, 2024; Xiong & Yang, 2021). Empirical evidence suggests that such climates reduce utilization of support services and contribute to lower satisfaction among international students compared to domestic peers (Hyun et al., 2007; Song & Li, 2022). Although International Student Services Offices provide procedural guidance, they are rarely

equipped to address the compounded academic, professional, and wellness concerns faced by ICS preparing for clinical practice amid ongoing political and immigration-related uncertainty (Behl & Harrichand, 2025; Behl & Laux, 2024). Financial constraints, including visa-based employment restrictions, rising tuition, and lack of access to federal aid, remain persistent stressors that are further magnified during periods of restrictive immigration policy and political instability (Amirova, 2025; Banjong, 2015; Behl & Harrichand, 2025).

The Needs of Asian International Students

Asian Critical Race Theory (AsianCrit; Museus & Iftikar, 2013), discussed in the subsequent section, offers a critical lens for understanding the layered realities of Asian ICS, whose development within counselor education (CE) programs unfolds amid broader US sociopolitical climates characterized by racialized immigration discourse, xenophobia, and shifting geopolitical narratives. Asian ICS frequently navigate CE spaces marked by perpetual foreigner positioning while simultaneously attempting to construct viable professional identities within a discipline rooted in relationality, reflexivity, and cultural attunement. These processes do not occur in isolation; rather, cultural assumptions, language expectations, and racialized perceptions, shaped by national policy debates, immigration enforcement practices, and global power relations, coalesce to influence how Asian ICS are perceived by faculty, supervisors, and peers, as well as how they come to understand themselves as emerging professionals. Kuo et al. (2023) underscored how cultural insensitivity within CE settings disrupts professional identity development, echoing broader intersectional scholarship demonstrating that identities are fluid, relational, and contextually contingent rather than discrete or static (Moffitt et al., 2023).

Within this sociopolitical context, systemic oppression, manifested through structural racism, exclusionary immigration policies, and normalized anti-Asian sentiment, extends into the academic, supervisory, and clinical training experiences of Asian ICS. Bias, both implicit and explicit, functions as a persistent undertow shaping classroom engagement, evaluation practices, supervisory expectations, and peer relationships. Whether enacted through microaggressions during class discussions, lowered or uneven expectations in supervision, or subtle exclusion from informal professional networks, these dynamics undermine confidence, belonging, and clinical development (Bulut et al., 2023; Vela et al., 2022). Gerwe (2025) emphasized that inequities rarely emerge along a single axis; instead, they braid across race, gender identity, class, age, and immigration status, amplifying vulnerability for Asian ICS who must master counseling competencies while navigating racialized and politicized academic environments (Um et al., 2023). Within AsianCrit, such experiences are understood as products of Asianization and intersectionality, rather than individual deficits, highlighting the powerful role counselor educators and supervisors play in either reproducing harm or cultivating equity-oriented training spaces.

Transnational theory further deepens this analysis by illuminating how Asian ICS remain embedded in cross-border emotional, cultural, and professional networks while training within US institutions. Portes et al. (1999) suggested that these transnational ties can be both protective and taxing, as students draw strength from family systems and cultural values while simultaneously managing uncertainty tied to visa policies, geopolitical tensions, and future employability. From an AsianCrit perspective, these transnational stressors are inseparable from US racial hierarchies and immigration regimes that position Asian ICS as conditionally welcome and perpetually temporary. Taken together, these bodies of literature call for moving beyond deficit-oriented or acculturation-only frameworks and toward an understanding of Asian ICS development as complex, intersectional, transnational, and structurally mediated (Anandavalli et al., 2020; Anandavalli et al., 2025; Behl & Harrichand, 2025). Responding to this gap, the present study centers Asian ICS voices to examine how macro-level sociopolitical forces and institutional climates shape their academic experiences within CE.

Theoretical Framework: AsianCrit

Guided by the central research question, this interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) draws on principles grounded in Asian Critical Race Theory (AsianCrit; Museus & Iftikar, 2013), situated within the genealogy of Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT emerged from critical legal scholarship to expose the systemic racism embedded within US social and legal institutions (Bell, 1987; Ladson-Billings, 1998) and to challenge its persistent effects across social structures (Chan et al., 2021; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). While CRT provides a broad framework for examining racialized experiences among marginalized communities, AsianCrit specifically centers the historical, political, and sociocultural positioning of Asians and Asian diasporic communities, including the impacts of the model minority myth, anti-immigration policies, and racialized geopolitical discourse (Chang, 1993; Museus & Iftikar, 2013). These commitments make AsianCrit particularly suited for examining the lived experiences of Asian ICS within counselor education (CE), thereby extending the framework to this population.

Rather than serving as a conceptual backdrop, AsianCrit functioned as an analytic lens guiding data engagement, interpretation, and theme development. Central to this analysis was the tenet of Asianization, which describes the racialization of individuals from Asian countries in ways that homogenize, exoticize, and dehumanize them within US contexts (An, 2016; Museus & Iftikar, 2013). AsianCrit scholars emphasize that

Asian communities are internally diverse, linguistically, religiously, culturally, and historically, yet are rendered monolithic under white supremacy to reinforce perpetual foreigner status (An, 2016; Museus & Iftikar, 2013). Analysis was therefore attuned to how participants described being positioned within CE classrooms, supervision, and professional spaces through racialized expectations shaped by U.S. sociopolitical discourse. Consistent with AsianCrit, attention was also given to transnational contexts, recognizing that white supremacy operates beyond national borders and is reinforced through capitalism, globalization, and immigration regimes that shape racial hierarchies across nations (An, 2020; Anandavalli et al., 2021; Kim, 2020).

The tenet of (re)constructive history further informed interpretation by centering how Asian ICS experienced oscillations between hypervisibility and invisibility within CE programs (Iftikar & Museus, 2018). While Asian individuals are often subjected to heightened scrutiny, particularly Asian women, who may be racialized and objectified, these same structures simultaneously silence and marginalize their voices (Iftikar & Museus, 2018; Kim, 2020). Participants' narratives were analyzed as efforts to reclaim meaning, agency, and professional legitimacy within institutions that frequently obscure Asian ICS histories and contributions.

AsianCrit's emphasis on strategic (anti)essentialism and intersectionality also guided analytic attention to how participants negotiated racial identity while resisting homogenization (Iftikar & Museus, 2018). Although race is understood as socially constructed and fluid, AsianCrit recognizes the strategic value of collective identity in fostering resilience, solidarity, and leadership (Kim, 2020). Drawing on intersectionality theory (Collins, 1986; Crenshaw, 1989), the analysis examined how participants' experiences were shaped by the interaction of race with gender, class, immigration status, nationality, and other sociocultural identities (An, 2020; Anandavalli et al., 2021), particularly within academic evaluation, supervision, and professional socialization.

Consistent with both AsianCrit and IPA, storytelling and counterstorytelling were treated as central epistemological tools. AsianCrit scholars argue that white supremacy is sustained through dominant epistemic frameworks, necessitating the centering of lived experience to examine trauma, resilience, resistance, community, and survival (Museus & Iftikar, 2013). Participants' narratives were therefore analyzed as counterstories that challenge dominant assumptions within counselor education and generate alternative ways of knowing grounded in cultural knowledge and relational meaning-making. Finally, AsianCrit's commitment to social justice framed interpretation toward identifying not only individual experiences of harm but also systemic implications for counselor education, supervision, and training practices, particularly in relation to intersecting oppressions tied to race, gender, sexual orientation, class, ability status, and immigration status (An, 2020; Iftikar & Museus, 2018). Collectively, extant scholarship has established that ICS experience significant acculturative stress, linguistic challenges, academic writing demands, advising complexities, financial strain, and barriers to accessing culturally responsive mental health support within counselor education programs (Amirova, 2025; Anandavalli et al., 2025; Behl & Harrichand, 2025; Yakunina et al., 2013). This body of research has been instrumental in identifying structural and psychosocial stressors that shape ICS academic adjustment and professional identity development. However, what remains insufficiently explored is how Asian international counseling students, as a distinct and racialized subgroup, experience counselor education through the intersecting forces of race, nationality, immigration status, language, religion, and transnational positioning, particularly when examined through an AsianCrit framework. The absence of AsianCrit-informed empirical research in counselor education limits the field's ability to fully understand how Asianization, the model minority myth, perpetual foreigner positioning, and transnational stressors operate within classrooms, advising relationships, supervision, and professional socialization. Addressing this gap is theoretically critical for extending AsianCrit into discipline-specific inquiry within counselor education and practically essential for informing culturally responsive pedagogy, equity-oriented supervision, and advising practices that move beyond deficit-based or assimilationist models. Without such scholarship, counselor education risks perpetuating invisibility, misrecognition, and inequitable training environments for Asian ICS, ultimately impacting student wellbeing, professional development, and the ethical preparation of the future counseling workforce.

METHOD

Researcher Description

The researcher is a cisgender male of Chinese and East Indian descent, also a former ICS and current associate professor on the East Coast in the US. He conducted the initial analysis and coding, thorough self-reflection on his personal experiences, assumptions, and biases through writing and revising a reflexivity statement guided by criteria delineated by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Additional information on reflexivity is found under the trustworthiness section below. His research interests stem from being a former ICS. He approached this study with a keen interest stemming from his encounters with transnationalism, encompassing race, nationality, and religion within the host country (i.e., the US). He recognized this group's diversity of perspectives and lived experiences, acknowledging that his personal histories "do not guarantee shared perspectives or experiences" (Sprague, 2016, p. 77). To mitigate potential biases (e.g., challenges with the US political climate, lack of support for ICS from multiple avenues [institutions, counseling programs, professional

counseling organizations], and being triggered by participant narratives), he employed journaling and open discussions (with his auditor, an Indian cisgender female former ICS, and current assistant professor in the Southern US) to bracket his knowledge, experiences, beliefs, and assumptions, thereby facilitating a more accurate understanding of each participant's unique experiences. This methodological approach aimed to ensure the integrity and comprehensiveness of the study's findings regarding the lived experiences of IS in the context of racialization, belonging, and identity negotiation within counselor education.

Participants

Recruitment required all participants to meet three criteria: (a) being 18 years of age or older, (b) identifying as an international student (current or former), and (c) being enrolled in or having completed a Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) accredited counselor education degree program. The study employed purposive criterion sampling (Smith, 2004) to recruit participants from the counselor education (CE) community (e.g., CESNET LISTSERV), consistent with interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) methodologies that privilege depth of engagement with a relatively homogeneous group. The final sample comprised fourteen participants (N = 14), each assigned a pseudonym to protect confidentiality. The sample included ten females and four males, with four master's students, eight doctoral students, and two recent counselor education graduates. Participants' length of residence in the United States varied, with four living in the US for 0–2 years, five for 3–5 years, four for 6–8 years, and one for over eight years. Participants represented diverse Asian countries, including two each from Malaysia, China, Vietnam, and India, and one each from Bangladesh, Indonesia, Thailand, and South Korea.

Data collection

Data was collected during Spring and Summer 2023. The phenomenological interviews of all 14 participants were completed using Zoom, with participants' answering the following three questions: *How does the current US socio-political climate shape the adjustment and academic experiences of ICS, particularly in relation to the seven tenets of AsianCrit?, How do ICS negotiate their intersections in relation to their personal and professional development?,* and *What examples highlight how their intersections impact(ed) their personal and academic experiences?* In addition to the semi-structured interview, data were collected using a demographic scale. The semi structured interview protocol was designed to elicit rich, nuanced narratives regarding participants' experiences (Smith et al., 2022).

Consistent with interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), sample size adequacy was evaluated based on idiographic depth and information power, rather than traditional notions of thematic saturation (Smith et al., 2022). Drawing on Malterud et al.'s (2016) concept of information power, the sample was considered sufficient due to the study's narrow and clearly defined aim, the relative homogeneity of the participant group (Asian international counseling students enrolled in or graduated from CACREP-accredited programs), strong theoretical anchoring in AsianCrit, and the richness and depth of the interview dialogue. Analytic sufficiency was not treated as a fixed endpoint but was recognized iteratively during data collection and analysis, as recommended within IPA methodology. Specifically, by approximately the tenth interview, recurrent experiential patterns related to racialization, belonging, transnational stressors, and professional identity development had cohered within and across individual cases. At this stage, subsequent interviews no longer generated substantively new experiential structures or conceptual categories; instead, they deepened, nuanced, and contextualized existing superordinate themes, providing greater dimensional complexity and idiographic richness. This pattern signaled that the analysis had achieved sufficient interpretive depth to address the research questions, aligning with IPA's emphasis on conceptual density, meaning-making, and theoretical engagement over numerical saturation thresholds (Smith et al., 2022).

While the term data saturation is sometimes used to describe this analytic juncture, it is more appropriately understood in this study as analytic sufficiency grounded in information power, rather than redundancy of codes or themes (Malterud et al., 2016; Saunders et al., 2018). To further support analytic rigor and reflexivity, the researcher engaged in peer debriefing with an auditor throughout the analytic process to critically examine interpretive assumptions and potential researcher influence. Concurrently, analytic memoing was used to synthesize insights, trace the evolution of themes, situate interpretations within the broader scholarly literature, and identify areas requiring further elaboration or clarification during subsequent stages of analysis (Elliott & Timulak, 2021). Together, these strategies supported methodological coherence with IPA's idiographic principles and strengthened the credibility and interpretive integrity of the findings.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

This study was funded by a research grant from the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES). Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained before data collection. All participants reviewed the IRB-approved consent form and provided their written and verbal consent before participating in the study.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the seven recursive steps of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) outlined by Smith et al. (2022), employing an iterative, inductive, and reflexive process to construct an in-depth account of international counseling students' (ICS) lived experiences of racialization, belonging, and identity negotiation (see Figures 1 and 2). Importantly, IPA served as the primary analytic method, while Asian Critical Race Theory (AsianCrit) was deliberately integrated at specific analytic junctures to enhance interpretive depth without constraining inductive sense-making. The analytic process began with immersive reading and re-reading of interview transcripts, followed by detailed line-by-line noting that captured descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual features of participants' accounts (Bingham, 2023). At this initial stage, AsianCrit functioned as a sensitizing framework rather than a coding schema; no a priori codes derived from AsianCrit were imposed. Instead, open coding privileged participants' own language and meaning-making, consistent with IPA's idiographic and phenomenological commitments (Smith et al., 2022; Ugiagbe et al., 2025).

Emergent themes were then developed within each individual case, honoring IPA's idiographic emphasis on understanding each participant's experiential world before engaging in cross-case analysis (Smith et al., 2022; Ugiagbe et al., 2025). During this phase, AsianCrit informed interpretive engagement with emergent themes, guiding attention to how participants described experiences of Asianization, transnational stressors, and intersectional identity positioning without predetermining thematic outcomes. In this way, AsianCrit supported analytic reflexivity by sensitizing the researcher to sociopolitical and racialized dynamics embedded within participants' narratives while preserving the inductive integrity of theme development. The researcher then systematically searched for connections across emergent themes within each transcript using multiple IPA analytic strategies, including abstraction, subsumption, and contextualization (Smith et al., 2022). This process reflected the hermeneutic circle, wherein interpretation moved recursively between parts and wholes, allowing localized meaning units to inform broader experiential patterns and vice versa (Rajasinghe et al., 2024; Smith et al., 2022). AsianCrit was used at this stage as an interpretive lens to examine how individual experiences were situated within broader U.S. sociopolitical, institutional, and transnational contexts.

Following idiographic analysis, cross-case examination identified patterns of convergence and divergence across participants' accounts. At this stage, AsianCrit was engaged more explicitly to theoretically integrate themes, illuminating how macro-level structures (e.g., immigration policy, racialization, geopolitical discourse) shaped shared and divergent experiences across the cohort (Rajasinghe et al., 2024). Themes were iteratively refined to reflect both commonalities and distinctive features of participants' experiences, consistent with IPA's balance between idiography and pattern recognition. Throughout the analytic process, the researcher engaged in double hermeneutics, interpreting participants' sense-making while maintaining reflexive awareness of his own positionality and interpretive influence through journaling and peer debriefing (Smith et al., 2022; Ugiagbe et al., 2025). AsianCrit further supported reflexivity by prompting ongoing examination of how power, race, and institutional positioning influenced both participants' narratives and the analytic process itself. Together, this layered approach ensured methodological coherence between IPA and AsianCrit, positioning AsianCrit as an analytic and interpretive resource rather than a purely normative framework.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), particularly within counseling and counselor education research, is established through methodological rigor, reflexivity, and transparency rather than statistical generalizability (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith et al., 2022). In the present study, credibility was supported through sustained reflexivity, detailed documentation, and analytic rigor consistent with IPA's idiographic commitments. The researcher maintained reflexive field notes throughout data collection and analysis, documenting both verbal and nonverbal participant cues, emerging interpretations, and analytic decisions. These materials formed part of a comprehensive audit trail that included interview protocols, analytic memos, coding iterations, and decision logs, thereby supporting dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Smith et al., 2022).

Triangulation was achieved through multiple analytic strategies rather than data source comparison, in alignment with IPA tradition (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Specifically, the researcher engaged in iterative transcript immersion, cross-case analysis, and peer debriefing with colleagues familiar with IPA and counselor education research. Peer debriefing served as a critical check on interpretive assumptions, theme coherence, and alignment between data excerpts and analytic claims, thereby strengthening analytic credibility in light of partial participant feedback. Member checking was conducted in two phases: during data collection, through in-interview clarification and reflective summarization, and during data analysis, through the return of verbatim transcripts and preliminary thematic interpretations to participants via email. Participants were invited to review materials and provide feedback within approximately two weeks. Six of the fourteen participants completed transcript verification and responded to analytic summaries; the remaining participants did not respond within the designated timeframe. While the response rate reflects a limitation, this pattern is consistent with IPA scholarship, which cautions against overreliance on member checking as a sole indicator of credibility, particularly when participants

are interpreting accounts at a different temporal or meaning-making stage than the analytic process (Smith et al., 2022). Importantly, none of the participants who responded requested substantive changes to transcripts or interpretations, lending support to the credibility of the analytic claims.

To address the limited member-checking response, the researcher relied on prolonged engagement with the data, idiographic depth across individual cases, peer debriefing, and a transparent audit trail to ensure analytic rigor. Transferability was supported using thick descriptions and verbatim quotations, allowing readers to assess resonance and applicability within similar contexts. Finally, analysis was guided by IPA's double hermeneutic, wherein the researcher interpreted participants' sense-making of their lived experiences, using AsianCrit (Museus & Iftikar, 2013) as an interpretive lens to situate meaning within broader sociopolitical and racialized contexts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

International counseling students (ICS) in the US encounter complex and layered experiences as they adjust to both graduate training and the broader sociocultural context. Guided by Asian Critical Race Theory (AsianCrit), this study examined how the current US socio-political climate shapes the adjustment and academic experiences of ICS, with particular attention to processes of racialization, belonging, and identity negotiation. The research questions informed findings. Four superordinate themes emerged that illuminate the nuanced realities faced by ICS in CE: *Identity, Race, Nationality,* and *Religion* (see Figure 2). These themes reflect the dynamic interplay between structural forces, cultural narratives, and personal meaning-making as ICS navigate the counseling profession while holding transnational identities and aspirations.

Superordinate Theme #1 Identity

The first superordinate theme, *identity*, was endorsed by all 14 participants. The participants described identity as a dynamic and continually negotiated experience shaped by racialized expectations, immigration histories, and transnational realities. Their narratives revealed how navigating who they were "here" versus "back home" required constant self-monitoring, cultural translation, and emotional labor across multiple contexts. It comprised two distinct subordinate themes: i) Racialized identities, and ii) Transnational identities.

Racialized Identities

Eleven of the 14 participants described how their sense of self as emerging counseling professionals was shaped by racialized expectations and stereotypes in US academic and professional contexts. This subordinate theme highlighted experiences of being identified through racial and gendered lenses, having their competence questioned, and feeling their inner experiences were invisible beneath racialized assumptions. Participants shared how these dynamics shaped not only how others saw them, but also how they monitored and managed their own self-presentation.

Participants described being cast into familiar racialized scripts, such as the "silent, obedient Asian" student. Hina, a female master's student, explained,

> being an Asian woman… there is this stereotype about Asian woman like being obedience… another silent obedient Asian woman, but what is actually happening is that when I'm not talking I'm actually thinking a lot of things in my mind and I'm trying to… draw my own conclusions to think things thoroughly.

Some participants linked racialization directly to the evaluation of their teaching and professional roles. Priya, a female counselor educator, reflected on a particularly harsh student evaluation and wondered, "Why [was] this one particular student never able to accept me as, as a professor and I thought is it because you know I look different, and maybe that's how racism or colorism plays [a] role." These racialized encounters often cut deeply, with Chen, a male doctoral student, sharing, "I have an accent I'm proud of… but… not being seen serious enough… in a professional or academic setting… really hits me like my self-esteem… am I fit for this… will I succeed?"

Figure 1. *The Seven-steps of IPA Data Analysis Adapted from Smith et al. (2022)*

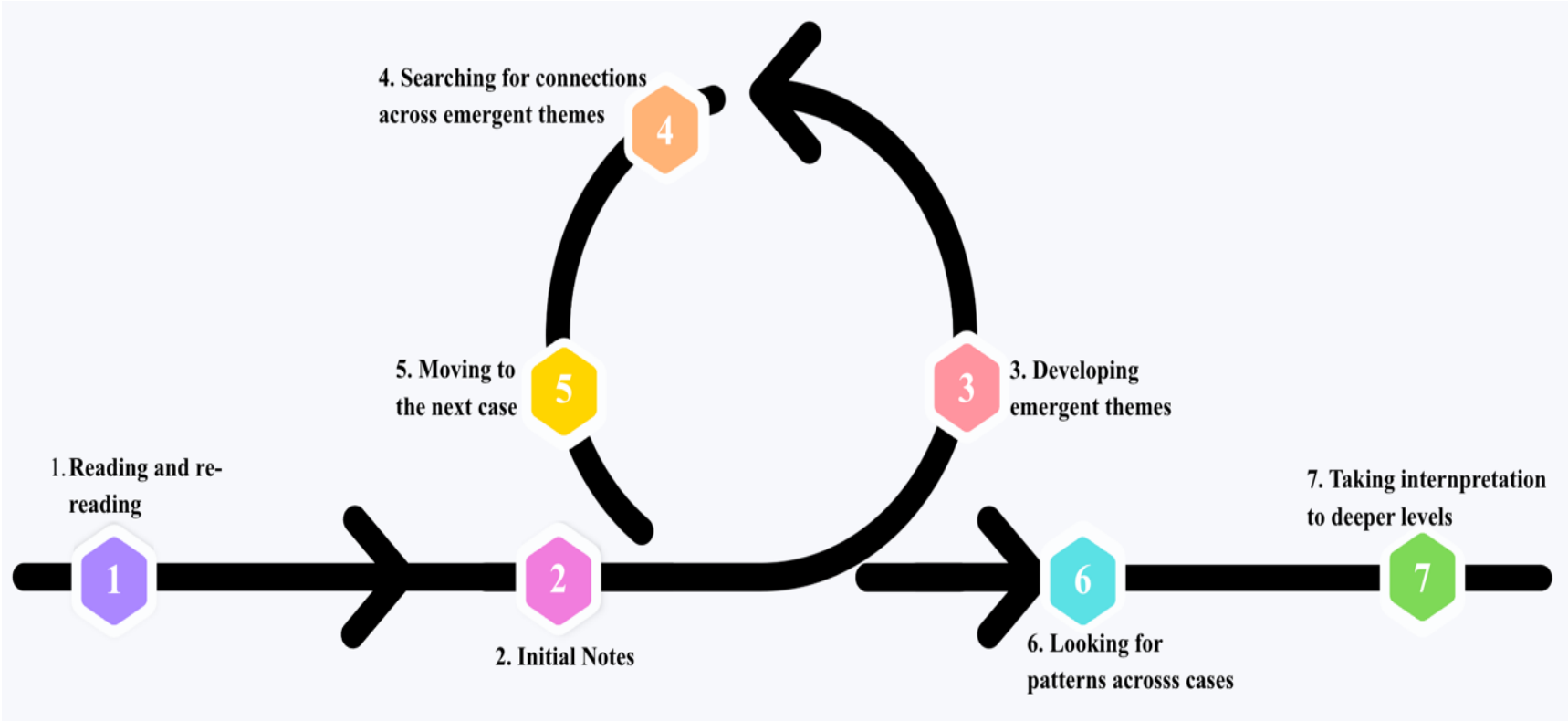
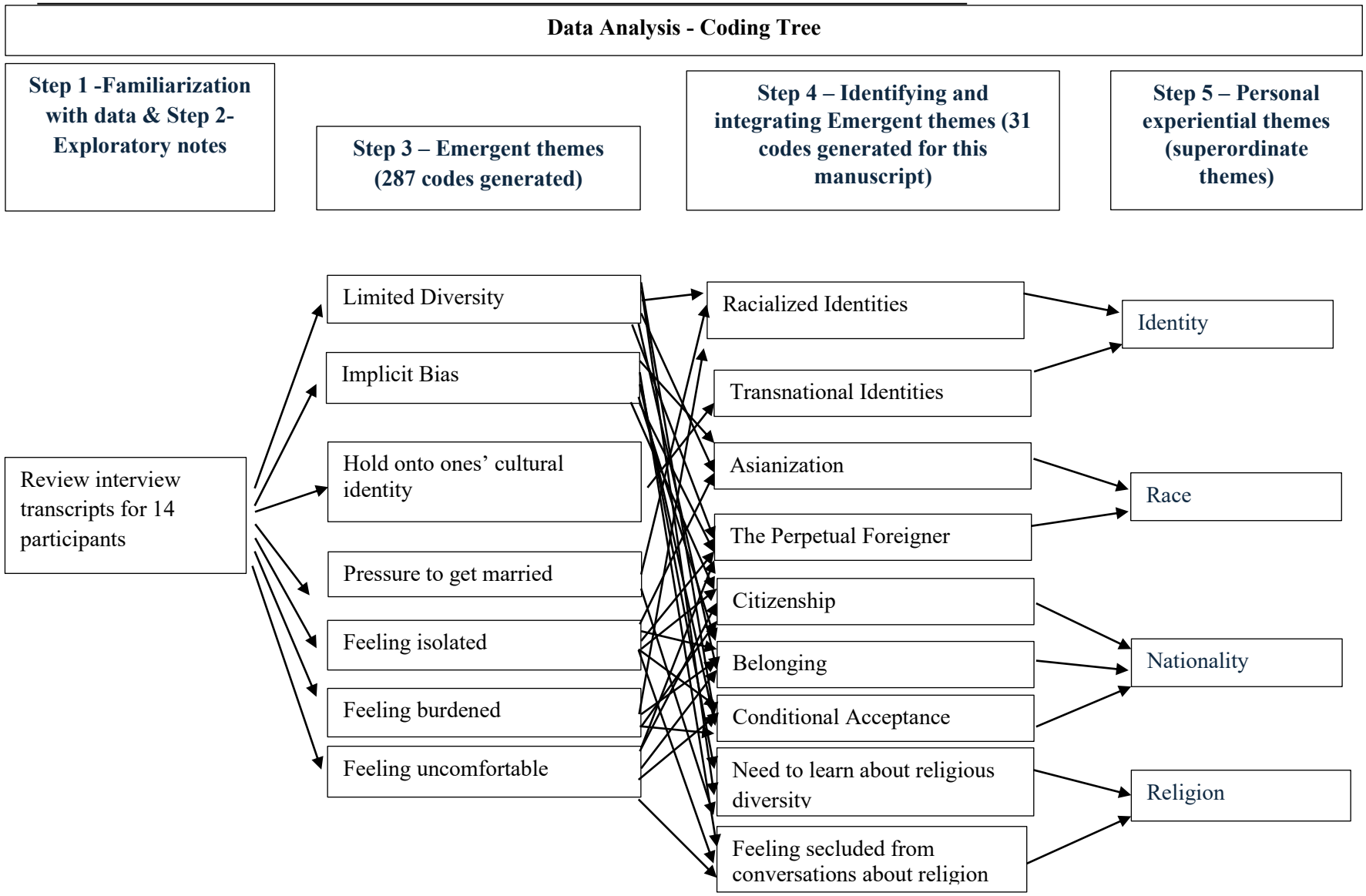


Figure 2. *Coding the Raw Interview Data to Generate Personal Experiential Themes*


Data Analysis - Coding Tree
Step 1 -Familiarization with data & Step 2- Exploratory notes
Step 3 – Emergent themes (287 codes generated)
Step 4 – Identifying and integrating Emergent themes (31 codes generated for this manuscript)
Step 5 – Personal experiential themes (superordinate themes)
Review interview transcripts for 14 participants
Limited Diversity
Implicit Bias
Hold onto ones' cultural identity
Pressure to get married
Feeling isolated
Feeling burdened
Feeling uncomfortable
Racialized Identities
Transnational Identities
Asianization
The Perpetual Foreigner
Citizenship
Belonging
Conditional Acceptance
Need to learn about religious diversity
Feeling secluded from conversations about religion
Identity
Race
Nationality
Religion

Transnational Identities

Ten participants highlighted the ongoing work of living "in between" nations, policies, and family expectations, constructing identities that were simultaneously rooted in home countries and reshaped in US contexts. This subordinate theme highlighted managing transnational obligations, time zones, and financial pressures, as well as navigating career plans constrained by immigration uncertainty. ICSs described carrying not only their own aspirations but the hopes, sacrifices, and investments of families and communities across borders.

For some, their identity as ICS was inseparable from the emotional and financial stakes of migration. Aihan, a female doctoral student, shared,

> I have to study harder than a local student… I felt very lonely and homesick. I miss my family, but I still have to study a lot… because if my grades are lower than a certain percentage, then it's going to be very difficult for me to go back home and then [get] a new visa to come here again… it's a lot of pressure.

Additionally, participants described structural barriers that made long-term planning fraught. Maya, a female doctoral student, recounted that multiple academic job offers disappeared once institutions realized she would need visa sponsorship: "Once they realize I have one year OPT [Optional Practical Training], they [said] we don't think we can sponsor you."

Superordinate Theme # 2 Race

The second superordinate theme, *race*, was endorsed by nine participants. Race emerged as a pervasive organizing force that shaped ICS visibility, treatment, and sense of safety in academic, clinical, and social spaces. It comprised two distinct subordinate themes: i) Asianization, and ii) The Perpetual Foreigner Frame.

Asianization

Nine participants described experiences of "Asianization", collapsed into a generalized "Asian" category that ignored national, ethnic, and cultural specificity. This subordinate theme included being treated as interchangeable within the broader Asian racial group, as well as experiencing anti-Asian racism intensified by the socio-political climate and COVID-19. ICS spoke about the erasure of their distinct backgrounds and the hypervisibility of their racialized bodies in moments of discrimination or threat.

Participants shared that others could not or would not distinguish between different Asian nationalities. Harold, a male master's student, stated that

> the majority of Americans couldn't distinguish… whether you're Vietnamese or Chinese or Korean or Japanese, and during COVID, there's an increasing… discrimination and even crime toward… the Asian community… that really concerned me… impacted my… sense of safety… during my stay here.

Other ICS described overt racialized hostility in everyday settings. Mira, a doctoral student, recounted studying alone in a crowded café when

> a white old women… was saying… did you buy this sh..seat, did you buy this shit or something like that… after hearing what those people were talking about… I realized that I was something, I can quote it as racial discrimination or something.

The lack of Asian representation in counseling and mental health further intensified these dynamics; as Aki, a male doctoral student, reflected, "Asian representation here in the mid-west… we are so, so rare, so scarce… in counseling and mental health, I think it's one of [the] place[s] where… that also makes it… pretty difficult."

The Perpetual Foreigner Frame

Nine ICS also described being positioned as perpetual outsiders who did not fully belong in US academic or social spaces, regardless of their tenure in the country or level of contribution. This subordinate theme encompassed assumptions that they would "go back," doubts about their knowledge or legitimacy because they were "international," and broader narratives that the US was welcoming in name but unwelcoming in practice.

Participants commonly encountered questions that marked them as temporary or not really from here. Mina, a female early-career counselor educator, noted,

> people ask me, like, do you plan on going back to your country after you graduate… I get asked this question… a lot… which shows that… they don't think I'm part of their culture or… their family kind of.

Other participants described being dismissed in collaborative learning situations. Naomi, a female master's student, recalled a group project where a domestic peer

> asked one question and I happen to know the answer… so I told her the answer, and she looked at me, and then she turned around, and she asked that question again to the person who was next to her… she was saying that because I'm an international student what do I know about English material… because I'm an international student.

At a broader level, Zara, a female doctoral student, captured the dissonance between public narratives and lived experience: "[The] US is a top host for international students right… But once we get to the US, we are like, wow, this is not a place that is very welcoming as it [is] being promoted."

Superordinate Theme #3 Nationality

The third superordinate theme, *nationality*, was endorsed by 12 participants. Nationality shaped participants' educational and professional trajectories through immigration policies, institutional barriers, and shifting socio-political climates. It comprised three distinct subordinate themes: i) Citizenship, ii) Belonging, and iii) Conditional acceptance.

Citizenship

Ten participants stressed how citizenship and legal status shaped their educational and professional trajectories. This subordinate theme captured how immigration policies, visa categories, and institutional sponsorship practices restricted options, created uncertainty, and left ICSs vulnerable to abrupt policy changes. For many, their national origin and non-citizen status overshadowed their qualifications and long-term aspirations.

ICS described how job and training opportunities were often contingent on sponsorship rather than merit. As Maya recounted, she received multiple offers from universities, but "if you click like you need a visa, they [US institutions] don't even… let you go forward… It's not even about your… skill set but your status, your country of origin basically." Other participants disclosed the discouraging effects of navigating H-1B and sponsorship pathways. Hai, a male doctoral student, noted that thinking about a career in the US "was a real red flag… because it seems like [there are] always… extra difficulties… all those things that come around… H-1B Visa and sponsorship… that kind of discouraged me." Policy changes amplified this uncertainty; Hai continued to describe receiving news during the Trump administration and COVID-19 of a proposed rule that "international students need to be… can no longer hold visa status… and need to be back to [their] country… It's kind of provoking anxiety and worries during that time."

Belonging

Twelve participants spoke explicitly about belonging, where they felt seen, valued, and at home, and where they felt marginalized or betrayed. This subordinate theme included experiences of profound disconnection in some counseling programs, in contrast to pockets of strong support and affirmation in others. ICS described belonging as dependent on faculty support, peer relationships, and institutional cultures that either honored or ignored their international and racialized identities.

For some ICS, negative treatment by trusted faculty members fundamentally disrupted their sense of belonging. Mina described feeling

> really like betrayed… by the people that I should be able to trust, like in my department… that was like my academic advisor… that's… hard to feel I… belong in the space that I am in just because the treatment that I received… as an international student.

In contrast, some participants recalled earlier educational experiences where they felt profoundly nurtured. Chen noted that during her studies, the faculty

> …really supported me and they really, like, paid attention to what I was asking for… it was one of those places where I feel appreciated and a sense of belonging, so I think [it] created a first… good experience with academia.

Still others linked belonging to their ability to be authentic in relationships; as Leilani, a female doctoral student, shared, "it's kind of makes it more difficult to be very authentic in… friendships or any relationships here and to make like close relationships," describing how constant self-monitoring around language, culture, and politics impeded connection.

Conditional Acceptance

Nine participants described feeling that their acceptance in academic and professional spaces was contingent on exceptional performance, perfectionism, and conformity to expectations of being the "strong" or "problem-free" ICS. This subordinate theme captured internalized pressure to overperform to earn trust, combined with external messages to do more than their domestic peers merely to be seen as competent.

Several participants stressed the constant need to prove themselves. Priya shared, "I psychologically feel more pressured… to prove to my students that I'm better… so… navigating that [role] is something that I'm very cautious about… I do know that it does play a role." Likewise, Zara described feeling compelled to be "extra… outstanding in order for the parents and students to trust me… like I published 2 papers during my master's degree… I had this extra anxiety and pressure to meet the standards of the tenured professor in the future." For others, this conditional acceptance translated into a need to appear flawless. Aki reflected,

> I have to be perfect [so] that I cannot make mistakes when I share my opinions… because of me… working to live up to the stereotype… faculty or my peers will think I am the student who has no problem… it takes away some… deep connection that I could have… with the faculty or my peers.

Superordinate Theme #4 Religion

The fourth superordinate theme, *religion*, was endorsed by 10 participants. Participants engaged with religion as both a deeply personal identity and a cultural system that intersected with race, nationality, and professional identity. Their reflections highlighted the complexity of negotiating spiritual or non-religious worldviews within counseling programs that often-lacked nuance in understanding global religious diversity. It comprised two distinct subordinate themes: i) Spirituality/religion through an intersectional lens, and ii) Spirituality/religion through a cultural lens.

Spirituality/Religion Through an Intersectional Lens

Eight ICS reflected on spirituality and religion as deeply intertwined with race, gender, sexuality, nationality, and professional identity. This subordinate theme captured how participants navigated multiple, intersecting identities, such as being Asian, female, queer, or Christian, in counseling programs that were often secular or perceived as suspicious of certain faith traditions. Religion was experienced not in isolation but as one strand in a complex web of intersecting social locations.

Yuna, a female master's student, described how being Asian, female, and Christian compounded marginalization:

> being Asian and being female in itself is already seen as like less than because of the… stereotype… and then… being a Christian in a mental health field is seen as ooo what are you going to do because you're a Christian… like how harmful Christianity is… historically… which for me as a Christian I am ashamed… knowing that history was part of… my religion or my faith.

Yuna went on to recall being directly questioned about whether her faith would make her biased as a counselor, reflecting, "it felt like questioning about like if you're a Christian then you are going to be very biased when you are doing counseling… well that's so judgmental… like you do not know who I am." Aki, who identified as Thai, Asian, with Chinese heritage, and as a gay man, explained that different aspects of his identity intersected in ways that were difficult to navigate:

> being a Buddhist and being Thai, me being Asian… having a Chinese heritage… I also identify as [a] gay man… sometimes it's just easy for me to put one or two aspects of myself to connect with other people while there [are] still parts of me that I'm not entirely sure how to fully navigate… in the Asian community I think sometimes it's hard… to really… talk about my sexuality fully… [it] is… so rare so scarce… that also makes it… pretty difficult.

Spirituality/Religion Through a Cultural Lens

Nine participants discussed how religion functioned as a cultural system that shaped, and was shaped by, national narratives, politics, and counseling practice. This subordinate theme included negotiating assumptions about religiosity attached to certain countries, grappling with the role of religion in controversial social issues, and recognizing gaps in their own knowledge of US religious diversity while working with clients.

Participants from non-religious backgrounds described encountering assumptions about their national origin and faith. Harold, a Chinese national, reflected,

> I'm from a non- religious background, so religion and nationality… people do have the stereotype of like people from China they tend to be less religious, and I know there's also this political issue… so that's also part of that… I kind of feel I… learn about… completely different version[s] of [a] story from China [and] from the United States… there are lots of censorship, so they're not accurate, so I tend to say oh the US… but then I realize that's also another version.

Harold further emphasized the importance of learning about religious systems to work effectively with clients: "that's also part I feel like I need to learn more about… especially when thinking about working with clients who have those… religious identities… to learn more about how the religious identity systems [work]." Maya described how religion shaped their understanding of controversial issues in counseling:

> I think the way religion affect me is it's a very… important factor, especially when it comes to working with… clients… especially when it comes to working with… LGBTQ+ clients or working on issues… related to abortion… It's harder for me to understand people's… fixation around anti-LGBTQ+ or anti-abortion from a religious standpoint… because I don't… share that religious background.

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of Asian international counseling students (ICS) within counselor education (CE) through the lens of Asian Critical Race Theory (AsianCrit). The findings illuminate the nuanced, multilayered ways Asian ICS navigate academic training, professional identity development, and belonging within US CE programs. Guided by AsianCrit (Museus & Iftikar, 2013), this study underscores how identity, race, nationality, and religion intersect within broader sociopolitical and institutional contexts to shape ICS experiences. Consistent with prior research documenting international students' struggles with racialization, marginalization, and belonging (An, 2020; Anandavalli et al., 2021; Kim, 2020), the present findings extend the literature by centering Asian ICS voices and illuminating how these dynamics specifically influence counselor development, professional confidence, and relational engagement within CE contexts.

The superordinate theme of *Identity* reflected the ongoing, dynamic negotiation of self that Asian ICS experience while living across national, cultural, and institutional boundaries. Participants' narratives illustrate that identity formation is not a linear developmental process, but a continuous balancing act shaped by racialized expectations, immigration uncertainty, and transnational obligations. These findings align with AsianCrit's emphasis on subjectivity and intersectionality, highlighting how identity is constructed relationally and structurally rather than solely intra-psychically (Museus & Iftikar, 2013). Similar to Kuo et al. (2023) and Moffitt et al. (2023), participants described managing multiple cognitive and emotional demands while simultaneously meeting academic expectations and sustaining familial responsibilities across borders. Additionally, professional identity development unfolded within contexts that required constant self-monitoring, linguistic adaptation, and emotional labor, underscoring how counselor identity formation for Asian ICS is inextricably tied to transnational and racialized realities (Bhel & Harrichand, 2025; Bhel et al., 2017).

The theme of *Race* illuminated how processes of racialization continue to shape Asian ICS visibility, credibility, and sense of safety within CE programs. Experiences of *Asianization* and the *Perpetual Foreigner Frame* reflect longstanding racial scripts that position Asian bodies as simultaneously hypervisible and excluded (An, 2016; 2020). Participants' accounts of microaggressions, accent-based discrimination, and dismissal of expertise align with existing research on implicit and explicit bias in educational and professional settings (Bhel & Harrichand, 2025; Bulut et al., 2023; Vela et al., 2022). Within AsianCrit, these experiences are understood as manifestations of structural racism that delegitimize Asian ICS' belonging and professional authority. Importantly, the findings demonstrate how racialization operates not only in overt incidents but also through subtle, cumulative interactions that shape self-perception, confidence, and relational engagement (Museus & Iftikar, 2013). This supports AsianCrit's assertion that Asian identities within US institutions are often constructed through hierarchical racial logics that remain normalized and underexamined (An, 2020).

Nationality emerged as a salient organizing construct shaping participants' academic trajectories, professional aspirations, and sense of belonging. Immigration status, visa restrictions, and institutional sponsorship practices transformed career planning into a conditional and stressful process, reinforcing uncertainty and vulnerability (Anandavalli et al., 2020; Behl & Harrichand, 2025). Participants' experiences of conditional acceptance, feeling valued only when overperforming or conforming to expectations of the "ideal" international student, echoed prior scholarship on internalized pressure and perfectionism among ICS (Anandavalli et al., 2025). These findings illustrated how belonging within CE is often contingent rather than unconditional, requiring Asian ICS to continuously prove competence, gratitude, and resilience. From an AsianCrit perspective, such dynamics reflect broader

sociopolitical narratives that frame immigrants as temporary, replaceable, or deserving only under conditions of exceptional productivity (Museus & Iftikar, 2013).

The theme of *Religion* further highlighted the intersectional complexity of Asian ICS experiences. Participants described spirituality and religion as deeply embedded within cultural, racial, gendered, and national identities, rather than as isolated belief systems. These findings align with prior research demonstrating the role of religion and spirituality in shaping international students' well-being, meaning-making, and responses to acculturative stress (Hsu et al., 2009; Philip et al., 2019). Within CE contexts, participants reported navigating assumptions about religiosity, moral positioning, and clinical bias, particularly when their faith identities diverged from dominant secular or Western norms. AsianCrit's commitment to reconstructive history and counterstorytelling offers a framework for understanding how religious identities are often misunderstood or flattened within counselor training, underscoring the need for greater global and cultural nuance in discussions of spirituality within CE curricula (Museus & Iftikar, 2013).

Taken together, findings illustrate that Asian ICS experiences within CE are not incidental or peripheral, but structurally produced through intersecting systems of race, nationality, religion, and power. AsianCrit provides a critical lens for understanding these experiences as interconnected rather than discrete, revealing how transnational contexts and perpetual foreigner narratives shape both visible and invisible aspects of counselor development (Museus & Iftikar, 2013). By centering Asian ICS counterstories, this study challenges deficit-oriented frameworks and calls counselor education programs to recognize these lived experiences as essential sources of knowledge. The study advances the counseling literature by reframing Asian ICS not as individuals in need of adjustment, but as emerging counseling professionals whose development is profoundly shaped by systemic forces within training environments.

Implications

The results provide important implications for counseling practice, particularly the need for counselors and counselor educators to adopt culturally responsive, critically conscious approaches when working with Asian international counseling students (ICS). Participants' experiences of racialization, perpetual foreigner framing, and conditional acceptance highlight how systemic bias and socio-political climates can undermine wellness, professional confidence, and help-seeking behaviors. Counselors working with ICS should intentionally assess for acculturative stress, racial trauma, immigration-related anxiety, and identity negotiation across race, nationality, and religion, rather than framing concerns solely as individual adjustment issues. Integrating AsianCrit-informed interventions, for example, validating counterstories, naming systemic oppression, and honoring transnational identities, can foster psychological safety and strengthen the therapeutic alliance (Museus & Iftikar, 2013; Behl & Harrichand, 2025). Furthermore, given documented barriers to service utilization, counseling centers and training clinics should collaborate with international student offices to clarify eligibility, reduce stigma, and provide culturally responsive outreach customized to ICS preparing for helping professions.

With respect to counselor education, there is a need to move beyond generic multicultural competence toward intentional, discipline-specific training that addresses the unique positionality of Asian ICS. Faculty should critically examine how classroom participation norms, evaluation practices, and assumptions about language proficiency may reproduce Asianization and deficit-based narratives (Ng, 2006; Kuo et al., 2023). Structured advising and mentoring models that developmentally address professional socialization, academic writing, and navigation of US counseling norms are particularly salient, as participants described these areas as sources of chronic stress and inequity (Amirova, 2025; Anandavalli et al., 2025). Counselor education programs may also benefit from incorporating AsianCrit, transnational theory, and intersectionality into curricula to help all students, domestic and international, critically interrogate power, privilege, and belonging within the profession (Anandavalli et al., 2020; Moffitt et al., 2023). Such curricular shifts align with CACREP's (2023) emphasis on cultural humility and advocacy while responding directly to the lived realities illuminated in this study.

For counseling supervision, findings suggest supervisors must attend carefully to how race, nationality, language, and religion shape supervisory relationships and evaluation processes for ICS. Participants' reports of heightened pressure to overperform and appear "problem-free" indicate that supervision can inadvertently reinforce conditional acceptance if power dynamics and cultural assumptions go unexamined (Bulut et al., 2023; Vela et al., 2022). Supervisors are encouraged to engage in ongoing reflexivity, explicitly discuss cultural identities and immigration-related stressors, and normalize help-seeking and vulnerability within supervision. Applying AsianCrit tenets, particularly storytelling, intersectionality, and a commitment to social justice, can help supervisors counteract invisibility and foster more equitable developmental feedback (Iftikar & Museus, 2018). Collectively, these

implications call for systemic responsibility by the counseling profession to create environments in which Asian ICS are not merely retained but affirmed and empowered as emerging professional counselors.

Although this study provides meaningful insights into racialization, belonging, and identity negotiation among ICS in the US, several limitations must be noted. First, all participants were from Asian countries (i.e., Malaysia, China, Vietnam, India, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Thailand, South Korea, and Taiwan), which means their experiences cannot represent all ICS. While their narratives offered substantial depth, the findings cannot be generalized to ICS from other world regions. Future research, including ICS from additional geographical locations, may reveal both similarities and differences in transnational experiences. A second limitation is that all participants were recruited from CACREP-accredited programs. ICS in non-accredited programs may face different cultural, academic, or structural dynamics, suggesting the need for additional exploration across varied program types. It is important to recognize that the average interview duration (~49 minutes) may be viewed as a limitation. However, using three guiding questions, the study adhered to Smith et al.'s (2022) guidelines for single interviews with a relatively homogeneous sample, and the 14 narratives yielded rich, consistent data. Because no new information emerged, saturation was achieved, and a second interview or focus group was not required. Finally, as interpretative phenomenology relies on the researcher's interpretation, the researcher's positionality may have influenced how he understood participants' experiences despite intentional efforts to bracket biases. The unique combination of emotional labor, academic expectations, and professional identity development suggests that ICS may benefit from tailored advising models, enhanced writing mentorship, culturally attuned mental health supports, and systemic advocacy that addresses financial barriers. Future research is needed to deepen the field's understanding of how counseling programs can cultivate conditions that not only sustain but also empower ICS as emerging mental health professionals.

CONCLUSIONS

This study highlights that Asian international counseling students' academic and professional development cannot be understood apart from the racialized, transnational, and socio-political contexts in which their training occurs. Guided by AsianCrit, the findings illuminate how experiences of identity negotiation, conditional belonging, and systemic bias shape counseling students' sense of competence, wellness, and professional identity formation. Supporting Asian ICS requires more than individual-level accommodations; it demands intentional, structurally informed changes across counseling practice, counselor education, and supervision. By centering counterstories and critically examining power, institutions and professionals can move toward training environments that affirm belonging, equity, and justice for international counseling students. Ultimately, such efforts strengthen not only ICS outcomes but also the ethical and multicultural integrity of the counseling profession.

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