OJED
OPEN JOURNALS IN EDUCATION

Lost in Transition: A Two-Year Collaborative Autoethnography of South Korean Doctoral Students' Development and Identity Negotiation

Miso Kim
Center for English as a Lingua Franca, Tamagawa University, Japan

Eunhae Cho
Department of Applied Linguistics, The Pennsylvania State University, USA

ABSTRACT

This collaborative autoethnography (CAE) explores the lived experiences of two South Korean doctoral students' transnational career transitions during 2019–2021. The purpose of the CAE is twofold: (a) to analyze international doctoral students' development during the transition; and (b) to investigate negotiations of their complex identities. The data came from our biweekly multimodal narratives on our development (96 total) and biweekly meeting transcripts (48 total), following recurrent restorying (Golombek & Johnson, 2021). The data analysis revealed that our major challenges during transition were to receive developmentally appropriate help (responsive mediation; Johnson & Golombek, 2016) and to build transnational, complex identities in a liminal space (Bhabha, 1994) between different geographical locations. Based on our two-year dialogue data, we offer suggestions for negotiating appropriate levels of mediation and reframing liminal identities in a liberating way.

Keywords: collaborative autoethnography, mediation, liminal space, South Korea, narrative

This collaborative autoethnography (CAE) explores the lived experiences of two South Korean (henceforth, Korean) doctoral students in transition from a Korean workplace to a U.S. doctoral program and from the said program to a Japanese university. They moved abroad to pursue their dreams, as their transnational

mobility was "a resourceful vehicle to help them 'become' the kind of person, professional or citizen that they aspire to be" (Tran, 2016, p. 1269). However, as they began their transition to the new communities, they encountered numerous challenges commonly shared by international students. Although previous studies mainly adopt the socialization metaphor (Sfard, 1998) to account for their challenges (e.g., Cai et al., 2019), the metaphor seems to leave out the students' microgenetic development and identity negotiation between multiple communities. Thus, we draw on the concept of mediational spaces (Golombek & Johnson, 2004) to analyze international students' development, and liminality (Bhabha, 1992, 1994) to investigate their identity negotiations in interstitial spaces between multiple communities.

The two participants' lived experiences of transition are important for two reasons. First, although several studies have reported on new doctoral students' experiences (e.g., Foot et al., 2014; Teng, 2020), little is known about what they experience as they graduate and move to a new position and country. This study analyzes both incoming and graduating doctoral students' experiences of transition, providing a holistic account of how they develop as they overcome challenges. Second, international students develop not only in mentor–mentee relationships or the academic community but also between all transnational communities to which they belong. This study focuses on the latter, revealing how the participants navigate all communities to become better researchers, teachers, and academics. Specifically, this study addresses two goals: (a) analyzing international doctoral students' development during the crucial transition periods and (b) investigating their negotiations of their complex identities during their transnational movement. By fulfilling these goals, this work provides implications for researchers to study international students' crucial moments of transition and for practitioners to help doctoral students use the complexities of their identities as resources for growth.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Beyond the Socialization Metaphor

Previous research on international doctoral students tends to view their development in relation to participation in academic communities. What underlies the studies is a socialization metaphor as a gradual increase in participation in one community (Sfard, 1998). The students are viewed as newcomers who need to learn the culture of the scholarly community, seek mentoring from more experienced academics, learn the new language, and eventually become expert independent scholars. For instance, studies by Foot et al. (2014), Rayner et al. (2915), and Teng (2020) investigated the emerging identities of doctoral students and their negotiation of participation and membership in academic communities. Cai et al. (2019) identified common challenges they face as they participate in communities, and Ku et al. (2008) and Thomson and Esses (2016) provided implications for how to better mentor and support international students. These studies supposed that learning takes place as the students participate in the

community, negotiate their identities, and learn from the old-timers, who are mostly advisors, mentors, or experienced colleagues. In other words, learning is "changing participation and identity transformation in a community of practice" (Wenger, 1998, p. 11).

Although this socialization metaphor provides a useful alternative to cognitive-oriented models in which learning is compared to knowledge transfer (Sfard, 1998), it falls short of explaining international students' development for two reasons. First, socialization is a lens too wide to focus on the students' micro-level moments of learning. As doctoral students participate, they negotiate their meanings with others in the community. The term negotiation, however, is too broadly intended to "convey a flavor of continuous interaction, of gradual achievement, and of give-and-take" (Wenger, 1998, p. 53). How do doctoral students receive the appropriate level of help they need, and how do they learn to use the help to develop their identities further? The broad nature of socialization is not apt for explaining the students' complex micro-level development, in which their cognitions, emotions, resources, coping strategies, and help from others are all intertwined.

Second, the socialization metaphor provides a limited explanation of identity conflicts across multiple communities. It can address the issues of multi-membership and examine participation across boundaries (Wenger, 1998), and some studies (cf. Baker & Lattuca, 2010; Baker & Pifer, 2011) have cast a wider net to analyze doctoral students' complex identities and developmental networks across multiple communities. However, it is also necessary to investigate the liminal spaces between the communities. As Handley et al. (2006) noted, "one could argue that the site for the development of identities and practices is not solely *within* a community of practice but in the spaces between multiple communities" (p. 650, italics in original). International students straddle the boundaries of various communities in their home country, their destination country, and perhaps other countries they had resided in. They may negotiate their identities between the communities, which cannot be fully addressed by the dichotomies of the socialization metaphor, such as core/marginality, center/periphery, participation/non-participation, and mentor/mentee. For these two reasons, we draw on new concepts to explain international doctoral students' transition and development.

Developing in Mediational Spaces and Negotiating Identities in Liminal Spaces

We draw on these two concepts: mediational spaces (Golombek & Johnson, 2004) and liminal spaces (Bhabha, 1992, 1994). First, we shift our focus from socialization to mediational spaces (Golombek & Johnson, 2004) to closely examine international doctoral students' microgenetic development in transition. In the socialization metaphor, students learn as they increase their participation in a community; in mediational spaces, the students develop as they externalize their experiences and emotions, discuss them with their more experienced peers, and eventually recontextualize and reinternalize the new understandings and concepts

(Golombek & Johnson, 2004, 2017, 2021). International doctoral students often confront challenges that they cannot solve by themselves, including language barriers, isolation, and identity conflicts (Gao, 2021). They may search for spaces to externalize their emotions and current understandings of their situation, such as going to their advisor during office hours or having coffee with people they trust. In these spaces, they verbalize what they feel and possibly learn to use new psychological tools from people who are more experienced than they are. The tools include new concepts, models, theories, and guides, all of which can mediate what the students are going through internally and psychologically. As the students try to resolve their problems with the new tools, they internalize the tools and redirect their further actions. From this viewpoint, international doctoral students develop as they learn to use new psychological tools. The process of learning to use the newly acquired tools and reaching their proximate level of development is termed mediation (Vygotsky, 1978). Development takes place in mediational spaces in which the students and people more experienced than they are come together to externalize their understandings, to learn to use the psychological tools, and to make the tools their own (Golombek & Johnson, 2004).

Second, we draw on the liminal space concept (Bhabha, 1992, 1994) to examine how they negotiate their identities between transnational communities. Bhabha (1994) elaborated that "[t]hese 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself" (p. 2). International doctoral students occasionally find themselves split between their country of origin and the countries in which they live(d), or between their mother tongue and new language(s) (Han et al., 2020). While the feeling of estrangement is real, transnational academics construct hybrid and fluid identities that stretch beyond the dichotomies of mentee/mentor, newcomer/old-timer, and core/periphery. They traverse the boundaries between languages, cultures, and communities, embracing their liminality as an asset rather than a liability (Ajšić, 2020). The spaces offer possibilities of hybridizing identities and negotiating in-betweenness.

In short, we use mediational spaces (Golombek & Johnson, 2004) to narrow the focus to international doctoral students' microgenetic development, and we draw on the concept of liminal spaces (Bhabha, 1992, 1994) to examine the students' negotiation of in-between identities.

METHOD: A COLLABORATIVE AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

We used CAE to investigate international doctoral students' lived experiences of the transitions experienced at the beginning (Eunhae) and end (Miso) of the Ph.D. program. We chose this method because it allows the researcher to understand society "through the unique lens of self" (Chang et al., 2013, p. 18) by drawing on his or her life histories and innermost feelings as data for social inquiry. CAE enables researchers to collect, analyze, and interpret autobiographical data as a team, providing opportunities to pool a different array of lived experiences and to

make sense of data from diverse perspectives (Chang et al., 2013). Although CAE can take many different forms, our CAE project focused on longitudinally capturing and analyzing identities-in-the-making.

Researcher-Participants

Eunhae and Miso identify as Asian women who were in their late twenties at the time of writing this manuscript. We were born and raised in Korea, earned bachelor's and master's degrees in English language and literature (Eunhae) and English education (Miso) at a large university in Seoul, and moved to the United States to begin a doctoral program in applied linguistics at a research-oriented Midwestern university. We were attending the same Ph.D. program at the beginning of this project, but Miso soon defended her dissertation and graduated. Figure 1 shows our career trajectory before and during the data collection period in the study reported herein.
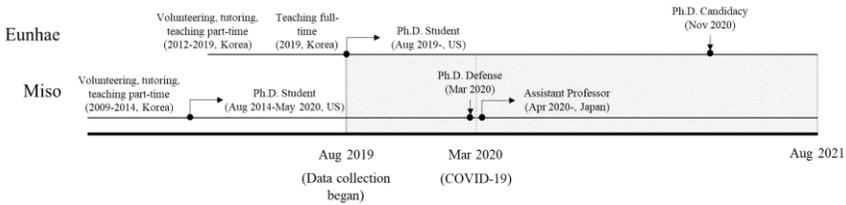

Figure 1: The Two Autoethnographers' Career Trajectories

Data Collection and Analysis

The data for this study came from a larger CAE project. For the project, three former or current international doctoral students in applied linguistics had been writing narratives on their everyday lives, teaching, and research and had been sharing these biweekly in online meetings since August 2019. The individual narratives were typically two to three pages long, mostly in Korean, and occasionally with creative forms of expression (e.g., internet memes, photos, and drawings). They were uploaded 24 hours before the designated meeting time. In the meetings, we shared our feelings and sought help and advice from each other. All the meetings were held online, video-recorded, and transcribed. The project was reviewed by the Institutional Review Board at the authors' institution, but it fell under Not Human Subject Research.

For this paper, we examined the data of Eunhae and Miso, who began (Eunhae) and finished (Miso) their doctoral studies during the study period of August 2019 to August 2021. The data included 96 narratives written by both of us (48 each) and 48 meeting transcripts. Throughout the data collection and analysis, we underwent what Golombek and Johnson (2021) termed the "recurrent restorying" process (p. 2), which is based on the three functions of narratives: narratives as externalization, narratives as verbalization, and narratives as systemic examination. First, we externalized our raw feelings and experiences in

the narratives and meetings, which provided us with opportunities to make sense of the events that happened. Second, when we revisited this dataset for this research, we approached it from a researcher's perspective. It helped us see how our emotions, identities, and development had been interrelated at that moment. Both of our data were rich in emotion and identity struggles, expressing frustration, isolation, estrangement, and feelings of not being competent enough as doctoral students. As we reinterpreted the data, we found little helping hands from all our communities, support from our collaborative autoethnography members, and baby steps we had taken to resolve the emotional dissonances, all of which we had not been able to properly recognize when we wrote the narratives. The links allowed us to verbalize our experiences with reference to scientific concepts—mediational spaces and liminality. Lastly, the very act of writing the collaborative autoethnography has allowed us to embrace our complex identities as a whole and to see ourselves as a legitimate member of academic society (Eunhae) and a foreigner who can strategically draw on her identities as resources (Miso).

To better illustrate our narratives, we drew cartoon strips to visually show our lived experiences in a four-part structure: introduction, development, climax, and resolution (Figures 2 and 3). We first drew Eunhae as a child (1st-year doctoral student) and Miso as a teen (6th-year doctoral student). We added animals and people to represent those who were around us at that time. The background figuratively illustrates our situations. For example, the thickets in Figure 2 and waves in Figure 3 signify wilderness and hardship. After finalizing the process, we selected the extracts that best showed our experiences and wrote the narratives based on the themes. The narratives cite our data using acronyms: M for the meeting number, A for the meeting agenda, and N for the biweekly narrative. In the following sections, we first present the narratives and analyze them based on the concepts of mediation and mediational spaces.

FINDINGS

Eunhae's Lived Experience: A Child Hiking on A Trodden Path

Scene 1. Starting off Graduate School

My transition from Korea to the United States is illustrated in the first image in Figure 2, in which a child goes on a new journey, leaving her school behind. I worked full-time as an elementary school English teacher for six months before arriving in the United States. My husband followed me, and Miso helped us with the settlement and gave us rides throughout the first semester. My church members were welcoming, and I managed to finish some administrative work before the semester began. Everything went smoothly. As an international doctoral student, however, I faced an expected challenge: my name. The name reads [ən-hæ]. The first syllable of my name is pronounced with a schwa /ə/. Although I was aware that "eu" reads as "yoo, or /juː/," Yoon-hi felt like someone else's name, and when called, I did not realize it referred to me. In non-professional settings, I used Grace as my English name, but I wanted to keep my

Korean name and identity as I developed my researcher identity. However, I quickly regretted my decision to adhere to my Korean name in my first semester (M5). Writing down my narrative of experiencing these awkward feelings, I negotiated and reconstructed my professional identity—but not necessarily connecting these incidents with racial identity back then. To stick to the spelling of "Eunhae," I also had to take in a "careless baptism" (Hoffman, 1989), the process of losing one's native linguistic identity and appropriating others' voices. However, by continuing to use "Eunhae" and recognizing all its possible pronunciations, I encompassed "continuous growth 'into' new positions and subjectivities" (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000, p. 163).

Figure 2: Eunhae's Cartoon Strip

Scene 2. "I Don't Know What I Should Do"

When I transitioned to graduate school in the United States, I faced different challenges with the various duties that I tried to tackle completely by myself (M4). I was too focused on what was on my plate, like the girl in the second image in

Figure 1, who fails to see the animals nearby and consequently becomes emotionally distressed.

My emotional distress reached its peak when I began teaching international students how to write English compositions at the college level. It was most challenging for me to write a syllabus and show up week after week to make it come alive with instructions, assignments, and activities. When I taught at an elementary school in Korea, I used pre-made curricula and teaching materials, but in the United States, I had to design everything from scratch. During my preparation before the semester began, this process "turned into a monster" (N1) because I was constantly changing the syllabus, adjusting the rubric, and incorporating new materials, which made the ordeal repeat itself many times. While I was experiencing this distress, I hardly reached out to people. There were people who shared teaching materials with me and spared time to help me, but I found it difficult to use these resources in my teaching.

My lack of interpersonal skills also affected my coursework. I occasionally missed some important information (M9) because I lacked the "prior text" (Kramsch, 2000, p. 19)—pragmatic or contextual knowledge accumulated and shared with the community members over time. I did my best in all the assigned tasks, but my shyness made the situation worse, because I did not know how to communicate my progress to other people. My public anxiety issue also hampered my performance as a discussion leader for the assigned readings and as a presenter of my research paper (M35). I also found it difficult to ask for others' help or clarification in a timely manner (M26, M39), which resulted in me doing more work than expected (M21).

I also struggled with academic writing, partly because I did not take full advantage of the available resources. I knew that the university offered various services and resources to international graduate students, but I felt that I did not have enough time to use these because I was juggling various graduate duties and busy meeting assignment deadlines (M29). I also did not have the right information about these services and resources. For instance, I thought I could only set three appointments at the writing center per semester, when in actuality, I later learned from our CAE group meeting that it is possible to book an appointment each week (M36). In addition to not having the correct information, I hired an editor to revise papers for my upcoming milestone (i.e., qualifying exam), but the editor only pointed out the issues in my writing and did not provide solutions to them. This combination of factors contributed to my feelings of distress and isolation regarding my academic writing.

Scene 3. Finding Neighbors Who Always Stood by Me

My participation in the CAE project enabled me to externalize and reframe my emotional distress. It also helped me raise my head, look around, and see the connections around me. As shown in the third image in Figure 2, I sat by the animals, who were trying to listen to my inquiries, and had a conversation with them. They were willing to share some of my burden and wait while I took some rest and then guided my way.

Joining this project helped shift my mindset, enabling me to see my interpersonal connections that could help me in my various roles. In terms of teaching, I borrowed some of my professors' teaching styles; for example, I made my students draw conceptual maps (M25). I showed more agency in terms of the materials I prepared and how I acted, and I became flexible enough to be able to shift between the role of a teacher and that of a student. For instance, I adopted a book chapter that I had encountered in my coursework on multilingual identity and used it as a springboard for a discussion with my international students (M26). Even during semesters that I did not teach, I filed good materials that I encountered in a teaching folder so I could use them in the upcoming semesters (M42).

In my personal space, my husband always supported me (M9). Within my coursework, there were cohorts of graduate students in my department whom I consulted to generate discussion questions for my classmates and for the presenters (M7, M20, M36, M37), and there were professors who gave me feedback on the drafts that I was either going to submit or planned to work on (M7, M16, M37). After a professor advised me to focus on improving my academic writing in English, I was able to approach consultants at the writing center, and the English language center, my friends, and editors gave me insightful comments on my drafts (M37, M39).

Most of all, engaging with the CAE group members led me to reformulate the meanings of "research(er)" (N48), "qualitative inquiry" (A49), and "research ethics" (A17, A24, A29, A33, A35, A39, A41, A43, A44). I also applied what I had learned and experienced in my lived experience of writing these auto-, duo-, or collaborative ethnographies using the aforementioned narratives and meeting agendas. They provided me with a space where I turned my negative emotions into catalysts for growth. The materials shared in the group also facilitated my growth. For example, Plonsky's (2020) book *Professional Development in Applied Linguistics* helped me demystify the tasks of a researcher (M42). Similarly, I started to use this CAE group as a mediational space not only to self-regulate my work habits (M38) but also to receive timely mediation with regard to my struggles and sometimes to report my development (M24).

Scene 4. "Keep Calm and Carry on"

As shown by the fourth image in Figure 2, I like to remind myself of my many close connections throughout my international doctoral journey. As I am still going through these milestones, I am in the process of being socialized into academia and of internalizing academic discourses. I will ask questions when I have any, again reminding myself of the people who are standing by to help me. Although my data do not show much about my gender and racial identities, my narratives do show how I juggled my national origin and linguistic background. My engagement in the biweekly narrative writing activity enabled me to externalize my ongoing and often conflicting thoughts and emotions. Re-reading those narratives and writing this article have also helped me to critically navigate dissonances. Further, the CAE group opened mediational spaces where two other

researcher-participants could provide responsive support and feedback. Thus, the aforementioned processes (writing narratives, sharing them with the group members, re-reading narratives, writing this paper, and drawing the comic strips) transformed me as a person struggling to ask for help (as depicted in the second image in Figure 2) to a person learning to see myself within the academic society (as depicted in the fourth image in Figure 2).

Miso's Lived Experience: Canoeing in the Crevasse

Scene 1. Finishing My Ph.D. and Preparing for a New Journey

I was blessed to graduate with two pieces of paper (the first image in Figure 3): a certificate verifying my successful dissertation defense and a letter offering me a job (採用内定通知 in Japanese). With these two letters in hand, I was excited to jump over to another country where I had never lived before and whose language I had little knowledge of. My character in Scene 1 is shedding tears not because I was happy, but because painful memory stood behind the glorious letters. At that time, I saw myself as a "failed Ph.D. student" because I had failed to land a job. During my second year in the job market, I actively sought help, even though I had always been afraid of asking for help. I deliberately suppressed my hesitation and desperately called for help: "In this job market year, it's as if I am a totally different person from a year ago. I rewrote all my letters and made several requests to my acquaintances and my advisor […]" (N_M3_09_25_19). I e-mailed my friends who were working in universities that posted a job vacancy, requested feedback on my mock job talk and interviews several times, and took my application materials to the writing center and my advisor, all of which helped me eventually get a job offer and graduate.

Scene 2. Jumping to the New Continent During the Pandemic

With all the support I had, I jumped to another continent (represented by the glacier in Figure 3), but I was caught in between (see the second image in Figure 3). It was March 2020, when the pandemic began to influence the entire world. Soon after my arrival, I was asked to stay in my room without any in-person interaction. I wanted very much to learn the culture of the Japanese academia and to befriend my like-minded colleagues, but I had no opportunity to do so. I reflected, "During my Ph.D. studies, I always remained at the periphery, so I wanted to be an 'insider' here; but I guess that's now impossible" (N_M16_05_14_20). In the Japanese culture, one is expected to read the "air" (空気を読む) to socialize in a community without explicitly asking for something, but I did not even have access to the "air." I was in Japan physically but was really nowhere.

Figure 3: Miso's Cartoon Strip

Scene 3. Being Caught in the Crevasse

I hopped from one continent to another, but I fell in the crevasse, without anyone to rescue me (see the third image in Figure 3). Thus, I had to rescue myself. I actively paved the way for my own involvement in the new society. I e-mailed like-minded scholars and joined reading groups (M16), attended an in-person Japanese language class (M25), and looked for Korean communities in Japan (M26). As my participation in the Japanese society increased, however, I came to experience identity conflicts. On the one hand, I was a young Korean female in my twenties with little Japanese proficiency and looked more like a student than a teacher, all of which are not much valued in the patriarchal Japanese society. On the other hand, I was a college professor who studied in the United States and spoke English fluently, which may signal a high social status in Japan. I was a whole person who possessed all these identities, but I could not help feeling that I was being dissected. There were bits and pieces of myself everywhere, but none was mine. My multiple identities were not seen as a whole;

they were broken into pieces. In Excerpt 1, I describe how I felt that "everyone around me puts up a mirror and reflects my appearance, but the reflections vary too much." I was caught in the crevasse, losing the "real me."

> Excerpt 1: I had to reflect on where I was standing. I went to the office to do some paperwork. A long-time staff member introduced me to a new member and said, "She (i.e., Miso) is like everyone's daughter here." […] On the first day of classes, I clapped after some students' presentation, and one student said, "The teacher is so cute." On Wednesday, two students came to me and said, "Did you know? You are famous for your cuteness." […] One day, my friend introduced a guy to me and told him I was a professor, to which he replied, "Why on earth would she go on a date with me?" (because college professors symbolize a high social status) […] Everyone around me puts up a mirror and reflects my appearance, but these reflections vary too much, so I can't stop asking, "What is the real me?" and I can't help being confused (N_M38_04_17_21).

Scene 4. Negotiating Identities in Liminal Spaces

Even though these identity conflicts are and will be perpetual, I occasionally come to see that they can be used as resources not only for myself but also for others around me. As in the last picture in Figure 3, the space between the three countries (i.e., Korea, the United States, and Japan; represented by three glaciers) can be a liminal space for me to canoe in with my students and colleagues (represented by animals and people).

The students around me found my complex identities inspiring. Back in Korea or the United States, I had few opportunities to think about my identities in teaching, simply because I was a student. After my arrival in Japan, I realized that I did not fit into the prototypical image of English-speaking professors, who were mostly White and spoke English as the first language. While my identities as an Asian and non-native speaker could be marginalizing, I could turn them against the prototype and use them to my students' advantage. The young students in Japan could easily relate to me, partly because I was also an East Asian non-native speaker of English. A student once wrote in my teaching evaluation, "I think it is amazing that a Korean teacher is teaching English in Japan, and I respect her very much. Like her, I want to do a lot of things," to which I commented, "I learned that a young, female, non-native-English-speaking teacher could be a role model for students" (N_M35 _03_07_21). A Japanese attendee at my talk also found it motivating to connect with various cultures through language (M36), and my students felt it was easy to speak to me because I was a young Korean (e.g., M26, M31, M33, M35, M40). These moments made me realize that my complex identities did not push me from the glaciers; on the contrary, they allowed me to canoe in the crevasse with my students and others around me.

These experiences have made me realize that my complex identities could be a resource, not a disadvantage. For instance, as I moved into Japan, I confronted patriarchal pressures in Japan (e.g., using 'attractive' and 'adorable' women's language, playing subordinate roles to male colleagues, and speaking gentle and polite language; Siegal & Okamoto, 2003), which are, I felt, worse than those in Korea and the United States. There is no specially designated women's language in the Korean and English languages, but there is joseigo (女性語, women′s language) in Japanese. However, due to my liminalities, I was relatively freer from the pressure to follow these patriarchal norms. I described it as follows: "The existence of a foreigner opens up a third space. The social norms of Korea and Japan lose their influence when they come across a foreigner. […] I don't have to follow one culture. I can create a culture in a given context. I would like to continue living the life of a multilingual and a transnational" (N_M34_02_20_21). My complex identities as a foreigner in Japan and as a speaker of English allowed me to open up and find refuge in the liminal space.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study aimed to analyze two international doctoral students' development in transition periods and their negotiation of their identities in transnational movements. In the following subsections, we first draw on the concept of mediational spaces (Golombek & Johnson, 2004) to explain such students' development. We then use liminal spaces (Bhabha, 1992) to account for their transnational identity negotiations. Implications for future research and practice follow each subsection. Since this study was limited to the two autoethnographical data, the implications should be tailored to individual doctoral students, depending on how they make sense of their experiences.

Creating Mediational Spaces for International Doctoral Students

In mediational spaces (Golombek & Johnson, 2004), students can verbalize their concerns and problems, be mediated by people more experienced than they are, and recontextualize and reinternalize what they have learned from such people. However, previous studies on mediational spaces (e.g., Golombek & Johnson, 2004, 2017) were based on the educator's perspective; thus, we explored the possibilities of creating the spaces on our own. This autoethnographic study shows that there are three steps to create mediational spaces for and by international students: (a) looking for available sources of mediation, (b) negotiating appropriate levels of mediation, and (c) recontextualizing and reinternalizing new psychological tools.

The first step is to look for available resources. Although the quantity and quality of the resources matter, the more important point is how international students make sense of them and how they use the resources to create a mediational space (Golombek & Johnson, 2004) in which they can safely discuss their concerns. For example, although Eunhae knew about the writing center and hired a professional editor, she was not able to fully use them at first because she

did not know how to ask for the feedback. In Miso's case, she first felt estranged because she thought the pandemic deprived her of all resources. Over time, she gradually discovered new resources around her, such as reading groups, Korean communities, and Japanese language support.

The second step is negotiating appropriate levels of mediation. International students need to learn how to use new concepts or ideas to redirect their actions; merely receiving a list of tools or having another person resolve their problems for them will not facilitate their development. One example of this was Eunhae's struggle to cope with the teaching materials that were given to her without any instruction. The help was way too implicit for Eunhae, who did not see the rationale behind the materials. Therefore, it can be more effective to negotiate the level of mediation. In their study of international students' writing, Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994) used a regulatory scale to mediate learners' errors. The scale ranged from implicit feedback (e.g., the tutor simply asks the learner to find errors) to explicit feedback (e.g., the tutor gives examples of correct forms). The tutors first gave implicit feedback, and if the learners did not respond to it, they gradually provided more explicit feedback. The study found that providing appropriate levels of mediation allowed the learners to gradually develop and take responsibility for their own learning.

Similarly, international doctoral students need to negotiate appropriate levels of mediation that can be sought from their immediate vicinity. Doctoral students usually have experiential knowledge of their subject matter; for them, learning to use scientific tools to reformulate their experiential knowledge in their interactions with those around them is crucial. For example, Eunhae had vague experiential knowledge about teaching, but she did not have sufficient psychological tools (e.g., instructional strategies) to lead a college-level writing class. During her coursework, however, she saw her professors use conceptual maps to analyze reading materials for discussion, and she learned to use both the maps and materials as the tools in her own classroom. By alternating her "Ph.D. student" and "teacher" selves, Eunhae was able to gain the tools. For another example, Miso's students helped her establish her identity as a professor, providing her with the psychological frame that an East Asian non-native speaker of English can be a role model to whom the Japanese students can easily relate. The aforementioned examples show that mediation for doctoral students is available beyond advisors' offices or classrooms. It can be found in many other places, including coursework, research projects, casual encounters with colleagues, and interactions with students.

The last step is to recontextualize and reinternalize the psychological tools at their disposal to redirect their actions. Once they have obtained the new tools, they need to try them out by themselves and redirect their actions. Eunhae obtained psychological tools from her doctoral classes and used them in her own first-year composition class, making her class more engaging. Miso obtained the tool from her students and actively sought ways to use her complex identities as resources. In short, the mediational spaces (Golombek & Johnson, 2004) provided Eunhae and Miso with the tools to reformulate themselves as researchers and professors, respectively.

For researchers interested in international doctoral students' development, mediational spaces (Golombek & Johnson, 2004) could be used for investigating where they turn to get help and how they learn to use the psychological tool with others in their transnational communities. For practitioners or doctoral students, the three steps could be a guide for (self-)mentoring. It could be used to diagnose the problem source of their difficulties, find the right tool for resolving the problem, and create a support network.

Negotiating Multiple Identities in Liminal Spaces

In both Eunhae's and Miso's transition to a new country and culture, it may appear that they were marginalized from the mainstream community. Eunhae, who had always been called /ən-hæ/ at home, had to learn the new pronunciations of her name. Miso found that her identities (e.g., teaching English in Japan as a non-native English speaker, looking more like a student than a professor, and holding a doctoral degree from America) were all broken into bits and pieces, and she felt confused. From the socialization metaphor, they struggled to develop identities in the new communities in the initial phases of their transition thereto. Wenger (1998) conceived that identity development is contingent upon participation: "A defining characteristic of participation is the possibility of developing an 'identity of participation,' that is, an identity constituted through relations of participation" (p. 56). These students' tumultuous identity negotiation process may be perceived as a sign of marginalization.

Although it may seem as if Eunhae and Miso were marginalized, they negotiated their multiple identities in liminal spaces between different communities and countries. For example, Miso stood in an interstitial space between the three countries and the various communities around her (i.e., her workspace, the Korean community, and the Japanese language class). As she participated in these communities, she found that her multiple identities (e.g., teaching English in Japan as a non-native English speaker, looking more like a student than a professor, and holding a doctoral degree from America) were approached differently in each community, and she felt confused, as if surrounded by mirrors showing varying reflections of herself. However, she soon realized that being in the liminal space liberated her from the pressure of having to follow mainstream norms and that her students could find her identities inspiring. She was not marginalized from the mainstream community; she was just standing in the liminal space.

As shown by Miso's experience, negotiating complex identities in liminal spaces can be liberating because the spaces provide opportunities to negotiate transcultural, national, hybrid, and overlapping identities. Bhabha (1994) argued that "this interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (p. 5). In liminal spaces, international students can strategically negotiate the preconceived norms and cultures of various communities and use them to their own advantage. As Miso wrote in her narrative, the existence of a foreigner opened up a third space in which she could negotiate the (traditionally)

hierarchical Japanese workplace culture. Miso also realized that her non-traditional identities could make her a role model for her students, who were predominantly young Asians. Thus, rather than mimicking the old-fashioned images of professors, she elaborated on strategies for relating to her students and motivated them with her multiple identities. Miso chose to canoe in the crevasse rather than climb the glacier and become a "full" member of the new community.

For researchers, this study implies the importance of investigating how international doctoral students negotiate their complex identities across all communities they belong(ed) to, and how their negotiation shapes their doctoral journeys. For example, scholars in English language teaching have explored how their liminal and transnational identities influence their pedagogies and teaching practices across borders (Yazan et al., 2020). Practitioners can help doctoral students reflect upon their positionalities in and between communities and find vantage points for further development to help them perceive their liminal identities as meaningful assets and resources, not hindrances to socializing in the new community.

CONCLUSION

Our two-year longitudinal CAE project reported herein showed that international doctoral students develop as they learn to use psychological tools and negotiate their complex identities in liminal spaces. They do not comfortably fit in the binaries of the socialization metaphor; rather, they negotiate the level of mediation with their agency and traverse the boundaries between communities and cultures with their complex identities.

The titles of our narratives were "A Child Hiking on a Trodden Path" (Eunhae) and "Canoeing in the Crevasse" (Miso). Eunhae continued hiking, owing to the animals who created mediational spaces for her (Figure 2). As for Miso, she was able to canoe in the crevasse, freely traversing the boundaries between communities and cultures (Figure 3). Rather than immersing international doctoral students in a foreign community, it would be better to hike with them and provide them with appropriate levels of mediation, or to canoe with them and enjoy their liberation from the pressure of having to "fit in."

REFERENCES

Ajšić, A. (2020). Floating on English in a rising sea of globalization: Liminality, liability, transformation. In *Autoethnographies in ELT: Transnational identities, pedagogies, and practices* (pp. 128–145). Routledge.

Aljaafreh, A., & Lantolf, J. P. (1994). Negative feedback as regulation and second language learning in the zone of proximal development. *The Modern Language Journal, 78*(4), 465–483. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.1994.tb02064.x

Baker, V. L., & Lattuca, L. R. (2010). Developmental networks and learning: Toward an interdisciplinary perspective on identity development during

doctoral study. *Studies in Higher Education*, *35*(7), 807–827. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070903501887

Baker, V. L., & Pifer, M. J. (2011). The role of relationships in the transition from doctoral student to independent scholar. *Studies in Continuing Education*, *33*(1), 5–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/0158037X.2010.515569

Bhabha, H. K. (1992). The world and the home. *Social Text, 31/32*, 141–153.

Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The Location of Culture*. Routledge.

Cai, L., Dangeni, D., Lazarte Elliot, D., He, R., Liu, J., Pacheco, E.-M., Makara, K. A., Shih, K., Zhang, J., & Wang, W. (2019). A conceptual enquiry into communities of practice as praxis in international doctoral education. *Journal of Praxis in Higher Education, 1*(1), 11–36. https://doi.org/10.47989/kpdc74

Chang, H., Ngunjiri, F. W., & Hernandez, K. A. C. (2013). *Collaborative autoethnography*. Left Coast.

Foot, R., Alicia, R. C., Tollafield, K. A., & Allan, C. E. (2014). Exploring doctoral student identity development using a self-study approach. *Teaching and Learning Inquiry, 2*(1), 103–118. https://doi.org/10.20343/teachlearninqu.2.1.103

Gao, Y. (2021). Understanding of international doctoral students' challenges: A literature review study. *Journal of International Students, 11*(2), 505–513. https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v11i2.2065

Golombek, P. R., & Johnson, K. E. (2004). Narrative inquiry as a mediational space: Examining emotional and cognitive dissonance in second-language teachers' development. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice, 10*(3), 307–327. https://doi.org/10.1080/1354060042000204388

Golombek, P. R., & Johnson, K. E. (2017). Re-conceptualizing teachers' narrative inquiry as professional development. *Profile, 19*(2), 15–28. https://doi.org/10.15446/profile.v19n2.65692

Golombek, P. R., & Johnson, K. E. (2021). Recurrent restorying through language teacher narrative inquiry. *System*, *102,* 1–9. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2021.102601

Han, S. S., Haneda, M., & Madany, M. (2020). Towards glocally situated TESOL practices: Collaborative autoethnography. In B. Yazan, S. Canagarajah, & R. Jain (Eds.), *Autoethnographies in ELT: Transnational identities, pedagogies, and practices* (pp. 206–222). Routledge.

Handley, K., Sturdy, A., Fincham, R., & Clark, T. (2006). Within and beyond communities of practice: Making sense of learning through participation, identity, and practice. *Journal of Management Studies, 43*(3), 641–653. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6486.2006.00605.x

Ku, H. Y., Lahman, M. K. E., Yeh, H. Te, & Cheng, Y. C. (2008). Into the academy: Preparing and mentoring international doctoral students. *Educational Technology Research and Development, 56*(3), 365–377. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11423-007-9083-0

Pavlenko, A. and Lantolf, J. P. (2000). Second language learning as participation and the (re)construction of selves. In J. P. Lantolf. *Sociocultural theory and second language learning* (pp. 155–178). Oxford University Press

Plonsky, L. (2020). *Professional development in applied linguistics: A guide to success for graduate students and early career faculty*. John Benjamins.

Sfard, A. (1998). On two metaphors for learning and the dangers of choosing just one. *Educational Researcher, 27*(2), 4–13. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X027002004

Teng, F. (2020). A narrative inquiry of identity construction in academic communities of practice: Voices from a Chinese doctoral student in Hong Kong. *Pedagogies, 15*(1), 40–59. https://doi.org/10.1080/1554480X.2019.1673164

Thomson, C., & Esses, V. M. (2016). Helping the transition: Mentorship to support international students in Canada. *Journal of International Students, 6*(4), 873–886. https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v6i4.323

Tran, L. T. (2016). Mobility as 'becoming': A Bourdieuian analysis of the factors shaping international student mobility. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 37*(8), 1268–1289. https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2015.1044070

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society*. Harvard University Press.

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge University Press.

MISO KIM, PhD, is Assistant Professor in the Center for English as a Lingua Franca, Tamagawa University, Japan. Her major research interests lie in applied linguistics, qualitative research in education, translingual practices, and feminism in second language education. Email: mkim@lab.tamagawa.ac.jp

EUNHAE CHO, PhD candidate, is a doctoral student in the Department of Applied Linguistics, The Pennsylvania State University, USA. Her major interests are applied linguistics, qualitative research in education, and sociocultural approaches to second language learning. Email: epc5303@psu.edu