## Ticking the 'Other' Box: Positional Identities of East Asian Academics in UK Universities, Internationalisation and Diversification

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**Abstract:**

This article critically interrogates East Asian academics’ positional identities in UK universities, internationalisation and diversification against the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) and Critical Race Theory (CRT) framework. Contemporary UK policy promoting racial equality and diversity is often over-generalised, while the critical race theory-based literature has focused on hegemonic notions of ‘white privilege’. Neither discourse provides an adequate, comparative perspective of power relations within diverse racial and ethnic groups. In advancing this perspective, the article compares and contrasts the experiences of two groups of East Asian academics working in UK universities. One group is foreign-born but has strong British identities following their English élite education. The other group came to the UK for postgraduate studies and/or chose to work in Britain. The paper changes the picture of a static, black and white perspective in the BME policy and CRT literature by offering a dynamic, fluid discourse involving East Asian academics’ narratives of their positional identities and choices.
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ABSTRACT

This article critically interrogates East Asian academics’ positional identities in UK universities, internationalisation and diversification against the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) and Critical Race Theory (CRT) framework. Contemporary UK policy promoting racial equality and diversity is often over-generalised, while the critical race theory-based literature has focused on hegemonic notions of ‘white privilege’. Neither discourse provides an adequate, comparative perspective of power relations within diverse racial and ethnic groups. In advancing this perspective, the article compares and contrasts the experiences of two groups of East Asian academics working in UK universities. One group is foreign-born but has strong British identities following their English élite education. The other group came to the UK for postgraduate studies and/or chose to work in Britain. The paper changes the picture of a static, black and white perspective in the BME policy and CRT literature by offering a dynamic, fluid discourse involving East Asian academics’ narratives of their positional identities and choices.

Keywords: East Asian academics, BME, Critical Race Theory, Yellow Peril, Positional Identities, Internationalisation, Equality and Diversity

1. Introduction

This paper critically interrogates East Asian academics’ positional identities in UK universities, internationalisation and diversification against the Black and Minority Ethnic
(BME) and Critical Race Theory (CRT) framework from a comparative perspective. What does internationalisation and widening participation in universities mean in the context of racial and ethnic diversity? Recently there have been a number of evidence-based research reports on the under-representation of BME academic staff in leadership roles in UK Higher Education (UK HE), for example, ECU (2011, 2014), Bhopal and Jackson (2013), Morrow (2015), Bhopal and Brown (2016), Adams (2017). However, there remains a paucity of knowledge on the interface and possible disparity between ‘international’ and ‘minority ethnic’ academic identities, and their respective or entwined experiences. This can be strategically important for the future of UK HE given that the overall proportion of non-UK born, international academics employed in UK universities is expected to rise to 50 per cent by 2027 (Universities UK 2007, 10). Such demographic forecasting implies that the continuing success of UK universities will be increasingly dependent on international academics.

In previous research, it was argued that international academics can enrich the intercultural dimensions of leadership and bridge the gap between ‘internationalisation’ and widening participation’ agendas of UK HE (see, for example, Kim 2009; Kim 2011). Furthermore, Brexit and the British immigration policy made the nexus between internationalisation and equality/diversity policy in UK HE an urgent issue for clarification because of the question of national and ethnic identity that Brexit has raised for all non-UK citizens.

The toxic political discourse around immigration and the UK Border Agency (UKBA) red tape were encapsulated in the Windrush scandal and a survey by the UK Home Office asking British home students whether “international students have been a positive or negative impact on their university experience”. This survey categorised international student[s] as a homogenised mass, perpetual outsiders who were not worthy of identification (Callaghan
in a similar way to the wide scope of the BME policy framework in which anyone ‘non-white’ is categorised, despite the diverse nature of this group.\(^4\)

Contemporaneously, the UK policy agenda for racial equality/diversity relies on an over-generalised BME category which includes anyone ‘non-white’, and which is also separate from the ‘internationalisation’ agenda. In conjunction with the BME category, the literature on racial equality/diversity often draws on CRT, which sees all social arrangements as structured by the premise of white privilege, and accordingly argues that concepts of race and ethnicity have continued to shape fundamental individual identities (Winant 2004; Cole 2017).

An immediate problem of this BME-CRT framework is this simple juxtaposition of ‘white’ versus ‘non-white’, where protagonists in this discourse are always assumed to be either white or black. Hence, there is no room for ‘neither white nor black’, ambivalent positioning. East Asian academics, for instance, are almost invisible in the literature on racial equality and diversity in the UK.\(^5\) It is argued that the two sets of policy discourse - the contemporary, market-oriented internationalisation policy\(^6\), on the one hand, and the BME-CRT framed equality/diversity policy on the other - do not provide a holistic comprehension of intricate inter-and intra-national relations and diverse ethno-racial power dynamics within the UK HE environment (Kim 2011).

Against this background, the article examines selected East Asian academics’ lived experiences, positional identities and mobilities in the UK. We argue that despite the legacy of the ‘yellow peril’ (in the 19\(^{th}\) and 20\(^{th}\) centuries) (Tchen and Yeats 2014; Cole 2018, 57-60), East Asian ethno-national and cultural norms have now gained a new recognition and rationality in the contemporary rise of East Asian power (Cox, 2012; Jacques 2012). These norms are strong and distinct in their antecedents and developmental pathways and deviate from Western hegemonic narratives. However, the ways in which this meta-narrative change is translated into the micro-level of individual lived experiences requires attention.
To explore this proposition, the paper adopts a narrative-constructivist methodology and intersectional approach based on biographical narratives. Drawing on C. Wright Mills (1959)’s *Sociological Imagination*, the paper offers a fresh understanding of the larger historical scene (the legacy of yellow peril and its transformation) in terms of its meaning for the inner life (as embodied subjectivity) and the external career of a variety of individuals (East Asian academics selected for this study) (Mills 1959, 5).

The research findings change the picture of a black and white dominant perspective in the BME policy and CRT literature by substituting a dynamic and fluid discourse involving East Asian academics’ positional identities and career choices in UK universities. The significance of this changed picture is explored in terms of its possible effects on the policy discourses on internationalisation and equality/diversity. Accordingly, the following section examines international and racial-ethnic profiles of the academic profession and leadership in UK HE to clarify the context of our research analysis, before presenting our research method and findings.

2. Interface or disparity between internationalisation and equality/diversity in the UK academic profession and leadership

It has been widely reported that BME staff are underrepresented at senior levels in UK HE (Bhopal and Jackson 2013; ECU 2014). Among the 535 senior officials surveyed at 163 UK universities, 510 were white, 15 were ‘Asian’ and 10 were recorded as “other, including mixed” (HESA 2017). The HESA data (2017) suggest that just 9.7 per cent of BME academics are professors, compared with 11.1 per cent of white academics.

However, there is significant variation among those identified as BME professors. Chinese (14.0%) and other minority ethnic (13.5%) staff were more likely to hold professorial roles than their Asian (meaning South Asian in the UK) (9.8%), mixed (7.8%) or
black (7.5%) counterparts. Furthermore, when we examine the nationalities of professors, only 4.7 per cent of Black British academics are professors. Among non-UK (international) academic staff, 4.3% of BME staff were professors compared with 9.4% of white non-UK academic staff (Arday 2017, 5).

According to the report by the Equality Challenge Unit (2015), there are just 20 UK-born BME deputy or pro vice-chancellors, against 530 who are white (Ahmet and Howarth 2016); and more recently, Higher Education Funding Council in England (HEFCE 2017) reports that only 3% of vice-chancellors and principals (University Presidents) were BME. These proportions are even lower when international staff are excluded. There are just five BME Vice-Chancellors in UK universities, and among them, three are in the UK’s top 50 universities: SOAS (Baroness Valerie Amos), LSE (Dame Minouche Shafik), and the University of Surrey (Max Lu) and they all have taken unconventional routes to the top. Baroness Amos has been a British politician and diplomat, while Shafik and Lu are international. Shafik is an Egyptian-born American-British economist and Lu is a Chinese–Australian chemical engineer and nano-technologist. Before coming to Surrey, Lu was Provost and Senior Vice-President at the University of Queensland, Australia, and also worked in Singapore (Nanyang Technological University). So far Max Lu is the only Chinese ethnic minority Vice-Chancellor in the UK (Kahn 2017).

On the other side of the Atlantic, by comparison, BME academics and leaders seem to be more visible. According to the American Council on Education (ACE) Demographic Overview (2017), 17 per cent of American University and College Presidents are racial minorities - an increase of 4 per cent since 2011; and the percentage of women holding the top job at colleges and universities stood at 30% in 2016 (ACE 2017). More than half of the Ivy League Universities (Brown, Pennsylvania, Harvard, Princeton, and Cornell) have had female presidents since 2000 (Seltzer 2017). After Brown University appointed the first black
female president among the Ivy League Universities, seven small, highly selective liberal arts colleges that were not known for diversity also appointed black presidents (Lewis 2016).

In the UK, although non-UK nationals are less represented in senior positions than their white British counterparts, when we examine the BME group separately, international BME (especially Chinese and other minority ethnic) academics seem to be better represented than local BME academics in UK universities. Furthermore, racial disparity among the international BME group is more visible in Science, Engineering and Technology (SET) areas. There are 8,300 professors in SET in UK universities, but only 35 are black, and the majority of these black professors in SET are international, not having been schooled in the UK (Morgan 2016).

However, when we study the gender balance among black academics, racial disparity is even more apparent: 23.9% of professors were female. Of these female professors, BME women make up just 1.6%, and black female just 0.5% (HESA, 2017). Accordingly, it may be said that most UK universities do not hire any BME women professors (Runnymede Trust 2017).

Given the striking gender imbalance and BME underrepresentation (especially black UK nationals) in the UK academic profession generally, and in academic leadership in particular, the experiences of BME academic staff have been treated as a ‘special case’ in UK universities. However, race and ethnicity are not only individual characteristics, but also a social and political issue in the context of institutionalised racial hierarchies.

Some BME academics reported that they suspected they had been appointed on a lower starting salary than white colleagues (Bhopal and Jackson 2013). Yet there are variations, as indicated in the following ECU statistical report (2015):

**Figure. Median Salaries of UK and non-UK staff by Role and Ethnic Group**
In this Figure, Chinese UK academics earn as much as white UK academics, whereas non-UK academics earn less than their UK counterparts, regardless of their ethnic backgrounds. Black academics tend to earn less than any other groups.

How do East Asian non-UK academics fare here? We assume that the Asian group in this chart includes East Asian ethnic groups. However, we suggest that in the UK, combining South Asian and East Asian academics in a single group does not constitute an accurate picture of equality/diversity that is consonant with the racial and ethnic profiles of UK HE academics.

Bhopal and Jackson (2013) suggest that BME academics have more ‘detours’ in their career progression than white colleagues. For example, they are often perceived to have had to work harder than their white colleagues, and to meet higher thresholds for promotion. Bhopal and Jackson (2013) argue that the real problem lies in the fact that universities tend not to recognise and may even devalue the backgrounds, styles, expressions and substance of diverse ethnic identity and cultural capital. Accordingly, policy recommendations in the authors’ LFHE report was that there should be more principled diversity at the highest levels, which would contribute to the making of a less mono-cultural university environment for BME academics to inhabit (ibid.).

Furthermore, Bhopal and Brown (2016) suggest that unconscious bias training should be made mandatory for all staff on university recruitment and promotion panels to help eliminate potentially racist hiring decisions. Based on interviews with 15 BME academics in leadership positions and a survey of 127 BME university leaders, Bhopal and Brown (2016) reported that several BME staff members believed that unconscious bias was responsible for their failure to get promoted.

However, how do we extract the nature of ‘unconscious’ bias and articulate the causes of these alleged unconscious bias? Does racial and ethnic difference constitute a major
attribute of such bias, or is there something else more complicated and hidden? As Equality
Challenge Unit (ECU 2011) suggested, it is difficult to attribute race and ethnicity as the
underlying explanatory factor behind all adverse experiences that BME staff members have
in UK HE, and in many cases BME staff members prefer not to complain about clear cases of
discrimination for fear of escalating a problem and endangering their careers.

Meanwhile, Bhopal (2016) identified five key principles to underpin the Race Charter
Mark:

- that racism is part of everyday life and racial inequalities manifest themselves in
everyday situations, processes and behaviours;
- that individuals from all ethnic backgrounds should benefit equally from the
opportunities available to them;
- that solutions to racial inequality should have a long-term impact through institutional
culture change;
- that those from minority ethnic backgrounds are not a homogenous group and such
complexity must be recognised when exploring race equality; and
- that intersectional identities should be considered when discussing race equality.

While we endorse all of these principles, our attention is especially drawn to the last two
principles as the premise of our research on East Asian academics, whose collective voices
have not been heard in mainstream BME narratives and whose positional identities in UK
universities have, to our knowledge, not been examined under the HE sector’s racial
equality/diversity policy. The next section will interrogate these diversity issues via
intersectionality and critique the limits of the BME-CRT framework.

3. Diversity and limits of BME policy and the CRT framework of analysis
The UK policy discourse promoting racial equality/diversity (since 2010) has been constrained by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in the UK’s racial/ethnic categories. While BME encompasses all non-white individuals, the ‘Other Asian’ category in the ONS census includes everyone from the Asian continent except South Asians (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladesh) and Chinese, who have separate categories. How can we then say anything significantly common in the ‘Other Asian’ category? Similarly, the ‘Other White’ category (first introduced in 2001) is undiscernible as it mixes Western Europeans, Northern Europeans, and Eastern Europeans, plus white Americans and Australians.

The underlying assumption of this classification is, arguably, in CRT that focuses on ‘white privilege’ (Gillborn 2005; Cole 2012). However, as Gordon Allport (1954) in *The Nature of Prejudice* suggested, categories are irrational where they are formed emotionally, without evidence, and ethnic stereotypes are a typical example of irrational categories:

“‘This propensity [of a human being to prejudice] lies in his …tendency to form generalizations, concepts, categories, whose contents represent an oversimplification of his world of experience. His rational categories keep close to first-hand experience, but he is able to form irrational categories as readily. In these even a kernel of truth may be lacking, for they can be composed wholly of hearsay evidence, emotional projections, and fantasy.”

(Allport 1954, 27, re-quoted from Carvalho 1993, 302)

Given the irrational categories established in stereotyping race and ethnicity, social identity and leadership studies have acknowledged existing racial hierarchies and unequal power dynamics, while minorities, in turn, can use race and ethnicity as a strategic resource. Race and ethnicity are viewed here as both personal and collective, in that individuals can choose to manage their own racial identity (Tillman 2004; Ospina and Foldy 2009). As Stuart Hall proffered:
“identity is a ‘production’, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation… identity is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power.”

(Hall 1974, in Oray 2013, 257)

Nevertheless, as inferred from the ONS categories, there is still insufficient debate about race/ethnicity in UK HE despite the ‘intersectional’ contexts of equality/diversity and mobility and internationalisation. Let us take white British working-class academics as an example. Recently there was a special symposium on ‘Does Class Still Matter?’ held in Brighton, where a several senior female professors who defined themselves with ‘white working-class’ family backgrounds gave powerful biographical testimonies in relation to class-related discrimination in academia. At the same time, they also acknowledged their ‘white privilege’ and yet no one in the symposium questioned this notion of ‘white privilege’ as if that is the universally accepted norm.

The symposium discussing the marginalisation of these white working-class female academics in British academia and at the same time claiming their white privilege was an irony, reminiscent of the old Enlightenment assumption of ‘the standpoint of universality’, which was then blindly turned into ‘the universal standpoint’ in narrating. This standpoint led to the ‘pressure of universalisation’, which conflates the self and the other (Yu 2005, 29; Kim 2014, 68). In promoting diversity and inclusivity in academia, it appears that there remains a struggle to balance subjective narratives with epistemic power relations.

However, our interview data as well as Kim (2017)’s long-term research analysis of transnational mobile academics suggest that both national cultural origins and class distinctions (rather than race/ethnicity) are considered major attributes that determine the positional identities of internationally mobile East Asian academics. This aspect is supported
by Ong (1999, 214-239) who analysed how the national-state is being refashioned in a transnational world. Ong (1999, 134) explored how political constraints in one field can be converted into economic opportunities in another field, thereby turning displacement into advantageous placement in different sites. She took the case of overseas Chinese minority ethnic as “flexible citizens” par excellence (Ong, 1999). Here, ethnic Chinese identity is not a static inherited quality, but ‘formed out of the strategies for the accumulation of economic, social, cultural and educational capital’ (Ong and Nonin 1997, 44).

In multi-racial countries (such as the United States, Australia, and the UK), national citizenships are often sub-classified by racial/ethnic identities, although, in France, citizens cannot be categorised by race and ethnicity. Different societies apply differing criteria regarding who is classified as ‘black’, and these social constructs have also changed over time. In the USA, for example, the term, black people is not just an indicator of skin colour or ethnic origin, but has been a social classification of African-Americans with a family history associated with institutionalised slavery. The ideological notion of ‘whiteness’ in America is argued by Noel Ignatiev (1995), who explains how Irish-Americans with oppressed Irish peasant immigrant backgrounds were quickly able to adapt to the white supremacy racial discourse:

“By oppression – like gender oppression or class oppression or national oppression – we find further footing for analysing … the peculiar function of the ‘white race’. The hallmark of racial oppression is the reduction of all members of the oppressed group to one undifferentiated social status, a status beneath that of any member of any social class [emphasis added].”

(Ignatiev 1995, 1-2)

In the UK, however, ‘black’ historically referred to ‘a person of colour’, and has been a general term for non-European peoples. For instance, when the Runneymede Trust
published a list of ‘Black Female Professors’ in 2017, the ‘black’ category meant non-white. The list includes 54 BME women professors of ‘African, Asian (including East Asian) and Caribbean’ origin. Among these, many are South Asians and Other Asians (including 15 Chinese and East Asians, such as Japanese, Korean, and Chinese Malaysians and Singaporeans (Runnymede Trust 2017).

Furthermore, in the Marxist framework, ethnic minorities in the UK have been regarded as a racialised class fraction within the wider ‘working class’ (Miles 1982). As Sherry Ortner (1998) points out, class is often spoken through other languages of social difference. Racial and ethnic minorities are often perceived as ‘lower class’ regardless of their actual socio-economic status. In this regard, the Racial Equality and Diversity policy in UK HE tends to elide with the Widening Participation initiative which is measured by socio-economic class. “The specific needs of BME students have become subsumed within generic widening participation policies” (Runnymede Trust 2011, 4).

However, many East Asian academics, including those interviewed in this research) are not critically aware of this racial classification labelled as ‘black’ let alone the perceived association between social class and racial identities. Some of our interviewees did not even know that they are categorised as BME in policy terms. What then are those East Asian academics’ positional identities? Is there ambiguity in categorizing East Asian academics in the BME-CRT framework of analysis?

4. Positional identities of East Asian academics in UK universities

In the 2015 Runnymede Trust Report, Robbie Shilliam argues that “universities remain overwhelmingly administratively, normatively, habitually and intellectually ‘white’. Their doors have been opened but the architecture remains the same” (Runnymede Trust 2015, 33). However, we question why East Asian academics in the ‘white’ UK university environments
do not voluntarily identify themselves in the BME group. At the same time, these academics would not be included or categorised in the ‘ivory tower’ either. Hence, there may be ‘double marginalisation’ by number and symbolic representation of East Asian academics in UK universities.

4.1 Methodology

To explore this question we adopted a narrative-constructivist methodology and an intersectional approach to recognise ethnic-nationality, socio-economic class, gender, prior education and career trajectories as factors that are all likely to influence perceptions and positional identities. Positional identity here is defined as how individuals see their position: their personal or reflexive identity (Kim 2005), as differentiated from positioned identity that is defined as an institutionally framed identity. Positioned identity is a socially constructed official identification, including nationality, gender, institutional job title and professional knowledge (Kim 2005). Drawing on C. Wright Mills (1959), we offer analyses of biographical narratives to highlight the intricate entwinement between individual lived experiences, social structures and movements, and history.

The research compares the experiences of two distinct groups of East Asian minority ethnic academics working in UK universities. One group of academics was foreign-born but has retained strong emotional connectivity with the UK following their English élite education and local networks that they built and continue to maintain since childhood. In this article, élite education refers to primary and secondary schooling at private boarding schools that are members of the Headmasters’ and Headmistresses’ Conference of independent, privately owned schools (https://www.hmc.org.uk/). The other group of academics came to the UK initially for postgraduate study and/or have chosen to work in Britain as academics.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with twelve East Asian academics, namely, two mainland Chinese, one Chinese Australian, one Taiwanese, one Taiwanese...
Canadian, one Korean, one Korean American, one Japanese, one Vietnamese, one Filipino, and two Chinese Malaysians. The two Chinese Malaysians who make up Group 1 came to England as teenagers to attend elite boarding schools, and they then went up to Cambridge University. The other ten East Asian academics, comprising Group 2, were educated and have worked either in their home countries or internationally before coming to the UK. Six of these academics read postgraduate courses in political/social sciences and natural/human sciences at various British universities (UCL, LSE, Oxford, Cambridge, Birmingham, East Anglia). They then stayed on to work in the UK, while the other four academics in Group 2 came to the UK for employment after studying and working in their home countries or elsewhere (China, North America, Australia, and western Europe).

We refer to Groups 1 and 2, together, as Chinese and Minority Ethnic (CME) academics as a convenient term that contrasts with BME. In our Discussion, we will suggest how both labels, with the catch-all behaviour that the practice of each category demands, can in fact harm minority ethnic individuals that BME policy seeks to protect. The authors of this article who conducted research are both London-based East Asian academics. The first author is Korean, while the co-author is Malaysian. In a phenomenological framework of thinking and narrating the collected interviews, we are critically aware of the significance of reflexivity in this research analysis as the researchers’ social positions - both positioning and being positioned (Kim 2005) - and embodied knowledge could influence our assumptions. On the other hand, this reflexivity could also provide useful insights based on the authors’ positioning within the subject of their research by making sense of data that appear puzzling and contradictory (see, for example, Ng and De Cock 2002; Alvesson 2003).

In terms of positioning, Jean-Paul Sartre saw the “gaze” as the battleground for the self to define and redefine itself. The gaze of the ‘Other’ is beyond our immediate control and it objectifies us and robs us of our freedom as a subject (re-quoted from Kim 2014, 61). Analogically, it can be argued that there is a similar tendency in the contemporary BME-CRT
research framework. As East Asian academics are a minority in number in UK HE, their invisibility may have been a stereotype of East Asians in the UK BME policy narratives. Accordingly, if there is an over-generalised BME stereotype in the UK that made East Asians ‘invisible’ and ‘silenced’, then there is also a ‘model minority’ myth in the USA as the most persistent stereotyping of East Asians within the yellow peril legacy.

4.2 From yellow peril to the model minority and back again

The model minority myth was initially coined by American sociologist William Petersen in his article, ‘Success story: Japanese American Style’, published in the New York Times in 1966. Asian Americans assimilated with American culture to shed negative stereotypes about them and to achieve social respectability in the USA. As Frank Wu (2002) and Ellen Wu (2015) point out, the model minority stereotype is dangerous and harmful because it is racial stereotyping. Once we accept this racial generalisation, stereotyping East Asians as hard working, good at math and science, submissive and keeping their heads down, etc. easily follows (F. Wu 2002; E. Wu 2015). Consequently, the model minority myth has been false flattery as it is really about isolating and setting East Asian Americans against other minority groups such as African-Americans and Hispanics. Ironically, the model minority stereotype can serve to reintroduce a new form of the ‘yellow peril’ that has plagued East Asian immigrants in the United States since the late 19th century (Allred 2007). When Chinese immigrants first landed in the US in the 1800s, white Americans saw them as heathens. The xenophobia and discrimination escalated, and the overtly anti-Asian government then introduced the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, which prohibited the entry of Chinese persons into the USA for ten years. During World War II, the Japanese American internment is another well-known example of yellow peril. Philip Vernon (1982) described how Chinese and Japanese immigrants in the United States and Canada were regarded then:
“… as a kind of inferior species, who could be used for unskilled labor and menial jobs, but could never be accepted as equals into the white community. And yet Orientals survived and eventually flourished until they came to be regarded as even higher achievers, educationally and vocationally, than the white majority.”

(Vernon 1982, ix)

American public perceptions of East Asians that are somewhat distinct from other minority racial/ethnic communities in the US tend to continue today. Another layer of East Asian stereotype is a ‘perpetual foreigner’ syndrome. For instance, during the 2018 Winter Olympic competition, Bari Weiss, a New York Times op-ed writer and editor, tweeted “Immigrants: they get the job done,” along with a video of Mirai Nagasu (Japanese American) when she became the first American woman to land a triple axel on 12 February 2018. Weiss’ tweet sparked controversy on social media because Nagasu was not an immigrant (Madani 2018). She was born in California to Japanese immigrants and is an American citizen. This episode reveals a common public perception of East Asian-Americans as immigrants, regardless of generation, and as ‘the perpetual foreigner’, regardless of whether they were born in the U.S. or how long they have lived in the country. This view is not innocuous given the harmful effect on ethnic communities as well as individuals. For instance, hate crimes against Asian-Americans in Los Angeles County tripled in 2015, with the majority targeting Chinese-Americans, and experts suspect that the increase was connected with President Trump’s labelling of China as a ‘foreign enemy’ (Gandhi 2017; Yam 2018).

4.3 Yellow peril in silence

By comparison, in the UK, public discourse on CMEs is rarely heard, especially in relation to racial equality/diversity policy and practice. According to the BBC (2018), citing Ashley
Thorpe, there is less awareness of racial identity politics surrounding East Asians, compared with Black and South Asian groups: “British East Asians are considered a neoliberal, multicultural success story; so people are often unaware of the racism that they do encounter … They are characterised as being content, hard working at school, and with nothing to complain about” (http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-42859476). Commentators argued that the US entertainment industry is ahead of the UK when it comes to minority representation. Perhaps there is resemblance in academia when we look at racial/ethnic identity politics on campus. To date, there is a paucity of East Asian representation, and their voices have not been heard in the Equality and Diversity policy-making process - let alone institutionally among UK universities, perhaps due to highly individualised East Asian academics’ positioning and their voluntary non-participation in the BME policy discourse as evidenced in our research data.

However, as Daniel York in the BBC interview report said, “this is precisely why British East Asians should continue speaking up. We've been very good at edging ourselves out of the race and diversity debate [until now] ... the trouble is, if you don't make a noise you'll get sidelined and ignored” (BBC 2018). As the number of East Asian (notably Chinese) students has notably increased in UK universities, recently by more than 2,000, a 20% increase on 2017 (The Guardian 2018), it would be timely to broaden and diversify the BME Equality and Diversity Policy framework and discourse.

Against this backdrop of the yellow peril-model minority dialectic, we argue that the UK racial equality/diversity policy with a one-size-fits-all framework for all non-white academics can actually harm the career development of a number of academics. Accordingly, this view may have had the unintended consequence of distancing some East Asian academics from their respective academic communities when the opposite was intended by the Equality and Diversity Policy agenda. The following section will illustrate diverse CME academics’ positional identities drawing on our interview data.
4.4 “Ambidextrous” East Asian British academics’ positional identities

The two cases in Group 1 are compared with data in Group 2, although both individuals in Group 1 identified themselves as Southeast Asian Chinese and continue to hold Malaysian citizenship. CM1, a Chinese Malay medical professor attended a British élite boarding school and then Cambridge University. On graduation, he worked in Oxford and UCL but eventually moved to Singapore. CM1 suggested that the BME label may be disadvantageous for his career development by surfacing a non-existent problem and getting colleagues to view him as a “victimised and discriminated” minority, which he very stridently believes he wasn’t in UK HE. This kind of unwanted attention to his ethnicity left his real needs unmet – for instance, the paucity of incentives for encouraging quality research. CM1 suggested that this was an endemic problem for all early-career medical researchers in the UK at the time, and not merely for certain ethnic minorities.

CM1 eventually sought opportunities in Southeast Asia, where he originated. Given his family roots, Southeast Asia could be seen as an obvious geographical area for his career move, but CM1’s interest in progressing his career in Chinese East Asia was, in fact, “opportunistic” as he sensed that there were more opportunities for qualified young researchers, for example, in Singapore and Hong Kong. CM1 then took the view that his ethnicity, ironically, was considered important for his employers in Singapore although this was less important to him as a reason for choosing to progress his career in Greater China. He said he would have been equally happy to stay in the UK. Here CM1’s account contradicts Bhopal and Jackson (2016)’s general descriptions of the ‘BME academic flight’ from UK to overseas HE – consequent upon perceived professional barriers, marginalisation, and exclusion that they argue BME academics experience in UK universities.
Overall, CM1’s view of his ethnicity in relation to his career choice and subsequent move to Singapore was driven by the following factors, which seemed to remain consistent through his early and mid-career development:

- Connectivity of employers with international networks,
- Culturally open research centres of excellence, and
- Employers’ record of attracting external research funding.

CM2, another Chinese Malay academic in Group 1, also believed that he has never been professionally discriminated against in the UK. Yet he observed that his ethnicity had been categorised in staff surveys and student events as “BME”. He believed that this categorisation, in which he had been included without consent or consultation, had prompted him to imagine himself as a BME member in playing this role, for example, in public events inside and outside his employing university, where he has been invited to speak “as [his] university’s only BME professor”. Although he recognises a personal benefit in being invited to speak in this role, nonetheless the identity within which CM2 had been asked to position himself is contrived and artificial. Instead, his ethnicity played no role in his award of a university chair where he was required to fulfil the same requirements as other applicants regardless of ethnicity.

CM2’s views of his ethnicity did however differ from CM1 in the idiosyncratic way that CM2 portrayed his career choices. For example, he expressed his ability and non-preference in working either in Chinese East Asia or the UK as an “ambidextrous” skill that he had developed from his English élite education. CM2’s ambidexterity includes his linguistic trans-cultural skills and trans-disciplinary education backgrounds. As a polyglot, he speaks several European languages fluently. This adaptability has enabled him to be socially acceptable within Chinese East Asian as well as various western European environments.
Both CM1 & CM2’s views of their individual choices appear to clash with Wilkinson’s (1964, 33) perspective of “the Victorian public school ethos”, which he argued “closely resembled political assumptions underlying the British Constitution”. Here, a core assumption was the indoctrination of a collective loyalty for public service among public schoolboys that Wilkinson (1964) suggested was an intransient feature of public school education from their foundation as preparatory schooling for future political leaders and civil servants. Watters (2016) goes further in providing longitudinal evidence of a positive correlation between élite private schooling and high-status employment in Britain beyond public service. He argues that ‘old boys’ networks’ continue to be structured in a way that “assist[s] [former schoolboys] to obtain employment in particular high-status professions and areas of businesses” (ibid, 101). However, what is the statistical evidence for the employment of former élite schoolboys among prominent professional and other firms? How far did ethnicity matter in the operations of ‘old boys’ networks’?

Our data from CM1 and CM2 suggest that their Chinese minority ethnicity did matter in the UK for their positional identities in their professional fields of endeavour. Ethnicity mattered when they leveraged their status in positive, personal ways, firstly as Prefects at their English élite boarding schools, but also equally as international sons of educated, Chinese minority ethnic (CME) families in Malaysia where Bumiputras remain a privileged category of people. This provenance was secure in the sense that these two CMEs were anchored in their ethnic identity. Moreover, the CME provenance suggested their distinctiveness, not as a separate ethnic group that demanded equality/diversity, but as leaders among the white majority of their school peers. In other words, instead of their East Asian identity limiting personal opportunities, their status as Prefects and CME elevated them to a privileged position that other Prefects who were not CME may not have enjoyed. The respected, privileged positions of CM1 and CM2 as Prefects may then at least partly explain why CM1 & CM2 were able to work within the milieu of mainly white British medical
researchers in Oxbridge in the 1980s (CM1) and of investment bankers in the City of London (CM2) without apparent discrimination. At that time, these communities were among a number of professional communities that continued to maintain a concentration of public schoolboys and boarding school influence, and which practiced élitist cultures of their own (Watters 2016). Key similarities and differences between CM1 and CM2 in their perceived relationship between their élite education and CME identities may be thus presented:

Table 1: Comparative social identities of sampled CMEs

[insert Table 1 here]

4.5 Positional identities of East Asian international academics against the East Asian stereotype

Likewise, interviewees in Group 2, except three (a Korean-American female academic in Sociology whose subject area was ethnic studies, a Taiwanese-Canadian who has expertise in intercultural communication, and a Chinese-Australian female academic in interdisciplinary Social Sciences), did not consider their identities in relation to the BME policy framework for racial equality/diversity agenda. Two academics in Group 2 did not even know the definition of BME.

All of the CME/East Asian international academics come from élite education backgrounds in their own countries. Before coming to the UK, the majority of CME/East Asian international academics interviewed in this research (except the Korean American and Chinese Australian) were raised in their East Asian countries of origin, where they belong to the racial/ethnic majority. Accordingly, they did not easily identify with the mainstream BME narratives in the UK Equality and Diversity Policy. The ontological structure of their Lebenswelt (living environment) is not simply based on racial/ethnic minority identities.
Among our ten CME and East Asian international academics, four (two mainland Chinese, one Taiwanese, and one Korean-American) are early or mid-career academics. Three of these academics are female and one is male, and they are all highly motivated and proactive in their career development.

Among the Group 2 interviewees, an East Asian female (mid-career) academic talked about her experience of feeling like a stranger and being silenced in the BME Policy discourse:

“When people casually ask if the bullying I experienced in my previous university (before moving to the current one) was due to racism, I strongly deny. I think such attribute is a psychological projection and oversimplifies the complex situation. ... I am proud of my current institution’s strong commitment to widening participation and racial equality/diversity, fighting for social justice and social change. However, I don’t really define myself in racial, ethnic terms. I don’t have a ‘chip on my shoulder’, which is the term I actually heard from a fellow BME colleague recently. On the contrary, I enjoy being a foreigner here. I find my inside-outsider position useful for my academic work and life in general. ... When Widening Participation students and colleagues with working class backgrounds talk about their experiences of ‘impostor’ syndrome in the traditional academic environment, I feel silenced because I am not one of them. In fact, I am very comfortable with traditional academe due to my academic family background and upbringing. ....

... I am obviously an Anglophile and Europhile. London has become my intellectual home, and that is why I returned to London after working internationally. I love cosmopolitan London and being immersed in the European intellectual tradition.”

(Excerpt from an East Asian female interview narrative, November 2017)
A Chinese male (mid-career) academic in Cognitive Psychology, who came from Beijing to the UK for his postdoctoral work initially and is now Senior Lecturer, expressed his anxiety over the BME labelling. He was comfortably aware of his cultural difference as an international and Chinese scholar working in the UK, but he has never thought that he has been disadvantaged in his workplace because of his race or ethnicity. On the contrary, he has enjoyed his position as a Chinese international scholar. He was welcomed and recognised as strategically important for UK HE given the rise of China’s power in the global knowledge economy and international higher education market.

Another mainland Chinese, female (early-career) academic, a Lecturer in Sociology in an English university, who had worked in Hong Kong before her doctorate in Cambridge, shared a similar view. Regarding Equality and Diversity Policy in UK HE, she was engaged in gender issues and was also critical of the UKBA red tape. Her university is required to check her whereabouts regularly outside the term dates due to her Tier-2 visa status as a non-UK national. However, she could not recall any critical incident in relation to her race/ethnicity. The BME label does not feel relevant to her either.

By contrast, a Chinese-Australian female professor reflected on her positional identity that seems more in line with race/ethnicity and nationality:

“My background is later generation Australia-born Chinese, and often that is how I see my identity, although this depends on the context a little. For instance, I mostly feel Australian in a British context, as I am aware my accent is Australian and many British people relate on the basis of accent. However, on some occasions I identify as someone who is visibly Chinese, particularly when I wish to offer support to fellow academics and students who are from a non-white background. Ironically, I always felt "foreign" in my own country of Australia, as there is still a significant, if unconscious, "White Australia"
bias there. Although this was not the reason I left Australia, I feel less "foreign" in the UK, as it is a bigger society and used to more diversity.”

On internationalisation:

“I have always felt the academy was an international enterprise. It seems obvious that having foreign academics should contribute to internationalisation, but much of it depends on how their experience and expertise is used. From my experience in the UK, I would say that there is not near enough systematic harnessing of this experience, and I suspect that much of this happens informally, on the initiative of the foreign academics themselves. There does need to be more attention to how internationalisation happens across the whole university - not just through research (which is perhaps the most obvious way that foreign academics can contribute) or attracting international students, but through curriculum as well as cultural change in their institutions.”

On the racial equality/diversity policy and practice:

“I feel foreign again now, in a way, as I try to champion issues of diversity at my university, but I have little official role or authority, despite my own background and academic expertise in this matter. I feel like I am still trying to do things unofficially, and from the margins, which in some ways is how people from marginal backgrounds have to operate to get what they want done.”

(Excerpt from a Chinese-Australian female professor interview, August 2016)

This statement resonates with what Chong, an East Asian American College President in the USA who is also a co-founder of Asia Pacific Americans in Higher Education (APAHE), said:
“Oftentimes, [East] Asian Americans in higher education are the workhorses and not the show horses… They’re people behind the scenes doing a lot of the work without getting credit for it, and when it comes time to consider bringing these people forward to an executive-level position, they’re often overlooked.”

(Morris 2016)

Regarding the stereotype of ‘hard working’ East Asian academics, a CME male (early-career) academic in Social Sciences working at a Russell Group university who was interviewed in this research took it for granted to put extra effort in his work and socialising. Having moved between several countries as a Marie Curie scholar to study and work in several disciplines, he has learned multiple social approaches. For example, he understood it is necessary for him as an international academic - regardless of race and ethnicity - to learn the rules of his host society. He appreciated ‘British small talk’, the British way of socialising, and being funny in a British way, which are not explicit but important to learn to become good colleagues.

Regarding the “British” way, two other CME academics, one in natural science and the other in social sciences, who came to the UK directly to work, talked about their difficulties in decoding tacit cultural meanings embedded in everyday communication at work. A CME male academic, despite his education in the USA and Canada since childhood, still found it difficult to comprehend the British communication style that is far more indirect. It took time for him to learn to read between the lines and to understand what his native British manager really meant. However, on BME policy and racial identity politics, the CME male (early-career) academic above also said:

“I don’t think of myself falling into that category because of my upbringing. I know I am being categorised in the BME group, but I don’t think I am the short end of the stick. I am not part of repression and discrimination. In my department, there are three non-white academics but I am the only non-white
non-UK national. In my workplace, I have never experienced any
discrimination. The racial equality/diversity policy discourse indicates that the
UK is explicitly multicultural. In that regard, I don’t feel I need to work so
hard to fit in the UK society. I feel more at home here than in Scandinavia.”
(Excerpt from interview, April 10, 2018)

This academic also never thought of himself in racial ethnic terms. He said he has
always identified himself by his ‘nationality’. For academic career advancement, he asserted:
“I don’t think you should play that [BME] card”. He thought class distinction is more
significant than race/ethnicity, and the wide spectrum of diversity within the BME category is
elided into the black and poor widening participation beneficiaries, which is also
acknowledged in the Runnymede Report (Weekes-Bernard 2011). He suggested it may be
useful to have a new category: “BPME” (black and poor minority ethnic group).

Among the twelve interviewees, there was only one female academic from Southeast
Asia in a top UK university, and this academic attributed her experience of unfair treatment
in promotion to covert racial inequality and discrimination. She has faithfully followed the
advice from her former mentor in her previous Russell Group university, who is an Asian
(Indian) academic, that minority ethnic academics need to “work ten-times harder than White
British academics”. She was aware of the mainstream BME narratives, for example: “BME
academics are less likely to occupy professorial positions, are more likely to encounter issues
of wage disparity, and are significantly less likely to gain employment opportunities in HE
more generally. They are also less likely to benefit from a permanent/open-ended contract of
employment” (Arday 2015, 5). Nevertheless, the female academic has never participated in
BME activities.

By comparison, a Japanese female academic working in another Russell Group
University expressed her view of the BME policy framework for equality/diversity and her
positional identity quite differently:
“Why do I need to be bothered about my ethnicity that is not related to my academic work? I think the BME advocacy policy will make no tangible outcome. I have never experienced racism. I wouldn't be bothered. I don't want to spend time on racial politics. I really don't think the BME policy package based on racial ethnic categories will help my academic career progression. I believe in meritocracy. The common view of ‘hard working’ is not necessarily the trait of East Asian academics or ethnic minority, and individual work ethics is not related to the ethnic minority position. There are just individual attributes, individual choices and individual disadvantages. I don't benchmark the British or anyone. I am happy to live in limbo. Being categorised as Japanese doesn't help. I like the freedom to define myself. I don't need to follow the game. For the moment, I enjoy not being categorised.”

(Japanese female lecturer, Russell Group University Business School, March 2018)

At the same time, this Japanese academic thought that international academics have made distinctive contributions to the internationalisation of UK universities and new knowledge creation:

“Yes, these people add diversity to the university culture. My academic colleagues in my immediate unit are UK, Romanian, Italian, Canadian nationalities. Business Schools also count the nationalities of staff as it matters for some accreditation, I think… There are so many non-UK colleagues. Sometimes British may feel minority? I like this diversity of the British HEIs and I do hope this diversity remains after Brexit … New knowledge creation, generally yes, as people tend to utilise international networks. In my case I currently collaborate with my former colleague in Sweden, for example, where I did my postdoctoral research before coming back to the UK. These networks
come and go and there is serendipity. I also collaborate with academics in Japan, but that is not much with cultural proximity, it was more about the data set they had and the complementarity of research approaches.”

(Excerpt from a narrative interview with a Japanese female lecturer in a Russell Group University Business School, March 2018)

5. Discussion and Conclusion: Not a victim but a stranger

Drawing on C. Wright Mills (1959), we developed biographical narratives to explore intricate relationships between individual lived experiences and social structures, and movements and history that motivated this paper. Reflecting on those narratives, we have observed a number of behavioural traits of East Asian academics in their career choices in UK HE. The following Table summarises our research findings, and we draw on common and dissimilar behavioural traits in our findings as a basis for developing our principal contribution:

Table 2. Summary of findings

[insert Table 2 here]

This list summarises distinct behavioural traits that are drawn from our interview data. The traits do not constitute a checklist of universal traits for all East Asian academics to survive and thrive in UK HE. Establishing such a checklist is not our purpose. Rather, Table 2 summarises behavioural traits that appear to have been developed by our East Asian interviewees at various stages of their careers in UK HE. We draw on this list in our discussion.

For our CME interviewees, the two sets of behavioural traits enabled each group to choose work and social environments in and beyond UK HE where they have carved and preserved their own, respective identities. The formative learning in their adopted
environments as well as their countries of origin produced behavioural traits for survival that were strongest among both Groups 1 and Group 2 - namely, international networks and outlook, collective loyalty, individuality and resilience. There was more variation in the strength of behavioural traits for success, as may be expected, given the different disciplines of our CME respondents. Nonetheless, CMEs in both Groups exhibited largely similar success traits that built on survival traits.

Although the BME-CRT framework of Equality and Diversity Policy agendas has thrown important light on the existing racial bias and discrimination in UK HE, the ways in which our CME interviewees responded show incongruity. These CMEs have crafted behavioural skills to survive in their adopted environments and thrive in their preferred international work environments. First, our Group 1 interviewees supported a status quo which did not confer equality/diversity for their CME status. Indeed, they developed adaptive skills initially to cope and interact with a non-BME environment in their boarding school education to achieve a level of success in that environment. In English public boarding schools, they were proactive and interactive, experiencing the position of respect within the ontological structure of the white supremacy Lebenswelt.

Similarly, Group 2 interviewees believed that they had established their careers in UK HE based solely on their academic quality, and that the policy mantra of racial equality/diversity had been unnecessary to achieve this goal. Interviewees in both groups expressed concern that the BME labelling could be a handicap for their career development by distinguishing them, implicitly or otherwise, as a “victimised” minority, and not on the basis of their work.

All of the twelve CME interviewees had achieved their success to the disadvantage, if not at the expense, of prevailing norms such as the BME equality/diversity. A notable feature of their ‘ambidexterity’ (such as linguistic trans-cultural skills and trans-disciplinary
approaches) indicates that they have acquired ‘transnational identity capital’ (Kim, 2017), which “represents attributes associated with sets of personal psychosocial competencies in negotiating their ways in the transnational space— especially in the absence of tangible cultural guidance and social norms” (Kim 2017, 987).

Unlike the stereotypical BME experiences portrayed as victims in the literature (see, for example, Bhopal 2016; Hirsch 2018), our sampled CMEs crafted skills, very artfully, to thrive in their chosen academic careers, principally by conforming to the prevailing culture in favour of meritocratic excellence. For all our interviewees, this culture in the UK prioritised excellence in research. Table 2 therefore also sets out behavioural traits that have supported the ability of our sampled academics to thrive in environments that they astutely chose. A constituent element of this choice was in their acute observation, based on their formative experience in boarding school (Group 1) and their international study and work experiences (Group 2), of suitable research environments where they believed that they could thrive by applying their ambidextrous skills, as listed in Table 2.

Some of the “thriving” skills identified in Table 2, such as “insider networks (old boys’ networks)” and political support of established policies and practices that Group 1 respondents enjoyed, are attributed to “elitist” identities (Table 1). These identities had been shaped by Group 1 respondents first in their home environment and then developed in their adopted English environment. For CM1 and CM2 (in Group 1), this latter environment was not dissimilar in terms of the skills that their families at home in Malaysia had also developed and practiced for their survival as members of an ethnic Chinese minority in the Malay-dominant society where Bumiputra privilege is preserved (Kim 2001).

Measures of “thriving” were the same for both Groups in peer recognition for their scholarly contributions, but these were not necessarily the same metrics as their white counterparts. For example, our CME/East Asian academics refused to be a victim but assumed the position of a ‘stranger’ (invoking Simmel 1908) in a white-dominant social environment.
environment in the UK. Such a positional identity - ‘not a victim but a stranger’ and other
distinctive East Asian features of Table 2 suggest the unusual meaning of “low-profile” as a
strategic choice for our interviewees. Low-profile was incompatible with the status of a
“model minority”, as our interviewees, being internationally mobile, were not passively
conforming to the stereotypical roles ascribed to them.

As a matter of racial equality/diversity, the interactive, resilient response of East
Asian academics to prevailing cultural norms in UK HE suggests that the BME-CRT
framework should include an “ambidextrous” perspective of well-educated East Asians – i.e.
the significance of *la bonne education* surpassing the conventional racial/ethnic boundaries.
This same outcome may also be supported in other racial/ethnic minority groups with a
similar international profile as the CME/East Asian academics interviewed in our research.

Given the over-generalised BME policy framework for racial equality/diversity, our
findings have suggested the danger of throwing the interests of certain ethnic minorities out
with the bathwater by alienating East Asian academics that the equality/diversity policy is
intended, in principle, to protect. This one-size-fits-all BME labelling applies also to our
shorthand of CMEs, which the logic of our argument suggests should be discarded for the
same reason as we have argued that BME policy should be discarded for our ambidextrous
interviewees. Here, all racialised labelling is potentially harmful to the practice of their
behavioural traits as it can undermine individual authenticity.

Instead, what we suggest as our principal contribution of this paper is the ability of all
our sampled East Asian academics to thrive, without merely surviving, in both their home
and adopted environments. The notion of a privileged and apparently socially impenetrable
‘circle’ of white privilege has been reinforced by anecdotes of the continuing social
experience of Britons who have carved their own identities that are distinct from white
privilege (Irving 2014; Hirsch 2018). For our sampled East Asians, however, the existence of
this ‘circle’ was less relevant than whether they were able to create “new knowledge”, in a
formal sense in their work, but also personally, in new knowledge of applying or augmenting their cultural toolkit. Whether subconsciously (Group 2) or openly (Group 1), this toolkit motivated our interviewees to survive and thrive. In doing so, they contributed to building the transnational work environment and multinational culture which is a feature of UK HE that a number of East Asian academics observed and were attracted to.

Here, an observation is that East Asians, in fact, have been constituting and reconstituting this culture in a creative way, and in so doing they have begun to move the social agenda in UK HE beyond multiculturalism, and thereby beyond equality/diversity. In this sense, the legacy of “yellow peril” has indeed become transformed and may also have transformed the environment of UK HE beyond an exclusive concern with equality and diversity. While white Britons could legitimately fear the “low-profile” development of the yellow peril, they and other ethnic minorities could also learn from, as well as work with, ambidextrous social perspectives that can have benign outcomes. Here the yellow peril appears to have become neither offensive nor defensive, but adaptive, often creatively so, and supportive. We suggest how this active “low-profile” nature of ambidexterity as both socially passive-loyal and yet individually pro-active has, in fact, become a new norm for some time now, at least among both groups of our sampled academics.

In this regard, the gaze of the ‘other’ (Sartre 1956) is in fact not enslavement but on the contrary a catalyst for East Asian academics to thrive. The fact that “others look at us” makes a driving force for East Asian academics to engage and thrive. Sartre’s gaze of the ‘Other’ focuses on the binary nature of gaze, i.e. dualism, highlights unequal power relations. However, in analysing East Asian academics’ positional identities, we find the notion of duality, derived from Giddens’s structuration theory (Giddens 1984), whereby the viewer and the viewed in the gaze are in interdependent, mutual, reflexive relationships. As both parties are social actors in reflexivity, they are no longer opposed, although they remain conceptually distinct.
6. Coda

The editor of *The Good Immigrant* (2016) Nikesh Shukla says:

“But diversity is the wrong word … I very much hope we can stop being short-sighted about diversity and get to the point where writers can just be writers”. The essays in the volume interrogate a British national culture trapped in a post-imperial state of nostalgia where a white universal experience is the norm against which black and Asian writers must racialise themselves for a reading audience.”

(Parmar 2016)

Our research has illustrated that East Asian academics’ positional identities in UK universities are not known, while the ‘victimised’ identities of black minorities are dominant. By comparison, East Asian academics and students in the USA are stereotyped as a ‘model minority’ in the legacy of the ‘yellow peril’. And such stereotyping of East Asians has served to undermine Blacks and Hispanics in the USA, and to trap East Asian Americans who are then compelled to conform to the ‘model minority’ stereotype. Such a model minority stereotype does not exist in the UK BME policy discourse, and we have countenanced against introducing a ‘model minority’ in the UK. After all, the model minority myth in the USA has been harmful and dangerous.

Overall, the limits of the equality and diversity policy in the UK are in its simplified, racialised BME framework of explaining the process of domination and discrimination. We suggest that this application conforms with the origins of the BME policy framework as a tool for managing diversity initially, rather than for acknowledging and valuing diversity. In *The Established and Outsiders*, Norbert Elias and John Scotson ([1965] 2008) theorised on the sociology of power by a small-scale investigation into the process of domination and
discrimination: a differential in the power ratio between groups, where feelings of belonging and not-belonging, of being perceived as authentic or anomic, gain more importance than a singular demarcation by race/ethnicity, nationality, religion, or different culture/civilisation, in explaining the process of othering and marginalisation. These aspects are reflected in our sampled biographical narratives of East Asian academics’ positional identities.

Moreover, in terms of power relations, dynamics and executions in a business organisation, Reynolds and Lewis (2017) reported the significance of ‘cognitive diversity’ for business success, instead of box-ticking diversity based on conventional criteria such as race, ethnicity, and gender:

“Received wisdom is that the more diverse the teams in terms of age, ethnicity, and gender, the more creative and productive they are likely to be. But having run the execution exercise around the world more than 100 times over the last 12 years, we have found no correlation between this type of diversity and performance. … Since there is so much focus on the importance of diversity in problem solving, we were intrigued by these results. If not diversity, what accounted for such variability in performance? This led us to consider differences that go beyond gender, ethnicity, or age. When we have a strong, homogenous culture (e.g. an engineering culture, an operational culture, or a relational culture), we stifle the natural cognitive diversity in groups through the pressure to conform. … If cognitive diversity is what we need to succeed in dealing with new, uncertain, and complex situations, we need to encourage people to reveal and deploy their different modes of thinking. There is much talk of authentic leadership, i.e., being yourself. Perhaps it is even more important that leaders focus on enabling others to be themselves.”

In conclusion, our research suggests that compartmentalising ethnic identity is limited in explaining minority-majority power relations and their accompanying epistemic and symbolic capital and violence. The ontological structure of the Lebenswelt of individual East Asian academics that defines their positional identities does not fit within the dominant BME framework in the UK, as they may be ambidextrous actors who act independently and autonomously. Furthermore, our article has raised an urgent question of the implications of the ‘yellow peril’ legacy (of the late 19th and early 20th century) for contemporary ethno-racial politics in HE and international relations. In Bauman’s words, “the question is no longer how to get rid of the strangers and the strange once and for all, or declare human variety but a momentary inconvenience, but how to live with alterity – daily and permanently’ (Baumann 1997, 30).

Notes
1 Our interest in researching East Asian academics’ narrative accounts of internationalisation and diversification in UK HE followed the first author’s LFHE-funded research on tracking the impact of the BME academic leadership development programme. Two interviews in this article are drawn from this project.

2 ‘East Asian’ academics in this article have ethno-national backgrounds from Northeast Asia (China, Japan, Korea) or Southeast Asia, which typically includes the Greater China region (a term that refers to the economically integrated zone of China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, and ten ASEAN member states: http://asean.org/asean/asean-member-states/).

3 The scandal of the Windrush generation has brought into focus the government’s wider approach to immigration status which started to change in 2012. It is estimated there are about 120,000 children who have grown up in the UK, but who do not have citizenship or residency, even though they may well have the right to be in the UK. Given their undocumented status, these people, many of whom were born here, are facing the threat of deportation (BBC, April 22, 2018: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-politics-43858865/windrush-scandal-facing-the-threat-of-deportation).

4 Eventually the UK Home Office survey had to be withdrawn after criticism that it was flawed and open to abuse (The Guardian, May 18, 2018. https://www.theguardian.com/education/2018/may/18/home-office-sponsored-survey-on-foreign-students-is-withdrawn).

5 There has been some research on the British ‘Chinese’ Community (Cole 2018: 63-64); ‘Chinese’ students in British Schools and a growing critique on the stereotypical representations of Chinese families and their ‘success’ (e.g. Archer and Francis 2006), or research on Chinese academic mobility and diaspora (e.g. Leung, 2017; Welsh, 2015). However, none of the existing literature has not focused specifically on East Asian academics in UK universities.
The major driving force behind the internationalization policy and practice in the UK is ‘economic’ — neoliberal competition for global market share, indirectly of student and research markets, and directly for economic position within a world knowledge economy (Kim 2009).

ONS categories are White (British, Irish, Gypsy or Irish Traveller, Other White); Mixed/Multiple (White and Black Caribbean, White and Black African, White and Asian; Other Mixed); Asian/Asian British (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladesh); Chinese; Other Asian; Black/African/Caribbean/Black British (African, Caribbean, Other Black); Other ethnic group (Arab, Any other ethnic group).

Gypsy, Roma and Traveler communities are, of course, on the receiving end of horrendous racism and are significantly under-represented as a minority group in higher education in the UK. (See CHEER 2017; Cole 2018: 7-73).

Furthermore, the model minority myth also hides the situation of poor working class (East) Asian communities in the US (Cole 2017: 22-23).

Asians in the USA often refer to ‘East Asians’ (typically, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese), following their immigration history to the USA since the 19th century.

Since 2016, employers have been obliged to report to the Home Office anyone in the UK on a Tier 2 “skilled worker” visa who exceeds 20 days’ unpaid absence in a year (The Guardian, June 8, 2018. https://www.theguardian.com/education/2018/jun/05/universities-immigration-risk-hostile-environments).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflicts of interest were reported by the authors.

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For the paper submitted to Policy Reviews in Higher Education:

‘Ticking the ‘Other’ Box: Positional identities of East Asian Academics in UK Universities, Internationalisation and Diversification’

Figure 1: Median Salaries of UK and non-UK staff by Role and Ethnic Group

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‘Ticking the ‘Other’ Box: Positional identities of East Asian Academics in UK Universities, Internationalisation and Diversification’

Table 1: Comparative Social Identities of Sampled CMEs

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<th>Status in School</th>
<th>University</th>
<th>Perception of BME Identity imposed on them</th>
<th>Positional Ethnic Identity</th>
<th>Family</th>
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<td>Boarding in England from age 13</td>
<td>House Prefect</td>
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<td>Negative; Opposed</td>
<td>CME: Southeast Asian &amp; Anglo-Saxon</td>
<td>Malaysian &amp; Singapore Chinese</td>
<td>UK, followed by Singapore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CM2 Malaysian &amp; UK resident</td>
<td>Boarding in England from age 10</td>
<td>School Prefect</td>
<td>Cambridge</td>
<td>Negative; Neutral</td>
<td>CME: Southeast Asian &amp; Western European</td>
<td>Malaysian &amp; Singapore Chinese</td>
<td>Southeast Asia, followed by UK and Germany</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Summary of Findings

Survival & Success (“Ambidextrous”) Behavioural Traits of CME Respondents in UK HE Ranked by Strength

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survival traits:</th>
<th>Group 1 Traits</th>
<th>Group 2 Traits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(S=Strong; M=Moderate; W= Weak)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. International networks and outlook</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Collective loyalty within work environment</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Low-profile public stance</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Resilient</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Positive and interactive</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S/M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Non-confrontational and accommodating</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S/M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Success Traits:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Success traits:</th>
<th>Group 1 Traits</th>
<th>Group 2 Traits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(S=Strong; M=Moderate; W= Weak)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Stranger but not a victim</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Motivation to excel within established system</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Linguistic polyglot</td>
<td>S/M</td>
<td>S/M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. British Cultural literacy (“reading between the lines”)</td>
<td>S/M</td>
<td>M/W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Networks within Establishment</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>M/W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Ethnic and/or national pride (no stigma)</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>S/M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Project interview data