Politicizing Study Abroad: Learning Arabic in Egypt and Mandarin in China

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This paper examines ideologies of American study abroad in politically and culturally "non-Western" countries. Drawing from the theory of orientalism (Said, 1978), we analyze how American public discourse on study abroad for learners of Mandarin and Arabic manifests an orientalist thinking, and how such macro discourse both produces multilingual subjects (Kramsch, 2010) and considerable tensions with the micro discourses of these subjects. Our findings show that despite linguistic and cultural differences between China and the Arab world, the two contexts are imagined together as the political "East" in American public rhetoric. The two languages are also assumed to be crucial to the somewhat contradictory goals of "bridge-building" and "national defense." These imaginings provide students a mode of identity construction, but they are also contested in students' everyday experience. Using these findings, we argue that the discursive links between the two study abroad destinations result from a geopolitically situated American gaze, a view that obscures differences between the two destinations, the goals of individual language learners, and the locals they interact with when abroad.

INTRODUCTION

This article examines contemporary American discourse that politicizes study abroad in two emerging destinations—China and the Arab world. Learning Mandarin and Arabic was uncommon in the U.S. for the majority of the twentieth century. Both languages had similarly low enrollments in 1960 in American universities, with 515 students of Arabic and 679 of Chinese (Goldberg, Looney, & Lusin, 2015). Studying abroad in China or the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) used to be even less popular. In recent years, however, enrollment in Chinese and Arabic language courses has grown exponentially both at home and abroad. In 2013, Arabic enrollments reached 32,286 and Chinese enrollments totaled 61,055 in the U.S. (Goldberg, Looney, & Lusin, 2015). China and the MENA region have also emerged as popular study abroad destinations. With 14,413 American study abroad students, China is now the fifth most popular destination according to the most recent Open Doors data (Institute of International Education, 2014). The number of students studying abroad in the MENA region has also increased dramatically, rising by 160.1% since the turn of the twenty-first century (Institute of International Education, 2014).

These drastic changes cannot be explained by individual motivations or learning goals

alone. Study abroad in these destinations has been restricted by political circumstances at times. For example, China was not open to American students during China's Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) (Geng, 2010), which can explain their low numbers in the country during that time. American students' growing interest in learning Mandarin today coincides with China's economic rise and its increasing participation in the global market. On the other hand, the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks also led to increased interest among American students in study abroad in the MENA region in subsequent years (Lane-Toomey, 2014; Trentman, 2013).

The dramatic increases in the number of American study abroad students in China and the MENA region illustrate, therefore, how transnational movements are made "thinkable" and "desirable" through political rationality and cultural mechanisms in society (Ong, 1999, p. 5). These rationalities and mechanisms assign cultural meanings to transnational processes through discourses about globalization (Fairclough, 2006). Political and cultural discourses can thus inform and direct state strategies as well as individual movement, deploying and regulating various forms of transnational migration (Ong, 1999), including study abroad (Park & Bae, 2009; this volume). The growing interest among American study abroad students in China and the MENA region needs to be understood in relation to such political and cultural discourses.

Meanwhile, sociopolitical contexts can also shape students' experiences while abroad (Dolby, 2007). When language learning is involved, study abroad students' L2 use can be directly linked to their sense of self and sociopolitical imaginings. For example, students from Hong Kong had to negotiate their national identity when they were studying in Britain in 2004, just seven years after the Hong Kong Handover (Jackson, 2008). American study abroad students struggled in discussions about the Iraq War with their French host families in 2003 (Kinginger, 2008). These case studies illustrate how political events and local interpretations of them may present challenges to study abroad students' L2 learning experience. Yet what is missing from these studies is an analysis of how macro discourses promote the study abroad experience itself as a politically significant event. We are left to wonder about the overlap and inconsistencies between the sociopolitical imaginings of study abroad at the national and institutional levels and students' everyday experience abroad.

In this article, we examine and problematize American societal discourse that directs study abroad towards particular destinations. The focus here is the "politicization" of language learning, a concept that we borrow from Pavlenko's (2002, 2003) work on language learning and national ideologies. We use the notion of politicization here represent the process of how public discourse links the teaching and learning of certain languages to political needs. Drawing upon the theory of orientalism (Said, 1978), we argue that the American national narrative promoting study abroad in China and the MENA region manifests orientalism in the contemporary American sociopolitical context. Furthermore, such an orientalist gaze creates multilingual subjects (Kramsch, 2010) but also becomes contested in everyday experience.

In what follows, we begin by discussing the theoretical and methodological frameworks of our study. We then illustrate how Arabic and Mandarin, two otherwise unrelated languages, are rhetorically bundled together in the U.S. as "critical languages" and become connected with the political need of sustaining the U.S. hegemony in a changing geopolitical context. We problematize this macro discourse by examining American students' individual experiences in China and Egypt. Finally, because such politicization is not limited to Arabic

and Mandarin, we conclude with implications for further investigation of the politicization of these and other "critical" languages.

THEORETICAL FRAME

Our analysis draws on Edward Said's (1978) theory of "orientalism." The theory lends itself to the current study not simply because of our geographic focus. Rather, as a theory exploring the link between cultural representations and geopolitical power, orientalism can help us understand the politicalized imagining of the East. According to Said (1978), the East is often "Orientalized" as a homogenous entity in Western cultural discourse, and such an imagining justifies the need for the West to regulate and dominate the East. Knowledge of the East—including its languages—is then linked with the need to ensure and sustain Western cultural dominance (Said, 1978, p. 5).

Despite a changing geopolitical context in the twenty-first century, orientalist thinking has not disappeared. Said (2003) points out in the preface to his original work that orientalism has "never been more evident than in our time"—a time when "the mobilizations of fear, hatred, disgust, and resurgent self-pride and arrogance … are very large-scale enterprises" (xvii). Although the West can no longer effectively sustain its hegemony in the contemporary world, there now exists a rhetoric of threat from rising non-Western powers that "the West must learn to 'accommodate' for the sake of geopolitical co-existence" (Ong, 1999, p. 188). This stance of co-existence, as Ong (1999) explains, acknowledges the spreading capitalism and growing economic power of the East; however, it simultaneously assumes the existence of a cultural non-West that has not embraced Western-style political rationality and hence requires the West to "accommodate" it. As a result, globalists in the West advocate for more international economic collaboration while also paradoxically arguing for the West's (and especially the United States') continued economic and cultural dominance of the world (Block, 2004). Thus, the mastery of non-Western languages and cultures continues to be viewed as a means to help maintain non-Western civilizations as objects of control (Ong, 1999).

Today's orientalist discourse also gives rise to imaginings of transnational mobility, entailing "a new mode" of identity construction (Ong, 1999, p. 18). Yet language learners' identity is constructed and mediated not only through discursive practices in their L1, but also by means of such practices in their L2 (Kramsch, 2010). Therefore, we also draw on Kramsch's (2010) idea of multilingual subjects to understand how these institutionalized discourses of orientalism interact with students' everyday experience of using Arabic and Mandarin with locals while overseas. Specifically, we aim to address the following questions: How are orientalist imaginings of study abroad in China and MENA constructed in American political discourse? In what ways may such an orientalist imagining shape students' subjective positions or become contested in their everyday discourse when they study in these regions?

METHODOLOGY

We adopt critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Wodak & Mayer, 2009) as our methodological framework because of its potential to reveal the relationship between discourse at the societal and individual levels (van Dijk, 2009). CDA can uncover societal and individual

ideologies about globalization as well as how these ideologies justify, facilitate, and regulate individual transnational trajectories (Fairclough, 2006).

From a CDA perspective, when an event appears in both politics and the media, meanings are assigned through discourse to construct an "urgent need" at a given historical moment, which then leads to changes in social life and policy as a response (Jäger & Maier, 2009, p. 40). Therefore, for this study, we collected publicly available documents related to the promotion of Arabic and Mandarin from both discourse planes—policy statements issued by the U.S. government and media articles (mostly from 2000 to 2015). These documents include policy documents and political speeches released by the U.S. government on the topics of learning Arabic and Mandarin and studying abroad in China and/or the Middle East, as well as news reports and editorial columns that comment on such policies and related sociopolitical changes.

CDA can reveal the connections between political discourse, the media, and everyday communication (Jäger & Maier, 2009). Consequently, we draw microdata from two ethnographies of American study abroad students in Egypt and China. The ethnographic project in Egypt was conducted from 2009-2011. The data sources included interviews, documented use of social media, questionnaires, and participant observations with students and their hosts. The project in China was conducted in Shanghai during the spring of 2012. The data sources included audio-recorded interactions between students and their (local) hosts, interviews, participant observation, documented use of social media, and background and linguistic surveys.

We employ a CDA approach for both macro- and micro-level discourses (e.g., informal talk, interviews, online posts) because properties of such diverse discourse can point to societal and individual ideologies (van Dijk, 2001). Our analysis of the macro-level discourses is conducted both diachronically and synchronically. It focuses on the set of discursive meanings that are assigned to study abroad in China and the Arab world in American politics and the media. We compare common themes in the promotion of Mandarin and Arabic and analyze how orientalist ideologies are activated to associate the learning of these languages with America's political needs in geographical regions where they are spoken. Our analysis of everyday micro-level discourse focuses on how the orientalist themes constructed in the American public discourse are recycled, reconstructed, and/or rejected through study abroad students' accounts of their everyday experience. To illustrate the resulting complex and myriad relationships, we juxtapose the macro and the micro in our findings.

ANALYSIS & RESULTS

I. "National Security": Language Learning to Maintain American Hegemony

Arabic and Mandarin share the status of "critical languages" in American political discourse. The concept of "critical languages" emerged in the National Defense Education Act (U.S. House, 85th Congress, 1958) at the height of the Cold War as a way to address threats to national security. It has gained further prominence with the David L. Boren National Security Education Act (NSEA) (1991) and the 2006 National Security Language Initiative (NSLI).

As one of the few national policies directly involving foreign language education, NSEA has had a lasting role in shaping how foreign languages are constructed in public rhetoric. However, despite being a national-level policy document that promotes the education of

U.S. citizens in certain foreign languages, NSEA focuses far more on defining national security than on foreign language education. It begins with this statement:

> (1) The security of the United States is and will continue to depend on the ability of the United States to exercise international leadership. (2) The ability of the United States to exercise international leadership is, and will increasingly continue to be, based on the political and economic strength of the United States, as well as on United States military strength around the world.

As shown above, NSEA defines national security by linking it to the American hegemony in the world ("international leadership"), referred to as the U.S.'s political, economic, and military dominance "around the world."

Compared to its explanation of national security, NSEA is less specific in describing language learning, only stating:

> The future national security and economic well-being of the United States will depend substantially on the ability of its citizens to communicate and compete by knowing the languages and cultures of other countries.

It becomes clear here that NSEA frames foreign language education as a need to sustain U.S. dominance, directly linking communication with competition between nations ("to communicate and compete"). Furthermore, the diverse languages and cultures of "other" countries are lumped together as something to "know," a phrasing that implies they are static objects that can be mastered and controlled, rather than dynamic and developing systems activated in interaction, including intercultural exchanges (Kramsch, 2005).

Yet, curiously, NSEA does not specify any particular language(s) of focus. It instead lists a number of "challenges" to U.S. national security, which form the criteria to determine which languages will be "critical." These challenges include "economic competition," "regional conflicts," "terrorist activities," and "weapon proliferations." Read in the current discursive context (Jäger & Maier, 2009), there are clear links between these identified challenges and particular countries. For example, "economic competition" can be easily associated with China, whose economic growth is often imagined as a "threat" to the U.S. (see Ong, 1998). The phrase "terrorist activities," on the other hand, is frequently associated with the Middle East in American public discourse in order to justify military action in the region (e.g., Fairclough, 2006).

Indeed, later initiatives related to the NSEA almost always explicitly list Arabic and Mandarin. One example is the National Security Education Program (n.d.), which declares a focus on "non-Western European languages." This definition resonates with orientalist imagining of the East (Said, 1978). Linking the learning of non-Western languages with "national security" is further evidence that the need to learn such languages stems from the need to regulate the political Other. Arabic and Mandarin feature prominently in NSEP Initiatives, such as the Language Flagship. The Language Flagship was established in 2002 to develop students with "superior proficiency" in a "critical language." Initially, it only selected four languages for its Flagship campuses, two of which were Mandarin and Arabic. Although it has expanded to include nine languages over the years, Mandarin and Arabic remain the

languages with the most established centers: twelve for Mandarin and four for Arabic (Russian also has four).

The 2006 NSLI also features Arabic and Mandarin in all of its programs. It maintains the theme of language learning to support American hegemony: in a speech justifying the initiative, former President Bush explained, "We're facing an ideological struggle, and we're going to win" (Capriccioso, 2006).

Media documents also emphasize the need to learn Arabic and Mandarin for national security purposes and in order to promote American hegemony. Frequently, these needs are legitimized by means of comparisons with studying Russian during the Cold War. For example, an article from *The Washington Post* (Berkowitz & McFaul, 2005) describes learning the languages and cultures of the MENA region as "the non-military components of the war [on Islamic extremism]" and emphasizes the need for "human intelligence." It goes on to draw repeated comparisons with "the effort to 'know the enemy'" during the Cold War, rhetoric that resonates with promoting certain languages as "the language of the enemy" during the Cold War (Pavlenko, 2003).

Comparisons with the Cold War also surface in rhetoric about study abroad in China, most notably in the media coverage of a recent espionage case. Glenn Shiver, arrested in 2012, was an American student recruited by Chinese intelligence while studying abroad in Shanghai. In describing his case, *Washingtonian* (Wise, 2012) explicitly compares Chinese espionage with that of the former Soviet Union during the Cold War. It further states that China is replacing the former Soviet Union as a result of its economic rise, highlighting the parallel between China's economic growth and its "espionage against the US." This statement not only connects China today with the Soviet Union during the Cold War; it also recycles the discursive link between economic competition and America's "national security" stated in NSEA.

Since the Glenn Shiver case, the FBI has issued multiple warnings to American study abroad students, illustrated by its "safety tips" for American students overseas. In these tips, the FBI (2014) states:

> These [study abroad] experiences provide students with tremendous cultural opportunities and can equip them with specialized language, technical, and leadership skills that make them very marketable to U.S. private industry and government employers. But this same marketability makes these students tempting and vulnerable targets for recruitment by foreign intelligence officers whose long-term goal is to gain access to sensitive or classified U.S. information.

Thus, the primary "safety" concern is study abroad students' national loyalty, not their actual physical and emotional safety while overseas. Furthermore, we notice in the study abroad rhetoric the simultaneous promotion of human intelligence for the U.S. government and the warning against such intelligence work for foreign governments. This statement is a reminder to the students that, even though becoming a vulnerable target may be unavoidable, working as a spy for other governments is strictly prohibited. This politicization of language learning serves to deploy students to study abroad in these "critical" destinations but also to regulate their study abroad experience in an effort to ensure that they can and will only serve the interest of the U.S. government.

Given this emphasis in policy and media discourse on Arabic and Mandarin as "critical languages" for fighting "national security threats," we next turn to the micro discourses of students studying in Egypt and China.

Micro Discourses

1) China. While the American national discourse assumes that students in China will automatically become capable of understanding local politics and contribute to the U.S. hegemony, these students often struggled to make sense of the local political discourse in their everyday experience. Although they were sometimes able to socialize with the local people and construct meaningful relationships (Diao, 2014), American students in China often encountered self and/or peer censorship when they discussed local politics.

Mac, for example, was among those who felt unable to discuss political topics. He chose to study in China because he was an economics major, a clear reflection of macro discourses about the economic relationship between China and the U.S. During his time in China, there was a political scandal involving a top Chinese official who was ousted and arrested on accounts of abuse of power and corruption, according to Chinese news media. However, the scandal was widely reported in the West to have resulted from political drama within China's central government, which led Mac to be highly interested in learning more about the topic. Yet, despite such strong interest, Mac's Chinese roommate, Fang, was unwilling to discuss the occurrence with him, as evidenced by an excerpt from their conversation:

Excerpt 1
"This is Not Right."[1]

(FG = Fang; MC = Mac.)
1. FG: ((in English)) These things in China that can't- Just people- just the Party didn't like- Like our teachers just ask us don't to talk about it in the public. Because it will make big troubles.
2. MC: ((in English)) Oh really?
3. FG: ((in English)) Yeah. That- that sounds strange. Like- like- like- oh >I got a call< heh heh heh. Can't say. Yeah.
   ((switches to Chinese in an elevated tone)) This is not right.
4. MC: ((awkward laughter))

Fang shifted his view here, first stating that such political discussions are not allowed (turn 1) and later describing the situation as immoral ("not right," in turn 3). This switch signals a locally embedded discourse, in which political censorship is seen both as a top-down monitoring mechanism and as a bottom-up moral duty realized through self-censorship.

Yet, Mac did not fully understand these nuanced meanings, despite having studied Mandarin for six years in the U.S. and having been placed in the high intermediate class. In the final interview, he still expressed his confusion: "[W]hen you ask my roommate about it [the political scandal], he doesn't know. You know, maybe he does know and maybe- I don't know." The statement here evidences Mac's continued confusion with the situation. He was still uncertain whether his roommate in fact lacked the knowledge necessary to discuss the topic, was simply not interested in the topic, or was practicing self-censorship.

This instance of intercultural miscommunication highlights disconnections between discourses that are mediated at the national level. While China's political censorship is widely recognized in the U.S. as a form of governmental oppression, Fang's statement reflects how Chinese political discourse presents the practice as a moral duty that its citizens should actively fulfill. Yet, perhaps because such non-Western cultural discourses are often suppressed in the West (Shi-xu, 2005), Fang's explanation became something incomprehensible to Mac.

While Mac was interested in discussing politics with the local people, several other American students expressed their reluctance to engage in politically sensitive discussions. Yun's opinion, voiced in an interview, was a representative one:

> [I] don't want to hit a sensitive subject that'll potentially upset them […] I don't really feel aggressive about anything like that. I don't know if I have a good enough understanding of Chinese, like politics, which I don't.

The sentiment expressed by Yun shows that, despite the heavy politicization of learning Mandarin in American public discourse, some American students may simply resist the political agenda behind the rhetoric.

Yun's active avoidance of political topics, however, became culturally meaningful to her host family. For example, in a dinner conversation with Yun and another guest, the host mother praised Yun's understanding of cultural differences, in light of her avoidance of talking about local politics: "She knows we Chinese people don't care much about politics." According to the host mother, interest in politics is a fundamental cultural difference between American and Chinese peoples. She further described disinterest in politics as a defining characteristic of "our elegant young women" in China. Political apathy is thus linked with both nationality and gender.

2) Egypt. Many students in Egypt were pursuing political science, international relations, or related majors. Their explanations as to why they were studying Arabic closely reflected the political discourses described above, particularly those surrounding political tensions between the U.S. and the Arab world. Some students cited the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 as an event that influenced their interest in the region. They imagined their future selves working for the U.S. government, and their learning of Arabic and study abroad experience supported these imaginings (Lane-Toomey, 2014; Trentman, 2013). For example, Ryan, who was enrolled in a military academy, explained his motivation for studying Arabic as follows:

> I'm in the military […] so that kind of had an effect on it, I was probably going to just study international relations, but honestly, I think part of it had to do with 9/11 when I was in Junior High, and I really didn't know anything about the Middle East at the time. I was just really confused when they came out with the information on the attackers and they were all from countries that were Arabic-speaking.

As language is interpreted as the source of threats ("from countries that were Arabic-speaking"), Ryan's sentiment expressed in this interview excerpt clearly reflects the macro

discourse that links the learning of Arabic and threats to the national security from the Middle East. At the same time, he also reframes these discourses by emphasizing his "confusion" as a primary motivation behind Arabic study, rather than his certainty that learning Arabic will resolve conflicts. In this sense, while the public discourse associates this language with "the enemy" (Pavlenko, 2003), the individual student may simply see the link as confusing rather than transparent.

The voices of study abroad students in Egypt also problematize the focus of macro discourses on national security threats in other ways. For example, despite the intense political interests of many of the students, they were not always able to engage in meaningful political discussions while abroad. Tasha complained of the political apathy she encountered among her Egyptian friends, describing them as people who "simply don't care." She further contrasted such "apathy" with political activism in her home school in the U.S., calling such difference "a big shock." Tasha's example demonstrates that the anticipated political discussions of macro discourses did not always become a reality.

Furthermore, as in China, local expectations of the relationship between political discussions and gender also influenced students' opportunities to engage in anticipated political discussions. For example, Kala complained that local cab drivers would participate in political discussions with her male friends, but not with her:

> Like cab drivers ask a lot of my male friends about like the economics in America, and politics […] were they to know that I also know about it, I'm a poli-sci major […] they kind of filter based on me being a girl.

Interviews with Egyptian roommates also demonstrate that political discussions were not necessarily a local expectation for the study abroad experience, despite the heavy politicization of this experience in U.S. macro discourses. One Egyptian roommate, Amina, drew upon gendered discourses to distance the experience from politics, stating, "[W]e're girls, we don't have anything to do with politics." Although the male roommates reported engaging in political discussions, some of them explained that this was something new to them, rather than something they envisioned as part of the experience. For example, Osman, an Egyptian roommate, commented that he had developed his political awareness as a result of living with American students interested in politics and was impressed with their knowledge of both American and Egyptian politics.

There were also times when the U.S. students resisted the politicization in the macro discourses. As Mallory wrote on her blog: "Politics and martyrism aren't my cup of tea […] especially when I know that these are real things that I don't have much power to change." Indeed, despite study abroad participants' political interests, blogs seemed to be a place to avoid politics, with several of the students apologizing when they wrote about political topics. Thus, whether due to local (sometimes gendered) expectations or their own avoidance of the politics, students' actual experiences in Egypt did not always reflect the political engagement emphasized in U.S. macro discourses.

In the data from both Egypt and China, we see some reflections of U.S. macro discourses surrounding national security threats, as several American students—particularly those studying in Egypt—expected to engage in political discussions, and cited politics as a reason for choosing their study abroad destination. However, students were not always able to participate in discussions they found meaningful, partly due to the fact that some of them

chose to avoid political topics. Yet, some of those who wished to engage in such discussions could encounter local discourses about politics (e.g., peer censorship or assumptions that women should not discuss politics) that effectively distanced them from political topics, Thus, these students' actual experiences contest the macro discourses that explicitly link language learning and study abroad with the political needs of the U.S.

II. "Working Together": Sustaining the U.S. Hegemony for a Globalized Future

While the national security threat discourse links study abroad in China and MENA with threats to the U.S. and past events such as the Cold War, there is a recent shift in the political rhetoric. The emerging rhetoric advocates for "improved" relationships between the U.S. and China or the MENA region in the twenty-first century to address "shared global issues." Study abroad is then presented as one component on the path to achieving this goal.

Clear examples of this discourse shift are found in two speeches given by President Obama in 2009 (The White House 2009a, 2009b), one in Shanghai and one in Cairo, both of which emphasize the need for Americans to study abroad in China and Egypt. At first glance, the new rhetoric does appear to depart from the "national security threat" discourse. Instead of linking study abroad with past events such as the Cold War, these speeches highlight the new century and the globalized future. The phrase "the twenty-first century," for example, appeared four times in the President's Shanghai speech and twice in his Cairo speech. This contemporary and future context is further defined by "globalization." In each of these speeches, "global" or "globalization" appeared three times.

In this context of twenty-first century globalization, the new rhetoric no longer explicitly emphasizes competition between nations or threats to national security from a particular nation. Instead, working together on global issues is the new focus. However, just like the "critical languages" discourse, the identified "global issues of our time" in the new rhetoric construct a sense of political urgency, making study abroad a response to the political need of solving these global challenges. For instance, in Shanghai, President Obama (The White House, 2009a) stated:

> Today, we have a positive, constructive, and comprehensive relationship that opens the door to partnership on the key global issues of our time—economic recovery and the development of clean energy; stopping the spread of nuclear weapons and the scourge of climate change; the promotion of peace and security in Asia and around the globe.

Therefore, the White House's new initiative for study abroad in China, 100,000 Strong, is presented in the speech as a response to an urgent political need.

Similarly, President Obama's (The White House, 2009b) speech in Cairo emphasized the need to "join together" in response to the "mutual interests" of the twenty-first century:

> [W]e have a responsibility to join together on behalf of the world that we seek—a world where extremists no longer threaten our people, and American troops have come home; a world where Israelis and Palestinians are each secure in a state of their own, and nuclear energy is used for peaceful purposes; a world where governments serve their

> citizens, and the rights of all God's children are respected. Those are mutual interests. That is the world we seek. But we can only achieve it together.

In this speech, President Obama also presents study abroad as a response to these issues, stating that sending more American students to study abroad in the region is a means to improve the relationship between the U.S. and the Middle East.

Moreover, a closer look at these "global issues of our time" reveals that the seeming shift in the macro discourse is in fact only a continuation. These global issues are directly connected to the "threats" to U.S. security identified in the "national security threat" discourse. Table 1 shows the comparison between the "challenges" identified by NSEA in 1991 and the "global issues" of the twenty-first century identified in President Obama's speeches almost two decades later.

Table 1
A Comparison of "Global Issues" and "Threats" to U.S. security.

NSEA (1991)	**Shanghai (2009a)**	**Cairo (2009b)**
"economic competition"	"economic recovery"	
"regional conflicts"	"peace and security in Asia"	"Israelis and Palestinians"
"terrorist activities"		"extremists"
"weapon proliferations"	"the spread of nuclear weapons"	"nuclear energy"

As shown in Table 1, the threats to U.S. hegemony identified in NSEA are recycled two decades later as "global issues" requiring nations to work together. Both presidential speeches in 2009 still drew upon the frame of reference used in NSEA in 1991, but not all threats from NSEA appear in each of them. When comparing the two speeches, one noticeable difference is that "terrorism" is used in the Egypt speech while "economic competition" appears in the Shanghai speech. As indicated by this difference, there also exists a set of separate discourses about the Middle East and China, with the former more associated with terrorism and the latter with economic threats.

The recycling of these threats from NSEA is seen in speeches by other political officials, with threats presented using similar terms, such as "global challenges" and "pressing issues." These include two speeches by First Lady Obama to encourage students to study in China (Schulman, 2011; The White House, 2014), one by former Secretary of State Hilary Clinton (2013) to launch the 100,000 Strong Initiative, and one by Assistant Secretary of State Evan Ryan (2015) to announce the opening of a new study abroad branch in the State Department. American dominance remains a theme in this rhetoric. For example, in a speech by Mrs. Obama in 2011, she states, "[W]hen you study abroad, you're actually helping

to make America stronger" (Schulman, 2011). The imagining of a powerful America through study abroad returns to this political theme of the U.S. leading the world. Thus, although the politicization of learning Arabic and Mandarin has been reframed in the twenty-first century, it retains from the "national security threat" discourse the orientalist imagining that presumes U.S. dominance as the default. Tempering overt claims about the U.S. hegemony found in the NSEA with a call for "working together on global issues" reflects the idea of "accommodating" the East in order to sustain America's global dominance (Ong, 1999).

In the U.S. media, such rhetorical connections between study abroad and a globalized future with sustained American hegemony are even more explicit. In its commentary about study abroad in the MENA region, the *Christian Science Monitor* connects the need for foreign language learning with global business and 9/11 ("Go to college, see the world ," 2006). It then draws a distinction between study abroad in the "old days" and now:

> Study abroad is no longer a matter of individual growth, but of national strategic importance. Americans can't expect to lead the world unless they understand it.

Although the focus is the future, the expectation that America will be leading the world in this future remains unchanged. Indeed the phrase "national strategic importance" creates a sense of political urgency surrounding the U.S.' ability to effectively sustain its global hegemony ("to lead the world").

Similarly, a *New York Times* article attributes American students' growing interest in studying abroad in China to a "looming" China in the future (Lewin, 2008). A *Newsweek* article further highlights a sense of future threat to American dominance from China's rise as the rationale behind American parents' motivation to encourage their children to learn Mandarin (Miller, 2011):

> If they [our kids] don't learn—now—to achieve a comfort level with foreign people, foreign languages, and foreign lands, this argument goes, America's competitive position in the world will continue to erode, and their future livelihood and that of subsequent generations will be in jeopardy.

As these instances and others show, the challenges of the globalized future become synonymous with a "looming" China and terrorist attacks such as 9/11, thus linking this newer discourse back to the "national security threat" discourse. Learning these languages is presented as a way to counter national threats, in line with Ong's (1999) accommodation and co-existence theory of contemporary orientalism.

It is, then, perhaps not surprising that the themes of globalization and national security have converged in the political discourse. The Language Flagship, one of the NSEA-based national initiatives, is the epitome of such convergence. Despite the fact that it only focuses on the learning of nine identified "critical languages," it bears the slogan of "Creating Global Professionals." The convergence manifests the inter-textual links between the twenty-first century discourse of working together to solve global issues and the national security discourse from the Cold War era. Though seemingly more benign, modern discourses surrounding the need to work together to address the challenges of the globalized future are,

in fact, simply a revisiting of an orientalist imagining that promotes Western dominance in the East.

Micro Discourses

1) China. The students in China came from diverse academic majors, but they all drew on the theme of a "globalized future," present in the macro discourse, to imagine their future selves as global professionals. Three of the four focal students, Ellen (a Chinese language major), Mac (an economics major), and Tuzi (an English major), had decided to study abroad in China because of their aspirations to work in China or for China-related business.

However, economic globalization sometimes became a sore topic. While the American national narrative positions China as an economic threat, these American students sometimes encountered a local sentiment that viewed the trade between China and the U.S. as a sign of American exploitation. Below is a conversation between Yun and her host family. In this segment (Excerpt 2), the host mother and the grandmother criticize American economic dominance, lamenting how China is exploited for cheap labor and yet has to pay high prices for products that are made locally but branded as American.

Excerpt 2
"Made in China."

(HM = host mother; YN = Yun; HGM = host grandmother.)
1. HM: iPhones, many things are all ma- made in China right?
2. YN: right
3. HM: but what you make is- from making an iPhone you can't profit much. All iPhone sales profit Americans. And you- from China to America Americans still sell (iPhones) at a high price in China. (Chinese people) are only doing the lowest (work). Its original design, its most tech stuff, most core (technology), it (Apple) won't give it to Chinese.
4. HGM: [tech]
5. YN: [uh huh]
6. HM: Can- can- can you understand what I mean?
7. YN: hm.
9. HGM: [((in Shanghainese)) They Americans have the control.]
8. HM: [So this is the biggest problem.] Right?

As one of the most advanced Mandarin learners of the cohort, Yun frequently engaged in family conversations. However, she was only able to backchannel (e.g., "uh huh," "hm") throughout this episode of conversation. Her inability to participate in this dialogue was not due to a lack in her linguistic knowledge to comprehend what was being said. Rather, this represents an instance of her being caught in tensions between discourses in the West and the non-West (Shi-xu, 2005). On the one hand, the U.S. national narrative presents China's economic rise as a source of threat and promotes America's sustained dominance in the region; but, on the other hand, the local discourse sees the U.S. as an exploiter and resists American economic dominance.

These tensions become even clearer in another encounter Yun experienced with a taxi driver, which she recalled as particularly difficult during her interview:

> The taxicab driver was like really intensely criticizing America. And it was just like - I understand that he was angry, and that people in China are still really poor, and like he felt like America is making money off China. And I'm like, okay, I understand why you felt that way, but like at the same time there are poor people in the U.S. too. Like I feel like people just tend to gloss over America and ignore that America has a lot of problems too . . . Like people are just taking advantage of China.[1]

Once again, in this instance we see the local resistance to American hegemony. Yun's frustrations in both cases point to tensions between the orientalist imagining of sustained American hegemony in the region and local resistance to such ambitions.

The students in China also explicitly mentioned and criticized orientalism in the U.S., but their interpretation of orientalism focused on imagining a homogeneous East rather than on geographical power struggles. For example, Ellen, who desired to become a Chinese language teacher, described her career goal as to reduce "stereotypes" and "biases" about China in the U.S., such as the orientalist imagining of a Far East that blends Japan, China, and Vietnam together. Therefore, her experience learning and studying Mandarin in China became an identity tool, enabling her to differentiate herself from mainstream America and to assign meanings to her future self.

Yet, in Ellen's actual everyday discourse, the orientalist imagining gets activated and further distributed rather than being reduced. For example, her Chinese roommate, Helen, once asked about the intercultural relationship between white men and Chinese women:

Excerpt 3
"Yellow Fever."

(EL = Ellen; HL = Helen.)
1. HL: I am curious. Why are there foreign girl- guy- guy- guys who prefer Chinese girls?
2. EL: I don't know why
3. ((both laugh))
4. EL: I only know we have a word, that is, yellow disease. That is, ((switch to English)) yellow fever
5. HL: hm
6. EL: We will say, that they like Asian girls.
((Six lines omitted))
13. HL: Then do you think there are many guys who like Asian girls?
14. EL: Yes.
15. HL: A lot?
16. EL: Quite a lot.
17. HL: Oh really! ((laughter))
18. EL: ((laughter)) Really. They think they are mysterious. ((laughter)) They just look very ((switch to English)) exotic.

The Chinese roommate, Helen, initially referred to "foreign guys" with "Chinese girls" (turn 1), but Ellen talked about the relationship between these guys and "Asian girls" (turn 6). Contrary to what Ellen described as her professional goal in the future (differentiating the Asian cultures), she continues to use the label "Asian girls" or "Asian guys." It was Helen who began to appropriate this categorization by calling this a relationship between "guys" and "Asian girls" (turn 13). As this episode of interaction unfolded with Ellen's explanation of how Asian women are imagined as "mysterious" and "exotic," she was guiding Helen to view herself and other Chinese women through an orientalist male gaze.

2) Egypt. The theme of "working together on global issues" and its convergence with "critical languages" explicitly appeared in the micro discourse of students studying in Egypt, but their interpretations differed from what was promoted in the macro discourse. For example, Mita explained in her interview that Arabic is "a critical language," but her interpretation of the "critical language" had nothing to do with national security. Rather, it was deemed a necessary tool to "communicate" between the U.S. and the Middle East and promote "world peace," thus giving meaning to her study abroad experience.

Mita was not the only one to hold this view. The students in Egypt often drew upon the macro discourse of "working together" to contrast themselves with other Americans and position themselves as knowledgeable about the Middle East. For example, James, who was majoring in International Relations, explained his purpose in studying Arabic in Egypt as follows:

> I think that the problem now is that the Arabs and the Middle East and Islam are one thing to most Americans, and I want to differentiate the issues to most Americans to make them understand all of the problems and all of the differences between the two cultures and two societies.

As James assigns himself the task of "differentiating" between the Arabs and the Middle East and Islam, he is in fact differentiating himself from "most Americans." Orientalism, furthermore, is presented simply as an imagining of the Arab world as a monolithic threat, as opposed to what Said (1978) has revealed about Western dominance over the East.

Carson also drew upon this interpretation of orientalism to construct his own identity as *not* orientalist. Carson was in the U.S. military and had been stationed in Iraq. He presented his initial interest in Arabic as a result of his lack of knowledge about the war he was fighting, explaining, "[T]here's a war going on, and I don't really know why I'm here, I don't really know why I'm fighting this war." His efforts to learn Arabic and study in the Middle East then allowed him to differentiate himself from both this past self as well as from "mainstream" Americans:

> It's Edward Said's orientalist belief […] just believing that all Arabs are the same […] the Middle East is monolithic, there's no differences between them, of course there's many differences between them, there're major differences, and no one realizes at home.

Orientalism is defined here explicitly as "the Middle East is monolithic," and there is no mention of the political dimension in Said's writings, despite the explicit citation of his name.

Another interpretation of orientalism involves seeing the Middle East as a place that needs regulation, a view with which some students aligned themselves. Jennifer, a student in Egypt who was unhappy from the beginning of her stay, and began counting down the days until her departure from Egypt shortly after her arrival, wrote on her blog:

> It is hard for me not to feel like an orientalist at times, especially when my Internet shuts off in the middle of a conversation, or when people on the street or in a tram car have really extreme body odor […] I am making an honest effort to be more relaxed, and even if I don't want to embrace the differences here, I can just accept them.

Jennifer's ambivalence towards the orientalist imagining is telling. For her, cultural adjustment becomes a process of accommodation that requires "effort" and entails frustrations. Despite her claims to try not to be "an orientalist," her view actually represents the societal discourse that is deeply rooted in orientalism: the culturally and politically non-West is less advanced and clean, and consequently, needs regulation.

Meanwhile, the way these students were seen by locals often had to be understood within the context of American control and dominance in the region. Sometimes study abroad students were viewed as "different" Americans. For example, Inas, an Egyptian roommate, explained how encountering Americans speaking Arabic was "wonderful" and represented a departure from "the years of politics":

> If he speaks my language this is a good way to communicate with me, there's a bridge, there's a relationship, so in my opinion this is wonderful, this is the best thing that's happened, that's better than the years of politics.

However, at other times, these American students were simply seen as symbols of U.S. dominance in the region. For example, Rose, expressed her frustration that she was assumed to have certain political views based on her American nationality:

> [A]t the same time we're cursed in every place because we have to have a reply to like why is America in Iraq, why does America encourage Israel in Palestine against the Palestinians, why do I like Bush, why are we responsible for everything in American politics and I was like 12 years old when Bush was elected . . . but we're still responsible for it because of our skin and our passport.

Thus, students studying in Egypt drew on macro discourses promoting "working together" to differentiate themselves from "orientalist" Americans, which some of them defined as people who imagined the Middle East as a monolithic entity and thus promoted discord in Arab-U.S. relations. Many also wished to distance themselves from continued American hegemonic practices in the region, yet they were unaware of the links between these practices and the macro discourses they took up to create their multilingual identities. As illustrated by the quote above, this could lead to considerable frustration in interactions with locals who connected their presence with American hegemony in the region.

In both China and Egypt, we see students reflecting twenty-first century macro discourses of "working together" in Egypt and of a "globalized future" in China. However, for individual students, these discourses are often a way to create identities for themselves as multilingual subjects distinct from "mainstream" Americans, and they are unaware of their reinforcement of U.S. hegemonic practices. Furthermore, students' ability to construct these identities is again subject to local discourses, which at times hampered their ability to construct their desired multilingual and multicultural identities.

DISCUSSION

Foreign language education has long been politicized in American national narrative as a means of cultivating ethnic and/or national identities (Pavlenko, 2002, 2003). Our analysis of the macro has revealed the orientalist imagining behind two seemingly contradictory discourses, both of which frame language learning as a tool to sustain U.S. dominance in regions that have not embraced the Western-style political systems. The shift in discourse from "threats to national security" to "working together for a globalized future" continues to maintain an oriental gaze situated in today's geopolitical context. The newer discourse is an example of "accommodating" and "co-existing" with emerging economies and political movements to effectively sustain the American global hegemony. Therefore, the new theme of "working together" does not replace the old theme of "threats to national security." Instead, study abroad in China and the MENA region is now tied to both ensuring America's "national security" and making America "stronger" in a globalized world.

Moreover, the macro and the micro discourses reveal the many inconsistencies and conflicts between the two. We were able to uncover the orientalist themes using CDA, but these themes were not transparent to the students. Students often (re)interpreted orientalism as the imagining of a homogenous Far East or Middle East, and they used such interpretations of the macro discourse to make sense of their experiences and construct their identities as non-orientalist, multilingual Americans. Yet they often failed to see the connection between the macro discourses they drew upon and the West's continued power and dominance over the non-West (Ong, 1999; Said, 1978). Although many students mentioned problems with American hegemony and dominance, they did not detect the orientalist imagining in the American national discourses they took up to create their identities as multilingual subjects.

Meanwhile, while the macro discourses promote an understanding of languages and cultures as static "objects" for learning (Ong, 1999), students' everyday discursive practices show the opposite. When they interacted with locals, local sets of cultural discourses became activated. While the American national narrative promotes sustained American hegemony, local discourses in these regions often approach such dominance with resistance or resentment. As seen in examples from both China and Egypt, individuals may experience difficulty engaging in meaningful discussions because of resentment towards American exploitation. Students may even be seen as symbols of American dominance and become targets of criticism. The ways American students are received in these communities, therefore, must be understood within this context of American hegemony and local resistance. Furthermore, as illustrated in the conversation about censorship between Mac and his Chinese roommate, local perspectives are embedded in local discourses may be incomprehensible to American students due to the suppression of discourses from the political non-West in the U.S. (Shi-xu, 2005). While globalization may have led to increasing

transnational flows, these flows are still regulated by national and institutional agencies. Individual students' transnational mobility alone cannot overcome these disconnections between nationally mediated discourses.

As we compare the findings for China and Egypt, there are also many differences both at the macro and the micro levels. These differences show how problematic it is to simply group these regions together and bundle their languages as "critical languages." Yet, these differences also reveal strikingly similar themes. The MENA region is closely linked to the post-911 world, whereas China is often associated with economic globalization. But, despite these differences, both regions are presented as "challenges" or "threats" in the macro discourse. Thus, the Eastern languages spoken in these regions can still be grouped together (e.g., "critical languages") because of the similar political need to accommodate to these societies in order to sustain the U.S. hegemony. At the micro level, the students in Egypt often reproduced the politicized meanings of study abroad, as they directly commented on their future desires to work for the government. But those in China instead tended to frame their futures as related to global business involving China. In both cases, students' imagined future selves corresponded to what the macro discourses promote: a response to China as an economic threat and the Middle East as a political threat.

By using a CDA approach, this study outlines orientalist themes in discourses that politicize non-Western languages. However, many other themes such as the "Grand Tour" of study abroad (Gore, 2005) were also present in our data. Furthermore, we have only focused here on the American public discourse about study abroad in China and the Middle East. Future research should incorporate local discourses in addition to the American public discourse. Moreover, there is the need to investigate the processes of politicization for other "critical languages," such as Russian, Korean, and Urdu, each of which may embody a different set of themes and ideologies. As we reveal new forms of politicization of study abroad in the twenty-first century, we hope to invite more research to critically address these equally pressing themes.

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NOTES

[1] Excerpt 1 originally took place in English, but all of the other conversations presented here were originally in Mandarin. The interviews were sometimes in Arabic (from the Arabic data) or Mandarin (from the Chinese data), or English (from both projects). All conversations and interviews that were originally in Mandarin or Arabic have been presented here through their English translations. Some of the English translations may seem odd. This is because these conversations took place mostly in casual settings.

TRANSCRIPTION

1. Transcription conventions for interviews

[…]	parts omitted by authors
[comments]	comments by authors

2. Transcription conventions for conversations

[]	overlap
(())	author's notes
heh	laughing sound

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