My personal and professional goal is to address stigmas associated with aging, disability, and care labor for older adults as social justice issues. I also aim to explore how to transform these issues through social work practice in interprofessional care teams, public health interventions, cultural change, and social and health policy reform. Studying in the U.S. allowed me to shape my commitment to social justice from a global perspective. As a first-generation female immigrant from a working-class family in China, I adopt a transnational and anti-oppressive perspective to examine the intersection of nationality, immigration, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic inequality, gender, age, disabilities, and caring responsibilities. The stigma of aging care results in inadequate support for older adults globally and contributes to unpaid/low-paid, immigrant, gendered, and racialized care workers. As a result, these care workers face enormous challenges in self-caring and supporting older adults and their families. Additionally, the struggles and experiences of older adults and their caregivers from these marginalized groups are often not represented in academia. My experiences in working with these multi-layered systematic oppressions deeply impact my research program, teaching, and community engagement.

Social justice commitment in research

My dissertation aims to understand how informal care partners (family, friends, partners, neighbors) manage fall risk in community-dwelling older adults with dementia. Dementia and falls are two aging-related health conditions that are stigmatized with ageism. In addition, older adults living with dementia historically were excluded from fall prevention clinical trials even though they experience two to eight times higher risk of falling. Moreover, their care partners often make extensive efforts and support in managing the health and well-being of older adults with dementia. However, their experiences and struggles are undervalued and unsupported by current social and healthcare systems globally. Therefore, my dissertation highlights the caring labor provided by dementia care partners in managing these stigmatized aging-related health conditions. This is my initial step to dismantle the stigmatization, exclusion, and marginalization associated with dementia, aging, and unpaid caring labor.

When collecting original data, I have reached out to community organizations that work with low-income older adults and caregivers, rural areas, racial/ethnic populations, and LGBTQ older adults in Washington State. I prepared recruitment materials in English, Spanish, Mandarin to reduce the language barriers in research participation of immigrants. These efforts allow me not only to analyze vulnerability, oppression, but also the resilience in the dementia caregiving. For the next step of my research program, I plan to adopt a participatory and critical approach to collaborate across different communities to address the intersection of social inequality with aging, disability, and caregiving.

Social justice commitment in pedagogy

My pedagogical goal for all the courses I teach is to prepare students and myself to fight oppression and social injustice through reflection, learning, and action for sustainable and
meaningful changes. Immigrating to the U.S five years ago, I have experienced the challenges of “adapting to” a society with its unique history and cultural background. By experiencing constant denials and exclusions as an “alien”, and mentoring and supporting students of color and immigrants, I have had more understanding of the systematic racism, xenophobia, colonialism embedded in current socio-political structures in the U.S. I have also gained valuable opportunities to learn from students and colleagues who strive to dismantle various systematic oppressions. Given these experiences, I always start my course by explaining my positionality and my experiences of privilege, oppression, and how I address them in my teaching, practice, and research. With this opening, I invite students to focus their learning on fighting these social injustice issues that they experience in their everyday life.

In the community services learning course for BASW student, I supported nine student groups conducting structural analyses on the social justice challenges they encountered in their service learning sites to identify what knowledge, practice, and policy are needed to address these social justice issues. In the MSW research course, I discussed with each student about their passion for social changes rooted in their lived experiences as immigrants, as Black, Indigenous and people of color, as people with other marginalized identities, and as service providers or policy advocates. Then I encouraged them to use the research course as an opportunity for self-growth in developing their capacities to work with these social justice challenges, rather than just completing a course for credits. This approach allows students to not view research as a scientific activity that has nothing to do with social work practice and their everyday lives, but a critical tool for self-reflection, professional learning, and igniting social changes.

**Social justice commitment in professional services**

As a social work scholar, my work grows from my collaboration with practitioners and community engagement. Since 2016, I have served as an advisory group member at the University of Washington Medicine Memory and Brain Wellness center to support their efforts in raising public awareness of discrimination and stigmatization related to dementia. Since 2017, I have also served as an advisory group member at the Washington State Department of Health for developing effective fall prevention interventions for high-risk and underserved older adults. In those roles, I bring in my social work perspectives, practice experiences, and cross-cultural understanding to serve older adults with diverse backgrounds. In 2020, I am selected as a recipient of the Martha H. Duggan Fellowship in Caring labor to recognize of my global equity work around aging care, disability justice, and caring labor. I will be working with Harry Bridges Center for Labor Studies for designing programs highlighting caring labors scholarship, especially those from racial/ethnic communities and the Global South countries.

In sum, I am committed to developing my scholarship focusing on social justice, anti-oppressive practice, and systematic changes locally and globally. As a scholar who is an immigrant of color from the Global South, I will continue exploring the impact of colonialism, social inequality, systematic racism on people’s experience of aging, being disabled, and caregiving. As an educator, I will continue developing partnership between academia and community and explore how to use research as a transformative tool for social justice.