

From the Yellow Peril to the Model Minority: Race, discourses, and identities of Asian Americans and Asian Canadians

Dr. Christian Chun

University of Massachusetts Boston

Racialized multicultural discourses in social circulation emerge in the English language learning classroom via textbook representations of immigrant success stories, and perceived racial and cultural differences among students (e.g., Bashir-Ali, 2006; Chang, 2013; Chun, 2016; Lee, 2015). Although these (neo)liberal multicultural discourses may be well-intentioned in their attempts to acknowledge superdiversity (Arnaut, 2016; Blommaert & Rampton, 2016), such discourses warrant closer critical examinations for the ways in which they essentialize and perpetuate specific cultural identities that support racial hierarchies, and enact power dynamics of who is defining, and who is the one being defined.

Although race and its socially and politically-motivated co-constructions of particular identities have recently become a research focus in the English language learning classroom (e.g., Kubota & Lin, 2009; Lee & Simon-Maeda, 2006; Motha, 2006, 2014), the field of sociolinguistics has not for the most part addressed the topic of racialized performativities, narratives, and identities through language and discourse with few exceptions (e.g., Bucholtz & Lopez, 2011; Hall, 2019; Labov, 1972; Rampton, 2006). This panel comprised of Asian American and Asian Canadian scholars discusses how various racialized language and discourses positioning Asian immigrants and descendants in their societies have shaped and constructed particular identities and their enabling enactments at various periods in history. How have interactional engagements (Goffman, 1983) in contextual encounters helped to construct indexical orders (Silverstein, 2003) of the myriad roles of Asian Americans and Asian Canadians, from their being the “yellow peril” to becoming the “model minority”? Furthermore, how have these ideological tropes helped to create gendered, sexual, and classed performativities in alignment and in resistance to these indexical orders? In our proposed talks, we aim to contribute toward important and much-needed discussions of race and its discourses in these times of xenophobic and demagogic racist nationalisms in many societies.

Keywords: race, identity, discourse, indexical order, performativity

1. Asian America as Method? Remixing Critical Education Practices with Asian American Students and Applying Them at a Historical Moment In Hong Kong

Dr. Benji Chang

University of North Carolina at Greensboro

For three decades, social justice-oriented pedagogies with Asian American K-16 students have been addressed in scholarship interrogating issues of colonisation, hegemony, and institutionalised oppression. Transformative outcomes of such pedagogies have been documented across spaces of education and community. But as Asian communities in North America and around the globe become increasingly migrant and transnational, several pressing inquiries emerge, including:

How well do these pedagogies with Asian students travel across regions?

Are these pedagogies able to have similar outcomes outside of the US, specifically in Asia and the rapidly expanding Greater China region?

What modifications may be needed to make the pedagogies more effective?

To address these inquiries, this paper examines a pedagogical approach with students of Asian heritage in the US and Hong Kong, which was informed by a framework drawing from “Asia As Method” in cultural studies (Lin, 2012), resistance and community organizing in critical pedagogy (Chang, 2015), and third space in literacy studies (Gutiérrez, 2008). This framework was operationalised through intersectional identity exploration, multiliteracies development, performance assessments, intergenerational mentorship, and community engagement across school/university/neighborhoods. This paper starts by outlining this work with US students of East/Southeast Asian, and ‘mixed race’ heritage, and its application with a student cohort in California which led to increased civic engagement, academic achievement, and other forms of agency. The paper then shifts to Hong Kong and applies a ‘remixed’ version of the pedagogy with a student cohort of South/East/Southeast Asian and ‘mixed race’ heritage, which was also tied to similar outcomes to those in the US.

These cohorts are discussed as illustrative cases to contribute to a more dynamic engagement of social justice pedagogies concerning students of Asian heritage, with implications for education and community engagement, as well as addressing some of the divisions across Chinese/Asian youth in Hong Kong today.

Keywords: Asian American students, *Hong Kong youth*, *Critical pedagogy*, *Intersectionality*, *Community engagement*

2. “What if I was not adopted”: Examining situated identities among Asian American adoptees working as English teachers in Taiwan

Dr. Genevieve Leung

University of San Francisco

Dr. Ming-Hsuan Wu

Adelphi University

As English is marketed as a desirable product for consumption worldwide with ideologies viewing “native English speakers” as the ideal language teachers, hiring English speakers as language teachers and *de facto* cultural ambassadors of the U.S. is a common practice in some East Asian countries. While race in TESOL has gained traction in recent years, less research has focused on Asian American teachers working in Asian contexts and their lived experiences in navigating terrains where they may not always be fully welcomed. Even less work has investigated the experiences of Asian American adoptees, and scholars have drawn attention to the lacuna of adoptees’ stories and voices in official archives and records.

To address this gap, we draw from the work on situated identities to investigate the racialized experiences of self-identified Asian American adoptees teaching English in Taiwan and their strategies in managing and negotiating their linguistic and cultural competencies. Using qualitative interviews, we examine 10 Asian American adoptees’ workplace narratives and utilize a grounded theory framework and narrative analysis to understand how participants make sense of their experiences as Asian Americans in the TEFL profession in Taiwan.

While looking Asian enables the participants to build rapport with students in ways their non-Asian peers could not, many participants voiced frustrations revolving around being seen as less of a novelty figure as a “foreigner” in Taiwan. This was exacerbated by encounters forcing them to come to terms with how their adoptee identities were being read by others in Taiwan. These narratives point to the potential of challenging normative concepts of parenthood and family in the Taiwanese context and beyond. Specifically, foregrounding participants’ experiences shows how foreign language curriculum can be more actively creating a critically aware and reflective citizenry, deconstructing beliefs upholding White Americans as idealized English language teachers.

Keywords: *adoptees, Asian Americans, English Language Teaching, Taiwan*

3. I Ain't Your Model Minority: The indexical order of 'Asianness', heteronormative masculinity, and class

Mr. Kevin Kang

University of Massachusetts Boston

Dr. Christian Chun

University of Massachusetts Boston

By inscribing and ascribing particular indexical signifiers to people in claiming tolerance and acceptance, while ignoring and/or dismissing actual individual practices and performative identifications, neoliberal multicultural discourses thus frame certain racialized groups as “an essentialized and totalized unit that is perceived to have little or no internal variation” (Ladson-Billings, 2000). In doing so, these discourses supposedly celebrating ‘diversity’ disregard the complexities, hybridities, and differences that constitute and are constitutive of any culture. Thus, in drawing on the ethos of tolerance and acceptance, neoliberal multicultural discourses paper over societal conflicts, internal divisions, and oppressions, and homogenize racial and cultural identities in ignoring the complex identifications people may perform and hold in any given interactional situational context.

As a person whose maternal grandparents, paternal grandfather and father emigrated from China to settle in the United States in the 1920s-1930s, I might be viewed and identified by some people solely as a Chinese American/Asian American. However, my lived identifications and performative practices have actually indexed a more White working-class (itself hybrid and complex) identity, having grown up in predominantly White neighborhoods in New York. In this paper, I first present a self-reflexive autobiographical narrative that illustrates how an indexical order (Agha, 2007; Silverstein, 2003) of ‘Asianness’ in its ‘model minority’ variety has been subverted by my appropriations of various enregisterments (Agha 2007) indexing a particular persona of a White working-class heteronormative male as represented in several Hollywood films such as *Goodfellas* and *My Cousin Vinny* in interactional contexts. I then address how these dynamics of a classed, ‘streetwise’ performativity of two main male characters in the independent film, *Gook*, who are second-generation Asian Americans, also belie the model minority discourse. These enactments illuminate how indexical orders of Asian American males are continually shifting and reacting to such positionings in White-dominated society.

Keywords: *model minority, Asianness, class, masculinity, indexical order*