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“Is it because I’m international?”: Unpacking experiences of “international instructors” via critical communication pedagogy as aligned with cultural wealth

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ABSTRACT

Given the relatively invisible yet growing presence of international academics on U.S. campuses, this study investigates the lived negotiations of “international instructors” across disciplines via critical communication pedagogy (CCP) as aligned with a pedagogy of cultural wealth. We place “international instructors” within quotation marks to challenge a territorial linear logic of the world, and also to facilitate a new space for rethinking academic labors and capitals. Aligned with a pedagogy of cultural wealth, CCP with key commitments to identity, power, culture, and language in the context of pedagogy is an appropriate lens to examine the lived experiences of “international instructors” as outsiders within U.S. academia. We analyzed interviews with 10 self-identified “international instructors” during the 2017-2018 academic year. Our analysis, guided by salient clusters of CCP commitments aligned with unpacking otherness as cultural wealth, identifies three overlapping themes: (a) salient status and wealth of “international instructors” as cocultural members; (b) mundane and repeated communication behaviors reflecting/resisting Eurocentric structures; and (c) distinctive cultural capitals and “international instructors.” Working together as an interracial and multinational team, we conclude by discussing pedagogical and practical implications for theorizing otherness as cultural wealth and renewing commitments to internationalization at home in solidarity with “international instructors.”

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Communication research on how international (a.k.a. foreign-born, transnational, or immigrant) academics experience U.S. academia remains sporadic (e.g., Chen & Lawless, 2018; Kim et al., 2011, 2012). Due to a lack of qualitative studies, relatively little is known about how international faculty members as an “invisible minority” navigate U.S. colleges and universities (Foote et al., 2008, p. 168; Kim et al., 2011; Véliz et al., 2020). In the 2019–2020 academic year and during the early onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, there were 123,508 international faculty members across U.S. colleges and

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universities (Open Doors, 2020). Historically, international faculty members have been “disproportionately found at research universities” and tend to concentrate in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields (Kim et al., 2011, p. 720). Existing reports and research are more likely to discuss challenges rather than opportunities facing international faculty (e.g., as non-native English speakers and cultural outsiders) as evidenced by headlines such as “Foreign-born faculty face challenges” (Collins, 2008; Herget, 2016; McCalman, 2007; Paris, 2019; Robbins et al., 2011; Yep, 2014). Given even less attention in the classroom (e.g., Alberts, 2008; Chen et al., 2021), we examine in this study the teaching experiences of “international instructors” across disciplines. Following Shome (2013), we place “international instructors” within quotation marks to challenge a territorial linear logic of the world that narrowly demarcates *international* (or not) according to geopolitical borders of nationstates, and also to facilitate a new space for rethinking academic labor and teaching excellence. We also use the term “international instructors” to honor varying (dis)identifications with the term that is constructed in communication.

This study responds to Alberts (2008) and others’ call that “it is important to investigate the role of gender and race in addition to ‘foreignness’ in determining international instructors’ experiences in the classroom” (p. 202). Besides limited research, the topic of “international instructors” in the U.S. classroom is especially complicated (e.g., Alberts, 2008; Robbins et al., 2011). One known, yet problematic, factor that often gets the most attention is U.S. students’ and colleagues’ attitudes and biases, whether conscious and/or unconscious, against instructors with *perceived* foreign or heavy accents (e.g., Chen & Lawless, 2018). For instance, Subtirelu (2015) reported that a foreign accent can hurt a teacher’s score on RateMyProfessor.com. Relating to the perceived accents are a myriad of (inter)cultural and institutional *problems* and *deficits* that “international instructors” encounter (e.g., instructional preparation, teaching techniques, cultural awareness). The default position is often that “international instructors,” as cultural others, should be primarily responsible for adapting, acculturating, and assimilating into the mainstream U.S. classroom culture (e.g., Ross & Krider, 1992). More recently, there have been efforts that recognize the essential, though underappreciated, cultural wealth that “international instructors” bring and add to U.S. academia (Chen et al., 2021; Robbins et al., 2011; Yep, 2014). Yosso (2005) first offered a model of community cultural wealth to challenge hegemonic and Eurocentric interpretations of cultural capital(s). Yep (2014) stated, “a pedagogy of cultural wealth recognizes, values, and engages the various forms of capital that international instructors bring to U.S. classrooms” such as intersectional, experiential, and cultural knowledge and perspectives (p. 88). Hence, we focus on how “international instructors” across disciplines experience and navigate teaching as teacher-scholars at a minority-serving institution that serves large populations of racial/ethnic minority students in the southwestern United States.

Aligned and allied with the orientation of cultural wealth, critical communication pedagogy (CCP) with key commitments to identity, power, culture, and language in the context of pedagogy is an appropriate lens to guide our study *with* “international instructors.” Considering a documented Eurocentric bias in communication theory (Chakravartty et al., 2018; Miike, 2007) and communication education (Waymer, 2021), we use cultural wealth as a reflexive tool to complement CCP and better

understand the experiences of “international instructors” in U.S. academia where their differences are often *presumed* as inferior and deficient (Niemann et al., 2020). By doing so, the critical commitments of CCP filtered through the lens of cultural wealth are suited to examine the lived experiences of “international instructors” as *outsiders within* U.S. academia. Following Orbe (1998), “an outsider within perspective” here describes how “international instructors” occupy marginal positions and communicate in mainstream U.S. academic settings (p. 230). This study builds on existing communication research concerning “international instructors” (e.g., Yep, 2014) using a two-time interview design (i.e., once at the beginning of an academic term and then again toward the end of the term). As the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has forced U.S. colleges and universities to reimagine and push the boundaries of internationalizing higher education, especially without travel, “international instructors” are especially valuable yet often hidden treasures in reimagining what some call “internationalization at home”-efforts, initiatives, and activities seeking to internationalize college campuses (Soria & Troisi, 2014).

“International instructors” within White- and male-dominated U.S. academia

“International instructors” are integral members of U.S. academia. However, given the historically Eurocentric, White, and cis-male-dominated U.S. academy (e.g., Chakravartty et al., 2018; Chen, 2018; Niemann et al., 2020), “international instructors” across gender, race, class, sexuality, and immigration status can experience teaching, research, and service *differentially*. Discourses of White supremacy, academic tokenism, and neoliberal multiculturalism intersect to normalize academic practices that always already stereotype, pigeonhole, and subjugate “international instructors” credibility as valid educators and teachers, especially immigrant women of color (e.g., Chen & Lawless, 2018; McCalman, 2007; Robbins et al., 2011). To what extent and how has U.S. academia been in service of whiteness and cis-male masculine patriarchy? Lawless and Chen (2017) argued that immigrant women faculty, especially women of color, were hired as a means to “internationalize” their universities frequently with little to no equitable support. In the process, many of them experienced being tokenized to serve on, if not chair, “diversity committees” while universities committed few resources for any real changes. Starting in the 1980s, when a flurry of research expressing concerns that “the education of American students was suffering because of foreign-born teaching assistants” (Alberts, 2008, p. 190; Ross & Krider, 1992), mainstream research is more likely to view “international instructors” “as a *deficit*, that is lacking in knowledge and skills—linguistic, social, and cultural, among others to teach in US classrooms” (Yep, 2014, p. 86) or as “problems, especially with respect to language and teaching skills” (Kim et al., 2011, p. 742). Those who were foreign-born teaching assistants then are now “international instructors” and professors who are still expected to shoulder most of the responsibilities and burdens of (inter)cultural adaptations in the name of multiculturalism or internationalization (e.g., Chen & Lawless, 2018; Véliz et al., 2020). In particular, language issues and classroom interactions are often highlighted whereas few studies recognize the cultural wealth that “international instructors” bring to U.S. academia.

Language issues, particularly foreign accents, are often the largest area of concern about “international instructors,” especially for students (e.g., Alberts, 2008; Chen & Lawless, 2018; Ross & Krider, 1992). Alberts (2008) concluded that the popularized yet stigmatized perception that “foreign-born professors are poor English speakers” actually harms the U.S. American students’ education by giving them an excuse to complain rather than an incentive to accept [adapt,] and learn from “international instructors” (p. 195). Ross and Krider (1992) underscored that language issues are not merely linguistic but involve cultural awareness and intercultural differences. Considering unequal power relations, Chen and Lawless (2018) highlighted a hierarchy of accents that reinforce and are reinforced by racism, (Western) European-ness, and embodied politics. In their study, a French accent was not just accepted but favored as a “sing-song accent” whereas a Chinese or African woman’s accent was viewed negatively (p. 7). Ultimately, language/accents issues concerning “international instructors” are complex and intimately tied to ideologies about culture, history, and power across time. We agree with Alberts (2008) that overcoming complex language issues requires “cooperation of both students and professors” (p. 201) to collaboratively approach linguistic differences as resources and opportunities, not mere problems.

Besides the common (mis)perception that many “international instructors” speak with heavy accents, differing standards for classroom interactions are another area of discussion concerning “international instructors” (Alberts, 2008; Lawless & Chen, 2017; McCalman, 2007). When considering challenges in internationalizing (U.S.) college classrooms, McCalman (2007) stressed three themes concerning “international instructors”: (a) students’ naivete and lack of interest in globalization and internationalization; (b) students’ difficulty in accepting nonnative instructors, including accents and unconscious cultural biases; and (c) students’ negative perceptions of international instructors’ teaching effectiveness. Alberts (2008) highlighted differences in teaching and learning from the perspectives of “international instructors” such as: finding multiple-choice exams difficult to develop for teaching critical thinking; students’ bringing with them little background knowledge from high school to college; and students’ feeling entitled to good grades. Lawless and Chen (2017) identified immigrant women faculty’s experiences with microaggressions in teaching, such as interactions that reinforced instructors’ otherness and receiving lower overall student course evaluations based on liking rather than the quality of instruction.

A few studies are beginning to not just challenge a deficit view of “international instructors” but recognize the unique resources they bring into U.S. classrooms (Alberts, 2008; Robbins et al., 2011; Yep, 2014). In the study by Alberts (2008), a minority of students identified advantages of having “international instructors,” such as getting first-hand information about other parts of the world and being exposed to different (e.g., non-U.S.) points of view. At the same time, Alberts (2008) cautioned that U.S. students can struggle with appreciating the different perspectives if they feel “that the [“international”] professors have little respect for the ‘American’ point of view” (p. 201). To what extent might such discomfort speak to an underlying tone of U.S. imperialism? In their collection, Robbins et al. (2011) approached international women faculty “as dynamic agents enhancing academic culture” in that they infuse into U.S. academia their womanist perspectives, varied lived experiences, and resources/capitals from their original cultural homes to help envision new global learning possibilities (p. xiv). Yep (2014) summarized preliminary themes when “international

instructors” talked back to/about their experiences in U.S. classrooms: (a) teaching as a labor of love, (b) sharing good teaching practices, and (c) documenting lived experiences through qualitative approaches. More work is needed to truly embrace the cultural wealth of “international instructors” in historically White- and male-dominated U.S. academia.

Cultural wealth and “international instructors”

Extending the notion of “foreignness’ as a teaching resource” (Alberts, 2008, p. 198) and a model of community cultural wealth as antiracist cultural capitals (Yosso, 2005), Yep (2014) conceptualized the cultural wealth of “international instructors” as an array of knowledge, skills, resources, abilities, and contacts that they “possess and utilize to survive and resist cultural normatives and to succeed and thrive in U.S. classrooms” (p. 87). Yep’s (2014) pedagogy of cultural wealth builds on Yosso’s (2005) work with communities and students of color. Issuing an antiracist challenge to traditional and deficit interpretations of cultural capital(s) in the context of communities of color, Yosso (2005) theorized and advocated a model community cultural wealth in which communities of color nurture at least six forms of cultural wealth and capitals to facilitate survival and resistance: aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant capitals. Yep (2014) added informational capital when considering the cultural wealth of “international instructors.”

As cultural others in U.S. academia, aspirational capital considers the abilities of “international instructors” to stay hopeful about the future of U.S. academia in the face of real and perceived barriers. Linguistic capital refers to worldviews and “intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style” (Yosso, 2005, p. 78). Familial capital for “international instructors” goes beyond cultural knowledge nurtured among family and kinship to include any supporting cultural identity groups that carry community history, memory, and intuition. Social capital refers to interpersonal and intercultural networks of people, relationships, and community resources. Navigational capital includes skills, strategies, and abilities to maneuver through (potentially hostile) social institutions. Resistant capital considers “those knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality” (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). Contributed by Yep (2014), informational capital refers to information and knowledge networks essential for academic survival and success (e.g., formal and informal information that provides mentorship, encourages sponsorship, or nurtures innovation). The lens of cultural wealth in solidarity with “international instructors” allows us to unpack and interrogate hidden assumptions about who or what is assumed deficit and/or wealth in U.S. classrooms. Considering that the college classroom reflects a microcosm of U.S. society, understanding classroom interactions between students from diverse backgrounds and “international instructors” needs an equally complex pedagogical framework such as CCP.

CCP

CCP is simultaneously a theory, method, and pedagogy of how critical communication scholars approach their research and teaching practices (Fassett & Rudick, 2016, 2018; Fassett & Warren, 2007). Informed by critical pedagogy, as well as “feminist pedagogy, performative pedagogy, queer theory, and whiteness studies” (Fassett & Warren, 2007,

p. 7), CCP—as a discipline-specific form of critical pedagogy in communication—is dynamic, multidimensional, and constantly evolving to expand “what is legitimate and meaningful” scholarship of communication and instruction (Fassett & Rudick, 2016, p. 424). Responding to the historical dominance of social scientific methods and assumptions in the field, Fassett and Warren (2007) conceptualized CCP as “engaging the classroom as a site of social influence,” where teachers and students “shape each other for better and for worse” (p. 8). For an extensive history of CCP, see Fassett and Rudick’s (2016) review. At its core, “CCP is dedicated to the study of communication in instructional contexts to make changes in the ways we talk and think about teaching and learning” (Cooks, 2010, p. 302). Centrally, CCP investigates pedagogical spaces as sites of possibility for “material change” (Fassett & Warren, 2007, p. 8). Thus, CCP is an appropriate lens to invite, via interview transcripts, “international instructors” across disciplines into conversations about communication and instruction.

Fassett and Warren (2007) named 10 commitments that critical communication pedagogues attend to as they engage in pedagogical praxis. Wiant Cummins and Griffin (2012) summarized these commitments as “understanding identity and communication as constitutive and contextually meaningful, culture and language as central, power as fluid, and reflexivity and praxis as essential” (p. 90). Fassett and Rudick (2018) reconceptualized the 10 commitments into three clusters or themes: (a) communication is constitutive—rather than representational (commitments #1–3); (b) social justice is a process—rather than a utopia and result (commitments #4–6); and (c) the classroom is a site of activism and interpersonal justice—rather than a proving ground for the “real world” (commitments #7–10). In this way, we are using CCP as a lens through which we can converse with and better understand the experiences of “international instructors” and the communication labors and cultural capitals they infuse into U.S. classrooms.

CCP is, as Cooks (2010) claimed, “critical pedagogy *in, of, and for* communication” (p. 295). Moreover, Kahl (2017) explained CCP as “a pedagogy perspective that recognizes power is present in all communicative acts, and has the ability to be subjugating or liberating” (p. 116). Since its inception, CCP has been used to explore a variety of phenomena. Unsurprisingly, it is useful in pedagogy (Young & Potter, 2018), but it has also drawn on its roots to broaden into queer communication pedagogy (Atay & Pensoneau-Conway, 2020), critical communication trans pedagogy (LeMaster & Johnson, 2019), and performance pedagogy (Huber, 2020). Scholars have pushed the boundaries of CCP, too, looking at its connection with sound (McRae & Nainby, 2020), disability (Brenneise, 2020; Makkawy & Moreman, 2019), mediated CCP (Atay & Fassett, 2020), and critical intercultural communication pedagogy (Atay & Toyosaki, 2018; Chen & Lawless, 2019). CCP is also utilized in a variety of communication research, such as assessment (Kahl, 2013), applied communication (Kahl, 2017), and organizational communication (Allen, 2010; Rudick, 2017).

Using CCP commitments as both a theory and method in alignment with cultural wealth, we focus on six pertinent CCP commitments that speak to interview discourses with “international instructors” across disciplines in this study. Similar to Fassett and Rudick’s (2018) CCP themes, we organize the relevant commitments into two salient clusters. The first cluster brings together the first two commitments: #1 in CCP, “identity is constituted in communication” (Fassett & Warren, 2007, p. 39); and #2 CCP educators “understand power as fluid and complex” (p. 41) to highlight the intersection of identity,

power, and culture in pedagogy. The second cluster addresses mundane communication moments in pedagogy as cultural and constitutive of larger social systems; #3 “Culture is central” to CCP (Fassett & Warren, 2007, p. 42); #4 CCP educators “embrace a focus on concrete, mundane communication practices as constitutive of larger social structural systems” (p. 43); #5 CCP educators prioritize “social, structural critique as it places concrete, mundane communication practices in a meaningful context” (p. 45); and #6 Language, and analysis thereof, as “constitutive of social phenomena” are central to CCP (p. 48). Given that the “international instructor” participants did not have to identify as critical (communication) pedagogues, we did not find commitments 7, 8, 9, and 10 to be as salient. These commitments focus on reflexivity (#7), engaging pedagogy as research and praxis (#8), a “nuanced understanding of human subjectivity and agency” (#9), and dialogue (#10) (Fassett & Warren, 2007, p. 52). This cluster of commitments is, of course, no less important, but is more directly aimed at practitioners of CCP, which the “international instructors” we interviewed did not claim to be. Thus, this exploratory study, guided by CCP as aligned with a pedagogy of cultural wealth, asks:

RQ: How do “international instructors” understand and experience their otherness within U.S. academia?

Method

This study took place at a large, 4-year, public university in the southwestern United States. The university, since 2012, has been federally designated a Hispanic-Serving Institution by the U.S. Department of Education, serving in fall 2021 about 31% of its undergraduate students as Hispanic/Latinx-identified. In 2017, the university received the Higher Education Excellence in Diversity Award for the fifth consecutive year. In 2020, the university was ranked top 30 nationwide for ethnic diversity by U.S. News and World Report. During the 2017–2018 academic year when the interviews were collected, the racial-ethnic diversities of undergraduate and graduate student populations were: 34.8% White, 28.3% Hispanic, 7.3% Asian, 5.8% Filipino, 8.0% international, 6.6% multiethnic, 4.6% not stated, 4.0% Black, 0.4% Native American, and 0.2% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. According to internal communication, there were 1,674 international students enrolled in the university in spring 2021 (with 77% undergraduate students and 23% graduate students). In contrast, faculty data by race/ethnicity in spring 2018 were 66.5% White, 16.4% Asian, 9.0% Hispanic, 3.5% Black, 3.5% unknown, and 1.1% American Indian/Alaska Native. Unlike student data, it was not reported how many faculty members might identify as “international” in terms of immigration status (e.g., naturalized U.S. citizens, green card holders, etc.). Overall, the university in focus strove to value the cultural diversities and wealth of its students, staff, and faculty.

Procedures

Before conducting semistructured, two-time interviews with self-identified “international instructors,” the research team first obtained Institutional Review Board approval. We employed purposeful sampling to recruit participants via our social and professional networks and word of mouth. The semistructured interview guide

allowed us to identify common lived experiences while attending to individual narratives (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). All voluntary participants were asked general questions about their experiences and salient identities communicating and teaching as “international” or foreign instructors inside and outside the classroom. The first interviews took place at the beginning of the academic term, and the second interviews were scheduled in the second half of the same term. This research was funded by an internal grant that afforded each voluntary participant a \$25 gift card after each interview.

Participants

Ten self-identified “international instructors” each participated in two interviews at the beginning and the end of the semester between fall 2017 and spring 2018 ($n = 20$ interviews in total). Following a semistructured interview guide, all interviews were conducted in locations of interviewees’ choosing, such as their office on campus. The participants ranged from 26 to 51 years old and hailed from various academic ranks: two graduate teaching assistants, one full-time instructor, five assistant professors, one associate professor, and one full professor across four colleges within the university (i.e., humanities, social science, science, and education; see Table 1 for more information). Concerning countries of origin, eight participants identified with a single country of origin (i.e., Argentina, China, Korea, Pakistan, Spain, Sweden, Taiwan, and Turkey), while two participants identified as multinational (i.e., South African/British and Indian/diasporic). The participants varied in race, gender, sexuality, and religious identifications: four White and six people of color; four cis-gendered men and six cis-gendered women; one gay and nine heterosexuals; and one Buddhist, one Christian, one Muslim, and seven nonreligious persons. In terms of immigration status, the participants ranged from full-time international graduate students holding F-1 visas, temporary workers holding employment-based, nonimmigrant H-1B work permits for specialty occupations such as higher education, green card holders, and U.S. citizens. Interviews followed IRB protocol and lasted between 30 and 60 min each. All interviews were audio-recorded with permission and subsequently transcribed. This process resulted in 435 pages of single-spaced transcriptions.

Researcher positionality

We worked together as an interracial and multinational team. The first author identifies as an Asian/cis-woman/immigrant/faculty who became a green card holder (a.k.a. U.S.

Table 1. Participants’ demographic background.

	Disciplines	Academic rank	Country of origin	U.S. citizenship
P1	STEM	Assistant professor	Spain	No
P2	Humanities	Assistant professor	South Korea	No
P3	STEM	Graduate Instructor	Pakistan	No
P4	Humanities	Associate professor	Argentina	No
P5	Humanities	Assistant professor	South Africa/Britain	No
P6	Education	Lecturer	Taiwan	Yes
P7	Education	Assistant professor	Turkey	Yes
P8	Humanities	Graduate instructor	Sweden	No
P9	Humanities	Full professor	India/Diasporic	Yes
P10	Humanities	Assistant professor	China	No

permanent resident) in August 2014. Since fall 2004, I have taught at four different universities across four states, including both historically White and minority-serving institutions. The second author identifies as a White, cis-woman instructor, and U.S. citizen. I have taught at predominantly White institutions in the past but currently teach at a public, Hispanic-Serving Institution in the southern U.S. The third author identifies as a White, cis-woman faculty, a first-generation college student, and a U.S. citizen. I currently teach at a minority-serving community college in the northeastern U.S. The fourth author identifies as an Asian, gay, male researcher who has been an international graduate teaching assistant in two southwestern universities in the U.S. I have taught and worked in mostly White-dominant environments over the past 4 years. As a team, we consistently challenged one another to stay conscious of the particularities of our cultural orientations while honoring our participants' voices on their own terms.

Analysis

Guided by the commitments of CCP, we went through a two-stage process of open coding and closed coding to identify and interrogate recurring (occurring consistently), repeating (explicitly stated again and again), and forceful themes (empathic responses) (Owen, 1984). At the first stage, each of us coded the interviews independently. Then, we shared, discussed, and interrogated our preliminary themes collaboratively in light of the CCP commitments. After several months of coding and conversing, we identified three overarching and overlapping themes around identities, mundane moments in pedagogy, and cultural capitals of “international instructors” that we found speaking to the salient clusters of CCP commitments.

Analysis

Salient status and wealth of cocultural “international instructors”

Informed by the first CCP commitment that “identity is constituted in communication” (Fassett & Warren, 2007, p. 39), the participants in this study described the identity of “international instructors” as fluidly and complexly experienced, negotiated, and at times contested across race, gender, sexuality, academic rank, and teaching approach (e.g., the extent to which an instructor might challenge Euro/Anglo/U.S.-centrism and White supremacy). As a cocultural group based on nondominant and invisible immigration status, many participants identified to some extent, but not fully, as/with being “international.” Consistent with the orientation of cultural wealth, Orbe (1998) coined the term *cocultural* to refer to minority, nondominant, or subcultural group members to “avoid negative or inferior connections of past descriptions (i.e., *subculture*) while acknowledging the great diversity of influential cultures that simultaneously exist in the United States” (emphasis in original, p. 2). In this study, we consider “international instructors” a cocultural group. Further, *within* the cocultural group of “international instructors,” there would be cocultural “international instructors” based on other nondominant groups such as race, gender, and sexuality. Some chose not to share cocultural identities with students for fear of further marginalization. Others chose not to share because the information seemed irrelevant to the class, not because they are not

willing to share information about their identities. For instance, Participant 3 would talk about her identity and experiences in small groups but did not want to “waste” the time of students in a class she felt was unrelated to identity. As simultaneously a cultural, linguistic, nationalistic, and emotional construct, participants in this study understood *internationalness* fluidly as (a) a racialized identity (e.g., Participant 2, “I’m Korean and I’m an international faculty, so I’m not American”); (b) a frame of mind (e.g., Participant 9, “Let’s say an internationally-minded instructor”); (c) a targeted yet unfamiliar difference (e.g., Participant 4, “I’d NOT like to be called foreign faculty ... being called foreign faculty would be like targeting you in a way”); and (d) a felt disadvantage (e.g., Participant 7, “But sometimes I thought, is it my personality or is it because I’m international?”).

In this study, the salience and negotiation of being/speaking/teaching as “international instructors” was more pronounced for participants belonging to other cocultural groups such as women, racialized minorities, and untenured graduate instructors and assistant professors. Similar to fluid and less visibly marked identities such as “first-generation college students” in Orbe’s (2004) study, participants belonging to multiple cocultural groups were more likely to experience the perceived stigma and biased status of “international instructors.” For those occupying multiple axes of marginalized identity positions (e.g., gender, race, and academic rank), “international instructors” became a more marked and visible identity that could impact teaching experiences. As “the only Asian faculty” and assistant professor with White colleagues in the same department, Participant 2 was “hesitant to reveal” her citizenship because she did not “want to make it too visible” to marginalize herself any further. Speaking as an international student and graduate instructor, Participant 3 talked about working harder for her students and explained, “so you know when you’re in a different country you want the people to really like you.” As an assistant professor and a racialized minority woman, Participant 7 talked about feeling less confident as an “international instructor.” She explained, “it’s not like it’s in your country. I think it would be much different for me, I would be much more confident. I would know the culture. So it would be much easier.” In juxtaposition, Participant 9, as a full professor and a minority man, considered himself “more of an international citizen” than a “citizen of one country.” He stated that “particular Indian identity has very little to do with my view of life.” In this study, racialized female instructors of lower academic ranks were more likely to experience being marked as “international instructors” than their male counterparts.

In contrast, for those from more privileged identity positions (e.g., Whites, males, and tenured professors), they might choose to declare and/or disidentify as “international instructors” on occasions. As a White, European man from Spain, Participant 1 could pass as U.S. American without thinking about it or being questioned. His international-ness, unnamed but marked, was heightened by his unfulfilled desire to experience the American classroom. In his interview, Participant 1 rarely avowed as an “international instructor”; one instance he did so indirectly was when he realized he could not teach but wanted to experience an “American-like classroom” as he explained:

And I asked my advisor to help her teach the course because as a postdoc, I couldn’t teach because I was funded by federal money. So, there was like some incompatibility on teaching. But I still wanted to get some flavor of the American-like classroom.

For Participant 5, she often strategically “played fast and loose” with her nationality and other identities to get her students to talk about issues and concerns in U.S. America. Though “straddling England and America at times,” it is more socially accepted for Participant 5 as a White woman who spent time elsewhere to still “identify as America being home.” As an instructor who prioritized getting herself “adapted to the U.S. culture and making her content really U.S.-based,” Participant 10 experienced her students reminding her of her age and gender “as a young, female professor,” but “not her Chinese identities.” In her experience, she saw “the huge difference between un-tenure and tenure” more than distinctions between international versus U.S. American faculty members, and stated: “once you’re tenured, it does not matter whether you’re American or international. I think people treat you equally because I think this is academia.” At the intersection of nationality, gender, race, and power, contexts such as academia and institutional culture matter and affect how the power lines are experienced and drawn inside and outside the classroom. Overall, the extent to which participants in this study experienced their “international” status being highlighted (or not) might signal students’ and colleagues’ perceptions of/about their bodies as fitting into (or not) the power structure within the academy and normative institutional culture. In the section below, we move to another cluster of CCP commitments around mundane and repeated communication behaviors in the eyes of “international instructors.”

Mundane and repeated communication behaviors reflecting and resisting Eurocentric structures

Fassett and Warren (2007) posited that CCP educators focus on “concrete, mundane communication practices as constitutive of larger social structures” (p. 43). Additionally, CCP educators “embrace social, structural critique” to put mundane communication “in a meaningful context” (Fassett & Warren, 2007, p. 45). Highlighting the ways mundane, microlevel communication affects and is affected by, structural, macrolevel communication is especially important in the case of “international instructors” who may face Eurocentric and linguistic barriers and/or anti-immigrant biases within the U.S. context. Indeed, Fassett and Warren (2007) emphasized the importance of a critical analysis of language in CCP practice and in relationship to the other tenets.

“International instructors” in this study also noted cultural differences that had affected their perceived ability to effectively teach in U.S. academia. For some participants, this was the amount of work “international instructors” must do to keep current with students. Participant 4’s advisor told him to watch American television for both language and cultural cues and references students would understand. Participant 10 watched American television to understand student references despite not enjoying the (reality) shows. Still, as she noted, “but you had to really keep up with the culture so that you can have some common language with your students.” In a similar vein, Participant 8 said that he Googled words he did not know after an interaction so as not to appear “stupid” by asking for clarification at the moment. Many participants identified how much harder “international instructors” have to work as a result of navigating a new culture; as Participant 9 says, “I think all international faculty members, by default, do more ... than their other colleagues do.” Unfortunately, this means many participants question whether interactions they have experienced—which are often negative

—are due to their personalities or their international status. Of course, as Participant 10 noted, personality is influenced by culture, so the two are not mutually exclusive.

One way some “international instructors” in this study dealt with learning a new culture and discussing or disclosing their international status is through humor. Participant 5 used humor to better engage students, pretending not to know a word despite living in the U.S. for over 20 years, so struggling students could also have a chance to understand or feel confident about the class material. While this participant believed this to be a pedagogical strategy that could invite students’ reciprocity, it also required that the “international instructor” make themselves vulnerable, be othered, and highlight their differences. Still, another instructor reflected on an initial interview for this project and realized that perhaps vulnerability was worth it. Participant 3 said:

So, this semester I would drop jokes relating to where I was from ... Just to see how people reacted. The students found such things really funny, and they talked back, and they talked about where they were from, which was here [the U.S.] but different parts of here. So I realized that talking about where I was from didn’t make anybody uncomfortable; it actually helped with the class interaction that I had.

Participant 7 suggested using humor to “mock” U.S. culture and the instructor’s “own culture [of origin].” He elaborated that an instructor cannot be critical of one and positive about the other, but that sharing “your cultural identity and your cultural inheritance is really important.” Participant 7 understood the diverse perspectives of “international instructors” to be about the legacies they carry and the cultural wealth they bring based on their varying cultural experiences and insights. Although this is consistent with other research on the use of instructor humor in the classroom (Goodboy et al., 2015), we argue that “international instructors” were using humor as a tactic to create reciprocal vulnerability (Wiant Cummins, 2017) with students across cultural barriers and to break down cultural barriers even at the expense of making themselves the joke.

Similar to Alberts (2008) findings regarding international faculty’s expectations of U.S. students, a few participants mentioned that education was more valued and teachers were more respected in their countries of origin, which could lead to some difficult lessons they had to learn about U.S. culture. For example, participant 3 explained that she helped her students a lot “because back home the teaching profession is really respected.” Several participants mentioned avoiding divisive topics like politics in class to not mess up and/or offend anyone. Still, as Participant 9 said, it is important to remember that “international instructors” bring new tools and perspectives such as linguistic and informational capitals to enrich the university community; “international instructors” create a richer learning environment and culture—an important reason to listen to their structural critiques to recruit and retain them.

Given the positionality of “international instructors” as *outsiders within* U.S. academia (Orbe, 1998), the structural critiques they make are worth noting. As they have already suggested, some participants perceived that their liminal identity requires more work than what domestic U.S. instructors are facing (e.g., publish or perish). Most participants’ critiques, especially pretenure, were about the importance placed on student evaluations as indicative of effective teaching. Participant 1, for instance, would like universities to re-evaluate the “research-scholar model,” remarking:

Because I can publish a lot of papers that mean nothing. And I could maybe publish one and do a lot of good work. Does that make sense? I could do a lot of changes on courses and not publish a single paper out of it. And the institution should know how to evaluate what it needs at every moment.

For Participant 1, the institution needed better ways of evaluating the work and progress of all instructors, especially “international instructors,” toward the triumvirate of research, teaching, and service. Several instructors in this study felt that tenure as a safety shield allowed them to be more daring, to try new things not only pedagogically, but personally, such as Participant 4 who, once tenured, felt comfortable to carry a purple bag his mother had made him without facing ridicule that might expose his identification as a gay faculty member.

Other participants suggested services for “international instructors” could help address structural barriers. These services might include specific professional development training for “international instructors” to recognize that they are “not born great teachers,” as Participant 1 noted. Participant 3 agreed, saying that her department would train teaching assistants with “generic” training. During the interview, she mentioned that she would suggest to her department the need for training teaching assistants specifically in effective group work, a necessary pedagogical component in her department. Even as Participant 3 was reflecting on “international instructors,” she remarked on the fact that better training for *all* teaching assistants would make the department, and thus the university, better. Considering “international instructors” specifically, Participant 6 suggested a new faculty support group where instructors from similar cultures could support each other. She even named the overwhelming culture shock she experienced without proper support as one of the reasons she did not pursue a tenure-track position. Participant 8 wondered if sharing the visa process with students might create collective action and political change that could make it “easier or less stressful to obtain a visa and work here legally” because it is such an “incredibly long and tedious and expensive process” currently. Participant 7 highlighted the mundane communicative practice of writing evaluation letters (e.g., letters of recommendation; colleague observation letters). As an “international instructor,” Participant 7 called for university services that could review letters for grammar and message—like a writing center specifically aimed at instructors. Because this is a routine task, offering a service like this could benefit international as well as U.S.-raised instructors, ultimately breaking down barriers for more than just “international instructors” (something akin to Universal Design for Learning). Participant 7 explained that this service could benefit many instructors, but that the “division of our roles” kept people individualized on campus, saying, “But, when we have that mentality, it’s hard to break through that and think about providing additional services that benefit everyone.” Recognizing the individualization of the academy, Participant 7 raised the issue of neoliberalism in the university—a focus on the individual as the sole responsible party rather than looking at collective action for the betterment of all. When otherness is expected and consumed to profit the neoliberal university, these kinds of mundane and repeated communication behaviors serve to maintain the status quo (Lawless & Chen, 2017). These critiques, in addition to considerations of culture and language, demonstrate that “international instructors” offer sharp insights about the academy and some of the problems therein. In the next section, we focus on the cultural capitals of “international instructors.”

Distinctive cultural capitals of “international instructors”

Linguistic and information capitals that “international instructors” can bring into U.S. classrooms are evident in the first two themes whether they are recognized as cultural wealth. Considering that “the dominant cultural discourse about international instructors is their lack of cultural and pedagogical competence” (Yep, 2014, p. 86), several participants responded with acquired navigational and resistant capitals in the process. Participant 2 stressed her navigational and resistant capitals as she discussed having to find her place as an international other without institutional support.

I think that the institution is not liberal at all. Although we are like trying to teach ideas that advocate a lot of different social identity and groups, but the institution per se could be really conservative, always upholding the status quo. We need to find our own place by ourselves if the institution doesn't support so that we can continue our research.

Her comment underscores that minority-serving institutions such as the one in this study could equally struggle with seeing and embracing faculty members' otherness as cultural wealth and capital. Similarly, when being *presumed incompetent* as a female “international instructor” (Niemann et al., 2020), Participant 5 explained how she maneuvered U.S. classrooms with careful professionalism.

There has been the odd occasion where I've had a student in class that has perhaps attempted to talk down to me because I am the female or I look too young to be teaching this class. I think in those moments, I try to be careful and be professional, but I also perhaps over-deliver. A simple answer that I could give, I maybe overcompensate a little bit by throwing in a whole bunch of different authors and different theories just to say, “Hey back off, I know what I'm talking about. There is a reason why I'm in this classroom and if you don't respect me, there is the door.”

Her careful professionalism of overcompensating here is strategically polite to bolster her instructor credibility without ruffling feathers. Her last sentence here also suggests the emotional labor of biting her tongue after being microaggressively *presumed incompetent*. Fortunately, this was an odd and rare occasion for her as a White woman.

Speaking as both an “international instructor” and woman of color, Participant 7 directly challenged the deficit view of “international instructors” when she stated,

What is problematic about this cultural deficit view is that then you forget about all the cultural wealth, right? The way that our thinking, our perspective, could diversify, enrich this intellectual environment. So, when you only focus on that as the deficit, that you forget about kind of ... and I mean, it is a reality. Do you call that linguistic labor, emotional labor ... there are extra labor that we experience that's invisible.

Participant 7's comment highlighted how the cultural capitals “international instructors” bring into U.S. classrooms are often forgotten, ignored, and deemed deficient as well as the added labor of maneuvering such encounters. Seeing the navigational capitals of “international instructors” should also mean recognizing the invisible, unwritten yet expected, and uncompensated labors that “international faculty” often engage in as a way to put domestic colleagues, administrators, and students at ease (Lawless, 2018). These labors not only are a matter of survival and self-preservation, but may have far-reaching, positive impacts within and beyond classrooms, departmental climates, and university cultures.

Discussion

Aligned with Yep's (2014) pedagogy of cultural wealth, we interviewed "international instructors" to better understand their lived experiences as *outsiders within* U.S. college classrooms in light of core commitments of CCP (Orbe, 1998). First, speaking to CCP commitments #1–2 around power and identity, our findings highlight that the salience of "international" status intersects and reinforces/is reinforced by cocultural positions especially gender, race, and academic rank. Temporary and pretenure female "international instructors" of color in this study were more likely to identify with and discuss being "international instructors." This builds on existing research calling for examining the gendered and racialized formations of "international instructors" (Alberts, 2008; Chen & Lawless, 2018; Robbins et al., 2011), and also gives needed attention to the power of academic rank. Ultimately, teaching as "international instructors" is a more fluid and complex positionality for some instructors than others across interlocking systems of power, privilege, and marginalization.

Second, responding to CCP commitments #3–6, within Eurocentric/White/cis-male/U.S. academia (e.g., Chakravartty et al., 2018; Niemann et al., 2020; Simpson, 2008), voices of "international instructors" in this study underscore that mundane practices can take more work, labor, and care from an ambivalent and potentially stigmatized position of being perceived as less effective or competent teachers (Alberts, 2008). Layering the power and cultural differences surrounding this positionality, humor became a particular tactic to intervene in the traditional student–teacher relationship, de-mystify the diversity rhetoric, and push from a vulnerable and ambivalent position in the hope of creating reciprocal vulnerability. Another mundane practice was student evaluations, which are often misrepresented as "teaching" evaluations. Already presumed less effective or incompetent, many "international instructors" are wary of the power that institutions give to student evaluations or treat them problematically as "teaching" evaluations without considering student effort, teacher self-reflexivity, and other factors relevant to teaching and learning. Echoing Niemann et al. (2020), "international instructors" in this study calls for proactive, rather than reactive, mentoring as a mundane practice to better address cultural disorientations and structural barriers to empower them to be more confident teachers and scholars.

Theorizing otherness as cultural wealth with "international instructors"

Located within (currently) White- and male-dominated U.S. academia, Yosso (2005) and Yep (2014) advocate for shifting away from a deficit view of difference and otherness toward a wealth-informed orientation of seeing and appreciating an array of knowledges, resources, and skills that cultural others such as "international instructors" bring into U.S. classrooms to enrich teaching and learning. Rather than "a product of colonialism and hegemony," otherness can be (come) resources, capitals, and inspirations to challenge relations of domination, reconsider hegemonic narratives, and reimagine new possibilities (Freire, 1996; Xu, 2013, p. 382). When considering the pedagogy of cultural wealth along with the first two themes (e.g., cocultural "international instructors" and mundane and repeated communication behaviors), experiences and capitals of intersectional others are underscored to shed light on mundane and repeated communication

behaviors that might not be invisible. Reciprocally, cocultural “international instructors” are uniquely positioned to push the boundaries of CCP. Together, “international instructors” and CCP scholars can investigate and exchange ideas about how the normalized U.S. academic culture vis-à-vis visible and invisible communication practices encourages and/or discourages embracing otherness as cultural wealth in their minoritized faculty members (e.g., “international instructors,” Black, Indigenous, and instructors of color, queer, and transgender instructors, and more).

Renewing internationalization at home

In partnership with “international instructors,” we join Alberts (2008), McCalman (2007), Robbins et al. (2011), Yep (2014), and Chen and Lawless (2018) in challenging the problematic assumption that “international instructors” are automatically less effective teachers. With foreignness and otherness as strategic resources and often-unrecognized cultural wealth, “international instructors” add so much to U.S. college classrooms, especially when students are willing to accept, cooperate, and respect their instructors. Furthermore, “international instructors” are valuable resources in reimagining possibilities of internationalization at home that better educate U.S. students as global citizens in an increasingly globalized world (Soria & Troisi, 2014). Practically, rather than placing most burdens and responsibilities of adaptation on “international instructors” (Chen & Lawless, 2018; Véliz et al., 2020), we recommend that U.S. institutions work with domestic students to become aware of implicit, unconscious, and cultural biases toward foreign otherness. “International instructors” instead could serve as faculty developers to train domestic instructors to have such conversations with students as a strategy of internationalization at home. As forces of globalization, such as the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, challenge universities to reimagine internationalizing teaching without travel, U.S. universities ought to first make or renew their commitment to supporting, mentoring, and embracing “international instructors.”

Limitations and future research

The findings of this study should be interpreted with consideration of the ways it was conducted. First, our two-time interview design combined with a small sample did not highlight (critical) self-reflexivity. Perhaps we need more participants from the same disciplines and/or longer than one-semester studies to garner and investigate (critical) self-reflexivity. Second, this study was conducted during the early years of the Trump administration before the double COVID-19 and racism pandemics. Future research might consider if imposed COVID-19 isolations, combined with the tightening of immigration policies, more severely impact “international instructors,” particularly those who are also lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ) faculty, immigrant mother-scholars, or Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) caregivers. Third, we recruited “international instructors” across pedagogical practices. Future research can recruit “international” critical pedagogues specifically to make more explicit connections between CCP and internationalizing education. Fourth, given our relatively small sample with disciplinarily diverse “international instructors,” we recommend that future research examine similarities and differences across disciplines to unpack

differential expectations and experiences across disciplines and strategize transdisciplinary possibilities.

Considering all the above, over a year working on this project, as we met (virtually), we used the opportunity to consider the interviews as a space for subjectivity and agency. We especially discussed topics such as the challenges with student evaluations and observations, since Participant 1 invited us to think about this issue as a space for consideration, for change in academia. We reflected upon our processes for observation and evaluation in the classroom. We considered the ways teaching is a communal activity. We talked about learning, unlearning, and relearning, and talked about how critical pedagogy “transforms us and our world” and gives us the “courage to say what we have lived” (Wink, 2005, p. 67). We reminded ourselves that learning to teach and learning to learn “takes a village,” as the condensed African proverb says.

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