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**Title**

Narratives of East Asian women teachers of English: where privilege meets marginalization,

**Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9rj7b4c4>

**Journal**

Language and Education, 33(2)

**ISSN**

0950-0782

**Author**

Xu, Yiran

**Publication Date**

2019-03-04

**DOI**

10.1080/09500782.2018.1483403

Peer reviewed

Book Review: Narratives of East Asian women teachers of English: where privilege meets marginalization by Gloria Park, Bristol, Multilingual Matters, 2017, xxvii+152 pp, £89.95 (hbk), ISBN-13: 978-1-783098729; £24.95 (pbk), ISBN-13: 9781788921749; £15.00 (Ebook), ISBN-13: 9781783098743

Yiran Xu

Department of Linguistics, Georgetown University, Washington, DC, USA.

yx110@georgetown.edu

In *Narratives of East Asian Women Teachers of English: Where Privilege Meets Marginalization*, Gloria Park presents a powerful narrative of five East Asian women and her own struggles in the journeys of English language teaching and learning. Aligning herself with the five East Asian non-native English speakers (NNES) in her book, Park considers her collaboration with her participants an extension of her own ever-changing identities – as a daughter, a wife, a teacher, a “mama scholar,” and an immigrant of color. Interweaving personal stories and experiences into a critical reflection on existing scholarship, Park provides an insightful and refreshing perspective on how English can be conceived as “a powerful conduit” (p. xxii) in women’s identity (de/re)constructions and negotiations, and how social inclusion and exclusion coexist as they are related to power, hegemony and legitimacy of the English language. Park also addresses the issues of gender, race, immigration and inequality that permeate the world around us, from intimate, personal life to academic, professional spaces. In particular, she challenges the dominant attitude towards East Asian women teachers of English as inauthentic, accented and unproductive, and strives for a more inclusive, democratic and fluid understanding towards multiple identities of female, non-white English teachers on a societal discourse level.

Overall, this book is more than a compelling narrative for English language teachers of any particular race and gender, as it addresses the identity and social issues of NNES of color across disciplines and social contexts. Given the personal nature of this book, it reaches a wide range of audience, from researchers who are interested in identity studies and critical discourse analysis, instructors or graduate students in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) programs, to general readers who are interested in pursuing a language teaching career.

The book consists of six chapters. It starts with Park's poetic autobiographical account of her life trajectory and career path and concludes with her critical reflections on the incidents she encountered in academia as a "mama scholar" of color. The chapters in between are dedicated to a professional review of literature on the issues of race, gender and class in relation to English teaching, her description of evocative genres as a way of inquiring, and an illuminating analysis of the five women's stories.

In the prologue, Park introduces the five participants in her study in detail – Han Nah Jung, Liu Li, Xia Wang, Yu Ri Koh and Shu-Ming Fung (all pseudonyms) – as well as her personal connections with each one of them. Han Nah is a native Korean speaker born in the suburbs of Seoul. She is interested in gender studies and bilingual (Korean and English) education. Liu and Xia are Chinese, who are both dedicated to improving English language education in China. Yu Ri, born in Seoul, Korea, has studied in the U.S. for a short period of time during middle school, which has influenced her perspective towards English language learning and her world views. Finally, in contrast to the first four participants who are considered as "students of new global elites" (p. 18), Shu-Ming immigrated to the U.S. at the age of thirteen with a lower socioeconomic status without much financial support or educational resources. Park, who shares the transnational identity and lived experiences with Shu-Ming, perceives her

as instrumental in constructing her own reflection on her identity and lived experience in this study.

Chapter 1, entitled “Rendering My Autobiographical Poetic Inquiry,” describes the author’s personal journey in terms of four waves marked by certain milestones from a young immigrant student to a “mama scholar” at a professional space. Over the course of her journey, she embraces opportunities and diversity on the one hand, and faces constant alienation and discrimination on the other. For example, while embarking on education with global perspectives in the U.S., she was at the same time alienated from the mainstream classroom discourse in her early age; while enjoying the privilege of her bilingual status, she was constantly dismissed for her foreign accent during her master’s study. By sharing her evolving and contradictory identities through the four waves, she is able to connect with the five East Asian women, which brings about the main theme of the book – the coexistence of privilege and marginalization of NNES women teachers. Her vivid and candid accounts not only position herself on an equal footing with the participants but also demonstrate her devotion to the study. This chapter serves as a captivating and engaging segue into the following chapters.

Chapter 2 introduces previous literature on gender, race, and class connection in English teaching. Interweaving her personal reflections with the review, Park demonstrates how the discourse on privilege and marginalization has influenced people’s personal lives. For example, the racialized discursively constructed identities of the “model minority” that are often attached to Asians and Asian Americans have, in some ways, prevented them from engaging with more open discussions about their struggles in life and work. By challenging the dominant discourse, she strives to create a “safe space” for women teachers who are wrestling with discrimination and exclusion based on race, gender, and class in personal as well as professional settings. As an

Asian scholar, I was deeply intrigued by her critiques about the homogenously racialized construction of “model minority” in the normative discourse, in which she argues that social class and racial status can grant privileges and at the same time lead to disadvantages. Chapter 3 describes the methodology of her research. Overall, this book is a combination of a research that Park carried out from 2004 to 2006 and her autobiography that she has been working on since her doctoral education. The narratives of the five women were collected from individual interviews and personal journals between 2004 and 2006. Echoing Sandra Kouritzin’s (2000) call to bring “life to research,” the author adopts a decolonizing methodology to “humanize” her research by bringing in episodes from personal lives and to challenge the conventional rigid, objective tradition that is devoid of any personal touch in academic writing. Specifically, she uses an evocative genre, i.e., “autobiographical self,” (p. 29) to reflect on her political stances as a female scholar. To her, writing is not simply a mechanical skill used to report findings, but more as a subjective activity that is infused with the author’s personal experiences, life attitudes, critical judgments, and political commitments. While her writing style may be considered subjective to scholars who are used to a positivistic approach, she makes an excellent point by suggesting that it is ultimately the researchers’ subjectivity that serves as the inspiration and motivation for any research, which, in her case, allows her to delve into the lives of others and to explore the complexities of real-life events.

In Chapters 4 and 5, Park presents the narratives of Han Nah, Liu, Xia and Yu Ri in relation to the issues of identity, language and power. Through the lens of gender, she unpacks the multiple identities they have constructed by the societal discourse and unveils how they navigate through various life situations. She highlights the importance of women’s personal experiences and argues that identities are socially constructed in different stages of life. For

example, Han Nah chose to major in Turkish studies in college because her father considered it a “unique area” (p. 46) in Korea where she would not need to compete with men. When she entered a Ph.D. program in Turkish studies, she was not treated as a member of the scholarly community because she was considered as a “woman traveler, an outsider” (p. 49). Liu, Xia and Yu Ri, three international students in different TESOL programs, enjoyed the privilege of having access to financial and educational resources, yet confronted with discrimination due to their limited English proficiency. When Liu tried to explain a computation error to a professor and a doctoral student, with whom she was collaborating on a project, she found it frustrating that her opinions were not taken seriously due to her insufficient communication skills. Similar to Liu’s experience, Xia’s limited proficiency in English constantly made her feel power- less. In her case, she not only experienced discrimination from native speakers of English, but also from Chinese speakers who shared the same ethnicity and linguistic background with her. When she applied for an on-campus job, she was charged by a Chinese recruiter for being unable to read K-12 multilinguals’ essays because she was a NNES. While reading the narratives of the Chinese international students, I personally felt sympathetic to their struggles and frustrations, but also felt tremendously proud of and inspired by their courage and perseverance. Through these stories, Park demonstrates how these women educators have been endowed with and deprived of power at the same time.

Park concludes her study with her autobiographical stories in Chapter 6. Aligning with the themes that emerged from her data, she critically reflects on four sensitive moments in her professional career that have influenced her as a woman and a “mama scholar” in the academia. For example, when she became a new mother, she was arranged to teach three sections of an undergraduate research writing course that was considered unpopular but less demanding for a

young mother. She also mentioned how she was offended at a dissertation defense when a senior male colleague restated her comments to the student several times because she was perceived as a NNES. Her personal stories, which explore the very sensitivity of identity politics, dovetail well with the main arguments of her project.

In conclusion, Park's book, which strikes a beautiful balance between critical reflections and personal narratives, makes a meaningful contribution to the discussions of privileges and marginalization of women teachers in English language education. Enlightened by the compelling narratives of the five women, she also critically reflected on the sensitive and political incidents in her life. Therefore, this study does not simply include objective research based on hard facts, but also aims to inject "life" or a personal touch into scholarly work and to make critical interpretations of the meanings and purposes of academic research. Overall, this book pays close attention to women's multiple and fluid identities and their social constructions in various contexts. It also sheds light on the critical issues of race, gender, and power in academia that deserve more open discussion.

#### Reference

Kouritzin, Sandra G. 2000. "A Mother's Tongue." *TESOL Quarterly* 34 (2): 311–324.