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Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cjms20>

### White Privilege, Language Capital and Cultural Ghettoisation: Western High-Skilled Migrants in Taiwan

Pei-Chia Lan <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Sociology at National Taiwan University

Available online: 30 Sep 2011

To cite this article: Pei-Chia Lan (2011): White Privilege, Language Capital and Cultural Ghettoisation: Western High-Skilled Migrants in Taiwan, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 37:10, 1669-1693

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2011.613337>

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# White Privilege, Language Capital and Cultural Ghettoisation: Western High-Skilled Migrants in Taiwan

Pei-Chia Lan

*Drawing on the case of Taiwan, this article looks at high-skilled migration from the West to Asia. I explore how Western high-skilled migrants exert agency to negotiate their positions as non-citizens, privileged others and professional workers. I have coined the term ‘flexible cultural capital conversion’ to describe how English-speaking Westerners convert their native-language skills, as a form of global linguistic capital, into economic, social and symbolic capitals. Their privileged positions are nevertheless mediated and constrained by their class, nationality, race/ethnicity and gender. In the global context, whiteness is marked as a visible identity and the ‘superior other’. Such cultural essentialism functions as a double-edged sword that places white foreigners in privileged yet segregated job niches. Their flexibility in capital conversion and transnational mobility is territory-bound. Many experience the predicament of ‘cultural ghettoisation’ in the global South, and they often face grim job prospects on returning home to the North.*

*Keywords: Professional Migration; High-Skilled Migrant; Western Expatriate; Language Capital; English Teacher*

## Introduction

The migration literature traditionally perceived the West as countries of destination for professional and labour migrants from Asia. Only when the Asian ‘tigers’ started recruiting a substantial labour force from South and South-East Asia, beginning in the mid-1980s, did scholars reposition the global South as major receiving countries. However, the streams of North-to-South migration, which entail a growing number

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Pei-Chia Lan is Professor of Sociology at National Taiwan University. Correspondence to: Prof. P.-C. Lan, Dept of Sociology, National Taiwan University, I Roosevelt Road, Sec. 4, Taipei, Taiwan 106. E-mail: pclan@ntu.edu.tw.

of Westerners working as managers, engineers or language teachers in major Asian cities, are subject to much less academic scrutiny.

To fill this gap, this article explores the experience of Western high-skilled migrants in Taiwan. To deconstruct the glorious image of free-floating cosmopolitans, I reveal how their migration trajectories are structured and constrained by macro forces and intermediate institutions. Rather than lumping them together as a homogenous group, I examine how their privileged positions, and sometimes disadvantages, are shaped and mediated by their class, nationality, race/ethnicity and gender. I conclude by engaging in a discussion of whiteness and racism in the context of global migration.

In particular, I argue that English-speaking Westerners can convert their native-language proficiency, as hegemonic linguistic and cultural capital, into symbolic prestige and economic and social capital in the global South. The English-language capital is, nevertheless, highly racialised: it has to be attached to white skin and only particular accents are considered 'proper' and valuable in the global socio-linguistic field. Such cultural essentialism functions as a double-edged sword that places white foreigners in lucrative, privileged, yet segregated, ghettoised job niches. An unintended consequence is that the fear and cost of starting again in their home countries has led to their prolonged sojourns in the global South.

### **Highly Skilled Migration and Flexible Capital Conversion**

The literature on labour migration has unevenly focused on low-skilled labour migration in '3-D', or dirty, dangerous and difficult jobs. By contrast, much less attention has been paid to professional or highly skilled migration, which usually describes those migrants who have university degrees or some expertise and working experience in a given field (Iredale 2001). The existing literature not only suffers from a shortage of data but also faces conceptual issues and analytical pitfalls, which constitutes the departure of my inquiry.

First, scholars have pointed out that the definition of highly skilled migration is unclear and even problematic. As Michael Peter Smith and Adrian Favell (2006) have argued, the divide between professional migration and labour migration, in parallel with the elite/proletariat dichotomy, glosses over stratification within and across these categories. The category of highly skilled migration actually entails a variety of occupations and status hierarchies. The trajectories of migration also differ: some find their own way to work abroad while others accept overseas assignments in multinational institutions.

In addition, the definition also lacks precision because it overlooks the reality that many skilled migrants suffer from 'deskilling' because their human capital cannot be properly converted after crossing borders (Smith and Favell 2006). In a reverse situation, some migrants become 'skilled' because their native-language skills or local cultural knowledge gain additional value after relocating to another country. It is thus important to problematise the definition of 'highly skilled migration'. Instead of

treating skills as given human capital, we should examine how the value of specific knowledge and experience is appreciated or deflated in particular social contexts.

Second, the literature has charted the moves of professionals mostly from the South to the North. The growth of highly skilled migration in recent decades is embedded in global structural processes, including the international spatial division of labour (Salt 1988), labour market restructuring in world cities (Beaverstock 1994) and the expansion of a global new economy (Xiang 2001). Further, the flows of skilled migrants are shaped by channels such as international recruitment agencies, the internal labour markets of multinational corporations, and companies with international contracts (Findlay and Li 1998).

Only recently has professional migration in a reverse direction been receiving scholarly attention. Since the 1990s, an increasing number of Taiwanese, Chinese and Indian professionals have returned to their native countries to join the booming Asian economy with a transfer of technology and skills. This shift has led to popular debates about 'brain drain', 'brain return' or 'brain circulation' (Saxenian 2002). However, as pinpointed by Rueyling Tzeng (2006a), the current focus is on *return* migration rather than *reverse* migration; the movement of non-indigenous professionals from the North to the South is still an overlooked phenomenon. I look at the case of high-skilled migration from the West to Taiwan (Taipei in particular) to demonstrate a regional pattern that widely exists in major Asian cities such as Singapore, Hong Kong, Seoul, Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok and Shanghai.

A third shortcoming of the literature on high-skilled migration is highlighted by Brenda Yeoh and Luisa-May Koo (1998: 161). They criticise this literature, with its focus on institutional mechanisms, for overlooking 'the individual experience of being part of the international circuit'. They also argue that professional migration is a highly gendered process, producing different sets of experiences for men and women. To address this gap, I examine how the social identities of Western migrants—ethnicity and nationality intersecting with class and gender—shape their agency and strategies to negotiate their positions in Taiwan as non-citizens, privileged others and professional workers.

Doreen Massey (1994) has coined the term 'power geometry of time-space compression' to describe how people are differently located in relation to access to and power over the movements and interconnections between places. I build on this notion to discuss how social locations shape not only people's ability or inability to emigrate but also their agency to reposition themselves in the new formation of time-space compression. In other words, I look at people's migration not simply as an act of moving across borders but as an ongoing process of negotiating their access to economic, political, cultural and social resources embedded in the movements and interconnections between places.

There is precedent work along this line of inquiry, such as Aihwa Ong's (1999) study of the recent settlement of Hong Kong immigrants in California. Planting the concepts of Bourdieu (1984) in a transnational field, Ong identifies the strategy of 'flexible cultural accumulation' among these affluent Chinese: they deliberately

convert their economic capital into the acquisition of cultural capital (British education, command of English and cultural tastes) to seek social recognition in the West. They also hold 'flexible citizenship' by possessing multiple nationalities to help them navigate multiple political arenas and global trade. Their class privilege and flexible strategies, however, face structural limits because these affluent Chinese are still categorised as inferior racial 'others' and second-class citizens.

The migration of Westerners to Taiwan takes a direction opposite to the route of Hong Kong immigrants in two ways. First, they move from core countries in the North to the semi-periphery in the South. Second, the most valuable capital they carry across borders is not money but their English-speaking ability. Unlike Hong Kong and Singapore, where English is more widely spoken due to the history of British colonisation, Taiwan has a much smaller English-speaking population and this circumstance increases the value of the English proficiency possessed by native speakers.

I view English-language ability as a kind of cultural or, more specifically, 'linguistic' capital. Pierre Bourdieu (1986) defines 'linguistic capital' as one form of cultural capital that can exist in the embodied state, i.e., in the form of long-lasting disposition through a process of education and cultivation, and in the institutionalised state, such as when certain languages are accorded recognition or dominant use by the authorities.<sup>1</sup> I use the concept 'flexible cultural capital conversion' to describe how Western migrants, given their linguistic habitus and privileged locations in the global geography of power, are able to convert their English-language capital into economic and social capital and status privilege.

### Methods and Cases

This article draws on multiple sources of data, including government statistics, secondary literature and in-depth interviews with 17 Western high-skilled migrants in Taiwan. The interviews were conducted in Taipei during two periods: from October 2005 to June 2006, and from February 2008 to May 2008. I selected high-skilled migrants based on the criteria that they hold college degrees or above and conduct professional jobs in Taiwan. For the purpose of theoretical sampling, I only interviewed those who are originally from Western countries. In order to exclude the cases of temporary sojourn (especially common among English-language teachers), I chose people who had resided in Taiwan for at least three years.

I used multiple methods to reach potential informants. First, I located seven informants through personal networks and later interviewed five others through their referrals (snowball sampling). Second, I placed an advertisement on an internet forum ([www.forumosa.com](http://www.forumosa.com)) that targets Western expatriates in Taiwan and conducted interviews with three volunteers who responded to my advertisement. Finally, I periodically read discussions on this website and other blogs related to the experience of foreigners in Taiwan. Two bloggers received an invitation to join the project. In addition to formal interviews, I also attended social gatherings of Western

expatriates, had informal conversations with several of them and made personal observations about their experiences in Taiwan.

Most of the informants were native English-speakers, including ten men and one woman from the United States, one man from Canada, one man from Australia, and two women from New Zealand. The other two were non-native English-speakers from Belgium and the Netherlands. All were white except for one African American man and one American man of half Caucasian and half Chinese descent.

My informants included 14 men and three women. Unfortunately, I encountered difficulty in recruiting more female interviewees. Yet, the uneven gender ratio of my sample reflects the gender asymmetry among professional migrants in Taiwan (to be discussed later). The majority (13) of my informants were married—one to a Filipina—while three others were single. Many worked as English teachers in schools of various levels, while the rest worked as manager, engineer, small business owner, journalist, photographer, researcher or translator.

Nine of the informants were in their 30s at the time of interview, six in their 40s; one in his late 20s and one his 60s. Eleven had college degrees, five had graduate degrees and one had some college education. The length of their residency in Taiwan ranged from three to 18 years; seven had been in Taiwan for more than a decade. Most held a work or a joint family visa (through marriage to a Taiwanese), and only one had become naturalised and held Taiwanese citizenship.

The interviews took place in the residences of the informants, my office in the university, or coffee shops and tea houses near where they worked or lived. I asked my informants to choose the language they preferred to speak; most spoke English to me but one preferred to speak Mandarin Chinese. The interviews lasted from one to four hours; all were tape-recorded and fully transcribed.

### **Stratification among High-Skilled Migrants**

The ethnic landscape in Taiwan has been transformed by the expanding presence of labour and marriage migrants in recent decades. Although foreign-born residents constitute only 2.5 per cent of Taiwan's total population, their number has increased dramatically since the early 1990s—from 30,288 in 1991 (DGBAS 2009) to 439,483 in 2011 (National Immigration Agency 2011).<sup>2</sup> The majority, mostly from South-East Asia, entered the country through 'guestworker' contracts or by marrying Taiwanese.

A much smaller group of foreign residents is composed of high-skilled migrant workers, whose number totalled 37,971 by June 2011 according to official documentation—increasing from 10,189 in 1993 and 21,978 in 1999.<sup>3</sup> The 2011 statistics, distributed by occupation, nationality and gender, are shown in Table 1. The leading categories of occupation are teachers, business employees and engineers. The two major sending countries are Japan (mostly business employees) and the United States (largely teachers); both have had strong business and cultural ties with Taiwan historically. Vietnam also sends a significant number of skilled migrants to Taiwan who, nevertheless, fall into the unspecified category of 'Others'.<sup>4</sup> Substantial

**Table 1.** Statistics for foreign professional workers in Taiwan (by 30 June 2011)

Nationality	Total			Total (excluding 'Others')			Teachers Total	Business employees Total	Engineers Total	Missionaries Total	Technical specialists Total	Physicians Total	Seafarers Total	Journalists Total	Nurses Total	Lawyers Total	Accountants Total	Others Total
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female												
Japan	6,761	5,417	1,344	3,575	3,159	416	590	2,140	680	8	61	16	0	6	1	0	3	3,186
Vietnam	5,400	342	5,058	171	53	118	7	17	18	90	36	2	3	0	1	0	0	5,229
USA	5,285	4,128	1,157	3,535	2,730	805	2,161	551	284	491	9	16	0	11	0	11	1	1,750
Thailand	3,195	1,859	1,336	268	191	77	3	37	44	17	165	1	0	0	1	0	0	2,927
Malaysia	2,139	1,447	692	1,059	789	270	61	272	332	104	5	257	272	6	18	0	4	1,080
Indonesia	2,069	572	1,497	255	175	80	4	75	107	40	18	10	1	0	0	0	1	1,814
Canada	1,733	1,361	372	1,273	999	274	1,071	115	48	33	0	2	1	2	1	1	0	460
Philippines	1,611	616	995	442	278	164	34	54	161	138	49	5	4	0	0	0	1	1,169
Korea	1,303	911	392	637	539	98	32	312	134	148	8	2	2	1	0	0	0	666
UK	1,156	983	173	847	703	144	657	106	59	18	1	2	1	2	0	2	0	309
India	852	696	156	342	311	31	19	168	102	46	4	1	0	0	1	0	1	510
Singapore	734	513	221	294	219	75	14	176	58	35	4	3	0	1	0	3	0	440
South Africa	661	443	218	562	368	194	540	10	7	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	99
France	525	452	73	257	231	26	71	108	50	24	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	268
Germany	516	433	83	272	231	41	53	100	82	30	3	1	0	2	0	1	0	244
Australia	497	401	96	276	229	47	149	65	20	34	4	2	0	2	0	0	0	221
Burma	370	157	213	35	11	24	2	5	7	6	4	9	94	0	2	0	0	335
Others	2,786	2,226	560	1,249	1,056	193	317	314	164	268	163	16	0	1	4	2	0	1,537
Total	37,971	23,332	14,639	15,727	12,647	3,080	5,785	4,625	2,357	1,605	536	347	378	34	29	20	11	22,244

Source: National Immigration Agency (2011).

gender asymmetry exists across most occupational categories. Men are the majority (62 per cent) of professional migrant workers and the percentage rises to 78 per cent when excluding the more ambiguous category of 'others'.

Three major strata of Western expatriates are found in Taiwan, with varying social positions and migration patterns. Their distribution approximates the shape of a pyramid, with fewer people on the top with the most resources and more people on the bottom with easier access to migration (Scott Sommers, personal communication). Putting aside the personal motives of individuals, I will demonstrate that their agency is nevertheless shaped and channelled by different global forces.

Toward the top of the stratum are those who relocated to Taiwan on assignment. They fall under the categories of diplomats, managers, business employees, engineers and teachers at international schools. Their relocations are the direct or indirect results of the movement of global capital—they either work for multinational companies or provide services for expatriate families. The employment packages for overseas postings usually include a premium of salary increase and compensations for airfare, moving, housing, utilities and tuition for children attending international schools.

Professional migration from the West to Asia is embedded in the recent formation of a multi-tiered spatial division of labour (Findlay *et al.* 1996). While global cities in core countries function at the apex of investment flows, lower-order global cities on the semi-periphery act as control nodes to sustain the global economy. Multinational corporations have created international internal labour markets to facilitate transnational production and service; circular migration becomes the nature of career paths for executives and managers above certain levels (Salt 1988).

Denny is an example of a migrant at this level. At the age of 48, he is the general manager of a five-star luxury hotel in Taipei which is part of a US-based international hotel chain. After college graduation, Denny started his career in the hospitality industry in Saipan and has been posted to the Philippines, Singapore, India, Bali and China to help establish new branches of the hotel chain; each stay ranged from five months to three years. He met his wife, originally from the Philippines, while both worked in Saipan. After that, she quit her job to become a 'trailing wife' and, along with their daughter, moves with him to accommodate his floating career. Denny told me that they had never lived outside the hotel until recently, when they rented an apartment in Taipei. He got used to this 'homeless' situation over the years and actually enjoys the comfort of having helping hands to do their laundry and cook their food without any charge.

The middle rank of Western expatriates generally moved to Taiwan on their own and later found employment with multinational or local companies (so-called 'local hires'). Analysing survey data from Taiwanese companies, Tzeng (2006a) found that they usually recruit returning Taiwanese and other Asians (especially Indians) for engineering positions and Westerners for key sales and marketing positions. The labour demand for the latter requires foreign-language skills and cross-cultural



knowledge for communicating with foreign clients, editing and translating documents, and coordinating trade shows and exhibitions.

Some Western migrants in the study first came to Taiwan as exchange students with an interest in Chinese culture, languages or martial arts; later they were offered jobs and stayed on. Some first came to teach English in cram schools and later moved on to other occupations with better job security and benefits, including business staff, journalists and editors for local English newspapers, and language teachers in colleges and universities.

On the bottom stratum of Western expatriates in Taiwan are those who make a living by teaching English at kindergartens or cram schools (*bushiban*). The industry of English teaching has boomed across Asia, especially in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and, more recently, China (Griffith nd). Several of my informants taught English in other Asian countries before coming to Taiwan. Teaching English becomes their ticket to travel and work around Asia. One said, 'You could teach English everywhere. That's pretty amazing'.

A web article promotes teaching English in Asia as 'a rewarding way to travel abroad and see the world'.<sup>5</sup> This echoes the reasons given by many informants about their decision to teach English overseas, such as 'I just want to do some travel and work abroad'. They described themselves as cultural explorers driven by curiosity about the East, especially for those who majored in Asian Studies and Eastern languages in college. A few of them have family backgrounds with exposure to Asian culture: for instance, parents who worked as journalists stationed overseas or grandparents who were Chinese art collectors or Mao admirers. Teaching English also provides youngsters with easy money and flexible time to achieve a Bohemian lifestyle with the perks of travelling as backpackers around Asia.

Under the rosy images of global trekkers and cultural adventurers, however, lies the dark current of economic migration and marginal employment. My informants, albeit from an unrepresentative sample, unanimously held degrees in liberal and fine arts. Some faced poor job prospects in the local labour market upon graduation and looked into alternative possibilities overseas. Some had worked in their home countries for a few years but found themselves trapped in low-paying, entry-level positions with little career promise.

Scott Sommers (2005a) has proposed a thesis about the economic migration of English teachers on his blog, which attracted attention and generated controversy in the expatriate community in Taiwan. As an English teacher himself, he noticed that the vast majority working in the industry were 'young, single, marginally employed holders of liberal arts degrees'. He provocatively argues that they are economic migrants marginalised by a shrunken labour market in the West as a result of capital outflow and global outsourcing:

Adventure as a myth is what they end up calling their lives after globalisation has taken them apart. . . . Increasing globalisation and the opening of trade barriers has made the recruitment of some kinds of labour easier and cheaper. . . . This group is,

for the first time, involved in a mass movement into countries of significantly lower development than they come from.

We need further empirical data to estimate to what extent globalisation and the off-shoring of middle-class jobs have propelled the dispossession and displacement of liberal arts degree-holders. Moreover, after the financial crisis of 2008, the number of people who go abroad to teach English as a way out of the depressing economy in the West is expected to rise. Several recruitment websites promote the teaching of English overseas as a 'recession-proof job'. And bloggers who work as English teachers in Taiwan describe their migration as 'a speedy way to pay off student loans back home'. This being said, the migration of most foreign English teachers is not driven solely by economic concerns, and many decided to work overseas on a whim ('Why not give it a try?') rather than after a careful calculation about costs and gains. However, two factors contribute to the unintentional prolongation of their sojourn: first, they lack access to the international circuits of mobility for 'global elites', and secondly they suffer from further marginalisation in the labour market in their home countries after teaching English overseas for years.

### **State Regulations and Intermediate Institutions**

In Taiwan, the regulations for recruiting foreign professional migrants were very liberal in the 1970s and 1980s. Only since 1992, when the Employment Service Act was promulgated to establish rules for recruiting foreign workers of all levels, did the procedures of recruitment become complicated, with more red tape and lower approval rates. Although it is still fairly easy for Westerners to get a visitor visa or even an illusory student visa to Taiwan—some Chinese language schools are even reputed to allow foreigners to register purely in order to obtain work visas—job permits for foreigners are strictly regulated.

The official category of 'foreign professional worker' covers the following jobs: specialised or technical work, director/executive/manager of a business set up by overseas Chinese or foreigners, school teachers, full-time foreign-language teachers at cram schools, sports coaches and athletes, religious, art and entertainment jobs and, finally, seafarers or shipworkers.<sup>6</sup> A more concise definition lies in the state regulation requiring that, when applying for a job permit, an applicant needs to find a sponsor who offers a monthly salary no lower than the amount specified by the government as the average wage of local workers in similar fields—NT\$47,971 (US\$1,520) in 2010. This rule aims to protect the job opportunities of Taiwanese nationals and to prevent employers from hiring 'unskilled' foreign workers under the guise of skilled migration.

In the late 1990s, the global shortage of professional workers, especially in the IT industries, called for the liberalisation of employment regulations for highly skilled migrants. Taiwan's government reacted with a few new policy measures to encourage the return migration of overseas Taiwanese and the recruitment of 'international

experts' (Tzeng 2006a). However, these efforts have not yet achieved success in stimulating highly skilled migration. Taiwan is still quite behind in the international competition for 'global talent'.

Compared to Hong Kong or Singapore, daily life in Taiwan is not as convenient or accommodating for foreigners, especially those who cannot speak Chinese. A non-citizen cannot apply for a landline or a cell-phone number without a local guarantor. Many banks refuse to issue credit cards to non-citizens, no matter how long they have resided in the country. The rules allowing non-citizens to apply for employment and visa permits are confusing and changeable. Relevant information in English is not easy to access and the information on government websites is often poorly translated.

Foreigners who work for consulates, multinational companies and international schools are usually taken good care of by their employers. Job permits are processed before their arrival; transportation facilities and furnished apartments, sometimes with maid service, are provided; local staff stand by to answer queries and provide hands-on assistance for foreign newcomers. For the rest who arrive in Taiwan without a packaged deal or even a job offer, they are left to their own devices to locate a job, rent an apartment, buy a car or scooter, and figure out subtle cultural differences and nuanced social rules when dealing with landlords, employers and bureaucrats.

The industry of English teaching, which accommodates the largest number of foreign professional workers in Taiwan, is a pool of muddy water. There are plenty of common practices that deviate from legal regulations: many foreigners teach part-time at several schools but the law allows them to work for no more than two employers stipulated in their job permits; the law only allows cram schools with foreign-language departments at initial registration to hire foreign-language teachers, but the labour demand stretches far beyond this.

The employment of foreign teachers in kindergartens is not permitted by the government due to the requirement of a professional licence for kindergarten teachers. However, bilingual or English-speaking-only kindergartens have become very popular in urban Taiwan. To fill the gap between legal regulations and parental expectations, kindergartens rely on well-connected agents to circumvent the law and hire foreign teachers. The agents help process work permits for a foreigner under the sponsorship of illusory cram schools which only exist at official registration (whose owners are always named 'Mr Chen', many informants jokingly said).

The situation of holding 'illegal' work permits may render foreign teachers vulnerable to the exploitation of employers, especially under circumstances where they lack sufficient information and resources. Frank, an American who first came to Taiwan to teach English in 2000, described his initial experience: 'I couldn't do anything. Everything was difficult, difficult. So you are very dependent on your boss, because otherwise they can really mess you up'. To avoid staff turnover or simply to take advantage of new teachers, some schools, mostly in the provinces, conduct unethical or illegal operations such as holding deposits from wages or overcharging tax deductions.<sup>7</sup>

Foreigners who are married to Taiwanese nationals and hold a joint family visa no longer need permits to work in Taiwan. The status of married migrants opens up a wider range of work and business opportunities, including freelance work. One informant said, 'I encourage people to get married! Because they give you a work permit!'. Such convenience, nevertheless, comes with some hidden risks. If the Taiwanese spouse dies or the couple divorce, the foreign spouse would have to leave Taiwan unless she or he has been granted permanent residency, a new category that was legally introduced in 2002.<sup>8</sup>

Although the descent principle has dominated the regulation of citizenship in Taiwan, the passing of new laws has introduced alternatives to marriage and professional migrants. According to the 2000 revision of the Law of Nationality, foreigners may apply to be naturalised after legally residing in Taiwan for five years and provided they possess 'sufficient property or professional skills, which enable him (or her) to make a self-reliant living or a living without worry'.<sup>9</sup>

Given the possibility of naturalisation, I had only one informant who chose to do so. Jacob had lived in Taiwan for 18 years, since he was 28. In 1997, he renounced his Australian citizenship and became a Taiwanese (Republic of China) citizen even though he was divorced from his first Taiwanese wife (he later married another one). He became naturalised to protect himself from the ever-changing rules about foreigner residency. Citizenship also gives him the freedom 'to do whatever I like to do here' (i.e. freelance work and business investment). His idea about citizenship is practical and instrumental: 'I don't try to get myself into becoming a Chinese. This is just a country where I live'.

### **Positive Racism and White Privilege**

Despite their complaints about the logistics of daily life as foreigners, all informants acknowledge some degree of comfort and privilege enjoyed by Westerners in Taiwan with comments such as: 'Life is easier here'; 'People are always friendly and nice to me'; 'It's very easy to get help everywhere'; 'Foreigners are totally spoiled in Taiwan'.

Unfortunately, the friendliness and kindness of the Taiwanese are not applied to all foreigners across ethnic and class spectra. Discourses of racism and xenophobia have emerged to attack the influx of South-East Asian contract workers and marriage migrants as poverty-struck, culturally backward 'inferior others' (Lan 2006). Yet, Taiwanese residents rarely expressed similar prejudice toward Western migrants. They are warmly welcomed as 'global talents' and perceived as 'superior others' who can benefit the economic development and cultural enrichment of the country. John, a white American, quoted the racist remark his Taiwanese neighbours made when telling him not to mingle with Filipino workers in the neighbourhood: 'You are like [a] white angel close to God and they are black demons close to earth'.

White privilege is omnipresent in everyday lives. Many Western migrants receive special treatment or speedy access at post offices and banks. Some people are also dealt with leniently by transport police when they violate minor rules or fail to carry a

valid driver's licence. Frank, an American who has lived in Taiwan for six years but speaks little Chinese, used this example to explain how a foreigner benefits on many occasions if he or she cannot speak any Chinese:

Once, we got stopped [by the police] and she (the Taiwanese wife) said (in Chinese) this [driver's licence] is from New York, and a New York licence is an international one, good everywhere. And there were two cops. One said, 'I didn't know that' and the other said, 'You didn't know that?' [*Laugh*] Sometimes I get stopped and she is not there. But then they have to speak English so they get frustrated. So they just say, 'Go, Go, Go!'. Because they cannot communicate with you and they feel embarrassed.

These policemen, stationed in an area outside a major city, gave Frank a pass because they implicitly succumbed to the symbolic prestige of the West as the superior other. They took for granted the status of New York as a global city and assumed that the driver's licence there must be internationally applicable; secondly, they were silenced by the English language—they felt frustrated and even ashamed that they could not manage to speak this global language. The situation would have been totally different if the police had stopped a Thai driver who could not speak any Chinese.

Katie, a 31-year-old New Zealander, first came to Taiwan as an exchange student and stayed on for reasons of employment and marriage (to a Taiwanese). She used the term 'positive racism' to describe her white privilege in Taiwan. She was offered a VIP card without asking when she was simply browsing in a store. After having a child, she started a website-based business selling environmentally conscious nappies, clothes and toys for children. This website originally targeted expatriate mothers but later attracted many Taiwanese clients who found her business 'special' and trusted the quality of the products because of her 'foreigner' status.

Patrick, a 32-year-old American, first came to Taiwan in his early 20s to learn Chinese, and taught English on the side. After marrying a Taiwanese, he became a freelance English translator and, with his wife, ran educational workshops on environmentalism. When they received invitations to speak on environmental issues in schools, administrators often preferred Patrick, rather than his Taiwanese wife, to be the speaker. When they wrote proposals to compete for public funding, friends suggested that Patrick be the oral presenter to improve their chances of winning the grant. Patrick, who chose to speak Chinese at our interview, talked about his privileged location in Taiwan:

Patrick: I have more opportunities. Sometimes people listen to me better, only because I am white. I like this and I also hate it. . . . Some professors ask me to lecture their students. This is impossible in the US. I cannot do it in the US. I am not very eloquent; I cannot compete with others. . . .

Wife: They think foreigners are earth lovers; foreigners care more about the environment.

In Taiwan, Patrick is attached to an image of Westerners as ‘authentic environmentalists’ despite the fact that his country of origin has a notoriously poor environmental record. This ‘cultural halo’ connotes symbolic images about Western modernity, values and lifestyles as products of superior civilisation and advanced development. In the next section, I will focus on the English language—linguistic capital with a cultural halo—and its potential to be converted into economic and social capital as material embodiments of white privilege and positive racism.

### **English as Cultural Capital: Conversion into Economic Capital**

A Taiwanese chain of English-language schools once ran a commercial on television, in which a homeless white man on the street was approached by someone offering a job, ‘Would you like to teach English in Taiwan?’. This school boasts about the competency of their English teachers by dramatising the uneven quality of English teachers in the Taiwanese market, where a rapidly growing demand meets the shortages of a certified labour force.

English has become the most powerful ‘global language’ due to the political and economic hegemony of the United States (Crystal 1997). The current generation of Taiwanese parents are eager to invest money to equip their children with English linguistic capital as a necessary cultural tool with which to achieve the status of ‘global elites’. Upper-class households hire home tutors to teach their children English; middle-class parents send children to cram schools or summer programmes. In urban areas, bilingual kindergartens, in which young Westerners are reading stories to and conversing in English with Taiwanese toddlers, outnumbered Chinese-speaking ones.

Although there are institutions that authorise teaching certificates such as TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language), the number of certified teachers available for overseas posts barely meets the globally expansive demand. Most English-teaching jobs in Taiwan, especially those at cram schools or kindergartens, require no previous training or teaching experience; native English-speakers with a university degree in any subject will suffice for an entry-level teaching job. Their competence in the English language is recognised as native knowledge rather than an achieved skill. Daniel, who has been teaching English since he followed his wife to Taiwan, described the situation: ‘I didn’t really know how to teach English, so I just teach, you know?’.

Sommers (2005b) describes English teachers in Asia as ‘cultural workers’ employed in an industry that sells language as a cultural product. In this sense, there is not much difference between Chinese immigrants running restaurants in America and Western expatriates teaching English in Asia; both groups of migrants make a living by selling packaged versions of their culture. The qualification of these ‘culture workers’ is based on their native language and cultural knowledge rather than on professional or certified skills—the entry to jobs on the bottom levels takes nothing

more than factors endowed on an individual by birth. This results in the working conditions of many English teachers being unprofessional, temporary and dead-end. Most of these positions are designed to be temporary, with as much labour being extracted from the teacher in as short a time as possible.

The English language as a cultural product or capital involves not just the capability to speak a language but also the symbolic images associated with the language. Like Chinese restaurants that try to deliver a sense of ‘cultural authenticity’ through food and décor to their non-Chinese customers, English teachers have to embody the image of these ‘authentic’ English-speakers whom Taiwanese parents have in mind. Particular English accents are privileged: a North American accent has long been favoured in school curricula; this explains why the majority of English teachers in Taiwan are from the United States and Canada. The others are from the United Kingdom, South Africa (largely whites), and Australia (see Table 1). English-speakers from other countries like India, Singapore and the Philippines can barely find jobs in this industry.<sup>10</sup>

Most importantly, the image of English teachers is highly racialised. English teachers in Taiwan are predominantly white. Black applicants are often turned down by cram-school administrators because Taiwanese parents prefer white teachers. Evan, an African American who has been teaching English in Taiwan for nine years, initially encountered discrimination when looking for jobs. Once he was asked to attend an interview after sending his *résumé* and talking to the cram-school manager on the phone. When he walked in, the manager looked surprised, saying, ‘You didn’t tell me you are black on the phone.’ Evan responded: ‘Did I need to tell you that? We talked on the phone. I am from the United States. What does that matter?’. The manager calmly responded: ‘No, it doesn’t really matter to me. I lived in the United States and I’d been with all kinds of people. But I have to explain to some of the parents’. The manager intended to distance herself from racism by quoting her cosmopolitan experience (living in the US) while justifying her discriminatory act by referring to the alleged preference of the parents. Evan concluded: ‘They are not looking for somebody who can teach the class; they are looking for a specific type of person’.

Native English-speakers of Asian descent also encounter similar problems. A friend of mine was born in Taiwan and grew up in New Zealand. Despite her fluent English, she had difficulty in finding English-teaching jobs because of her Asian face. She had to pretend that she did not speak any Chinese so she would look more like an ‘authentic’ foreigner. Ted, who is half Taiwanese and half American, also told me that he had been in a teaching situation where the administrator told him that ‘maybe you can tutor these people, actually you cannot. You are *not white enough* [my emphasis]’.

I asked Ted if the manager used the exact words ‘not white enough’. Ted said that he is not sure, but it was something like that. Instead of taking the words simply as a realist tale of what happened, I suggest that we read them as an inscription of memory that is mediated by the position of the speaking subject. The phrase ‘not white enough’—echoing Bhabha’s (1994) ‘not quite white’—characterises the hybrid

identity of racially mixed subjects. Their anxiety about 'passing' (or not) not only shapes their life experiences back home but also shadows their sojourns overseas.

The practice of converting English-language capital into economic capital is nevertheless mediated by state regulations on the employment of foreign English teachers, as I have mentioned earlier. Migrants with joint family visas, compared to migrants whose residency is tied to work permits, have more freedom to choose and transfer jobs and therefore have more flexibility in turning their English competency into profits. No longer in need of an employer to sponsor their residency, some take freelance work as English translators or copy-editors for business, governments and academic writers.

Most of my informants taught English at some time during their residency in Taiwan, and some continue to do so. Although the income of English teachers is 'high-paying related to the cost of living',<sup>11</sup> teaching at cram schools or kindergartens is a causal, temporary position with no benefits or career prospects. These jobs have extremely high turnover rates because they are filled by youngsters who travel/work in Taiwan only for a short period. If we see this as the secondary labour market of English teaching, the primary labour market refers to teaching English in colleges or universities. These positions are available only to those who have MA or PhD degrees. Although these positions are not always tenure-tracked, they offer full-time employment, stable salaries, packaged benefits and promotion opportunities.

Entrepreneurship is another common route down which Western migrants can escape dead-end teaching jobs. Often together with their Taiwanese spouses, some open their own cram schools for English teaching. Bars and restaurants are two other common business plans for Westerners. What they sell to Taiwanese consumers also involves 'cultural products'—Western cuisines and lifestyles. In addition, Western migrants can use their English capacity and cultural knowledge to build transnational links and business niches. For example, Martin, a 36-year-old American, operates a German-brand luggage store under franchise. With the success of this store, the first in Asia, he convinced the German company to make him the distributor for the Asian region. Jacob, a 46-year-old Australian, saw lucrative business opportunities in the waves of Asian immigration to Australia in the late 1980s; he then moved to Taiwan and started his consulting service for Taiwanese who pursue immigration to Australia.

### **English as Cultural Capital: Conversion into Social Capital**

The linguistic capital of English can be converted into social as well as economic capital. Higher-end professional migrants, such as diplomats and managers in multinational corporations, tend to have relatively limited interactions with people outside the 'expat' community. For other foreigners, social connections are important for survival. Taiwan is a society where interpersonal networks (*guanxi*) serve as a crucial medium of social relations. Many informants attributed the misfortune of



some foreigners to their lack of *guanxi*. As Michael Turton, an American English teacher, wrote on his blog that contains rich information for foreigners in Taiwan:<sup>12</sup>

NETWORK, NETWORK, NETWORK. I can't emphasize enough how important forming connections is. In Taiwan connections are the way things get done. Personal networks may allow you to purchase things cheaply, to hear about good doctors, to find things to do and so forth.

The English language could serve as a central cog for these disembedded outsiders to initiate and strengthen local networks. Most Westerners in Taiwan have the experience of being stopped by strangers on the street who simply want to chat and practice their English. Some even offer phone numbers for future contacts and invite them for festival activities or social gatherings. Some people, like Ted, consider such encounters annoying; he described these gestures as 'frighteningly friendly, like I have stalkers'. Yet others, like John, view it as a positive opportunity:

My identity of being a foreigner here, not just being a foreigner, educated American male foreigner, I am privileged. I don't have any problems. People are usually so nice to me and people want to talk to me.

*You mean strangers?*

Yeah, I know people on the street trying to practice English with you can be annoying but usually, if you are not in a hurry, that's a relatively friendly gesture, I find.

*Does it happen a lot even now?*

Yeah, routinely. Last night, this guy came up to me and asked me to explain the difference between chance and opportunity. I was walking down the street and I was stopped and, 'Hey! Can I ask you a question?'. This happens, people have some questions about English and we start speaking . . . it's easy to get to know people. Name cards come out and if I want to, I can call these people and I can just end up, like another friend. Networking here is like art.

John, an anthropologist full of academic and personal curiosity about Taiwanese people, sees these random encounters as seedbeds for the growth of social ties. His local friends sometimes treat him as their language-exchange partners. He smilingly said: 'Yeah, I have these friends. I am obviously their English-only-project. It can be really painful if that person is not very good at English'.

What explains the enthusiasm of these Taiwanese people for building social ties with Westerners? On top of the benefit of learning and practicing English, locals gain 'cosmopolitan cultural capital'<sup>13</sup> in their social exchanges with Western expatriates. Mastery of the English language and Western culture, and access to the expatriate community, indicate a cultivation of cosmopolitan identities in association with wealth and social prestige in the context of contemporary Taiwan.

Friendships and relationships between Taiwanese nationals and Western expatriates enable a practice of 'status bargaining' (Farrer 2008: 12) in which both parties

take advantage of variable standards of status and assets to empower themselves in specific fields. It is not uncommon that Westerners provide assistance based on their English competency in exchange for services provided by local friends. For example, Frank helps a Taiwanese friend to copy-edit his English business report and the latter returns the favour by filing tax returns for Frank, who can thus excuse himself from the burden of dealing with alien bureaucratic rules and take advantage of the local knowledge of tax avoidance.

For those who are married to Taiwanese nationals, they gain flexible citizenship and social capital from their spouses, both of which facilitate their career and business in Taiwan. In fact, Western entrepreneurs often register their business under the name of their Taiwanese spouse in order to reduce premiums for loans and insurance. The practice of status bargaining or capital conversion can happen in another way for intermarried couples. Two informants working as English teachers helped their Taiwanese wives to obtain teaching jobs in the cram schools where they work. These cases demonstrate a spillover effect of the 'flexible cultural capital conversion'. The English-language capital of Western migrants first converts into their own economic capital and then social capital (networks with the cram school), and later such social capital converts into economic capital for their spouses.

Thanks to the hegemonic English language, Westerners can get by in Taiwan without learning the local languages. Among my 17 informants, only four could speak fluent Chinese, seven could speak Chinese for the basic level of conversation, and the final six could barely speak any. Despite this, Western migrants are able to turn their white privilege and English-language capital into economic profits and social networks that facilitate their incorporation into the local society. Their privilege based on ethnicity and nationality can also be converted into assets and advantages in the field of romance and marriage, which is racialised as well as engendered.

### **Masculine Frontiers, Native Girlfriends**

Steven, a Canadian English teacher, used the metaphor 'frontier' to describe his move to Taiwan: 'This semi-periphery . . . it is a frontier. For white people who move here, it's like moving to the frontier of America, like moving to Nevada in the 19th century'. Leaving the settled homeland behind, Western migrants can feel lost and helpless in the Eastern frontier. Finding local friends, especially native lovers, is a good break from their isolation and dependency on employers. A native romantic partner constitutes an essential type of intimate network and social capital for foreigners, serving as a language and cultural translator, a local guarantor for obtaining services and renting apartments, and an agent who assists in negotiation with locals when conflicts and problems occur. Steven recounted this anecdote:

We had this neighbour [also Westerners]. They had problems, because they were really noisy and the landlady tried to kick them out . . . So this guy asked my wife to translate for him, and I told her, 'Don't do it because he's gonna come over here

whenever there is a problem.’ And I said to her, ‘Besides, he is supposed to have a girlfriend to do that for him.’

Karen Kelsky (2001) has written about the ‘occidental longings’ of cosmopolitan Japanese women; their aspiration for romance with Western men indicates a ‘conflating of whiteness and the West as object of desire and agent of “liberation”’ (2001: 56). These women constitute a minority group, but the desire for Western modernity—often in conflation with whiteness—permeates the global circuits of products, images and messages. Situated in the racialised ‘cartographies of desire’ (Constable 2003), many white male informants reported increased popularity in their romantic or erotic pursuit of local women in Taiwan in comparison to their dating experiences back home.<sup>14</sup>

However, the same racial position could disadvantage heterosexual white women. It is much easier for Western men in Taiwan to become romantically involved with native women than for their female counterparts to date Taiwanese men. On the Internet forum, female expatriates posted discussions under subjects like ‘It’s difficult to date’, ‘Are Asian guys undatable?’. Neither is it easy for Western women to find Western men as romantic partners. Catherine, an American woman married to a Taiwanese, complained, ‘The white guys always say: “Let’s go out with Taiwanese girls and let’s talk to our American friends when we have problems”’.

Casey, a 30-year-old single woman from New Zealand, teaches physical education in an international school in Taipei. She found Asian men attractive but her dating experience in Taiwan has not been smooth. She was once seriously involved with a Taiwanese man. His parents, who ran a restaurant, initially approved their relationship and even asked Casey to help to translate the menus into English. However, they later objected to this union and threatened to cut off financial ties with the son if he continued the involvement. In addition, local men often consider Casey, a bike racer, too ‘tough’ and ‘aggressive’. With waist-long blonde hair, she catches the eye of many Taiwanese men but most of them seem more interested in casual affairs based on an image in their minds of ‘sexually loose’ Western women.

Katie, also a blonde woman from New Zealand, recounted an episode that happened when she and her Taiwanese husband were hanging out in a night market. Some Taiwanese guy said to her husband: ‘*Lihai-lihai* (You’re awesome), married to a foreigner, hum?’. Her husband responded with pride, ‘Yeah! [with two thumbs up]’. The stranger went on asking, ‘Where did you BUY her?’. The couple then realised that this stranger mistook Katie for a Russian bride, given the recent phenomenon of brokered marriages between Taiwanese men and women from the former Soviet Union.

When the stranger flattered Katie’s husband for his ‘achievement’ in marrying a ‘foreigner’, he was referring to a white woman rather than a woman from South-East Asia, from where the largest number of marriage migrants in Taiwan have come. By marrying or dating a white woman, the Taiwanese man becomes ‘awesome’ in the double sense of transcending his inferior ethnic location and upgrading himself on the social-status ladder in parallel with the global hierarchy of economies. Casey described:

Having a Western woman on your arm has a few meanings: one, it means that you've got a big dick, second, all the Taiwanese girls will look at us together and think that he is well off. In people's mind I'm rich, because I'm from New Zealand.

White femininity in these narratives is either embraced or rejected. It is *embraced* for the social construction of whiteness as superior in the racialised standard of physical beauty and as dominant in the material relations of a global economy. The empowerment of a coloured man being with a white woman is symbolised as the enhancement of his sexual competency. White femininity can also be *rejected*—the association with feminism and sexual liberation in the West makes white women unsuitable wives and daughters-in-law compared to local norms of domesticated femininity.

Moreover, the stranger's remark in Katie's story about the interracial union was celebratory with an undertone of patriarchal nationalism, capturing women as boundary-markers for both the national community and the patrilineal family. The Taiwanese husband achieves some sort of 'racial hypergamy' by marrying 'in' a white woman. By contrast, Taiwanese women married 'out' to foreign husbands reported unpleasant encounters with strangers, mostly older generations of Taiwanese men, who made negative comments about their falling for white men as an act of *chonyian* (worship for the West).

The engendered terrains of romance and marriage have negative impacts on the career prospects of expatriate women. Casey started her overseas job-hunting by joining her boyfriend (they broke up soon after they arrived in Taiwan), also from New Zealand, to attend a job fair in Manila. Unlike the boyfriend, who was offered a packaged deal of 'overseas hire', Casey was employed as a 'local hire' without benefits or allowances. In addition to her limited teaching experience, her status as a single woman also impeded her chances of obtaining an overseas post: 'There's a really big misconception here that there are no men in Taiwan [for Western women], [so] single women would leave quickly'.

The masculine normativity of professional migration has created explicit or implicit barriers for women working overseas. Managers tend to have concerns about women's ability to cope with isolation, loneliness and physical safety in a foreign country. Women need to repeatedly show their interest in overseas positions in order to make them happen (Tzeng 2006b). While single women face marriage concerns in their pursuit of international careers, married women feel pressured to negotiate a package that includes employment for their husbands to avoid the stigma of 'trailing husbands' (Yeoh and Khoo 1998). In the power geometry of time-space compression, women are constrained by their gender position to access mobility in both public and private spheres. They are disadvantaged not only by a glass ceiling in the international labour market but also by masculine normativity in the expatriate community and gender gradients in intercultural intimacy and marriage.

### Cultural Ghettoisation, Prolonged Sojourns

The strategy of 'flexible cultural capital conversion' has its limits and drawbacks. Although Western migrants occupy privileged job niches with the conversion of cultural capital, it is quite difficult for them to move to other job categories unrelated to their English proficiency and cultural background. Catherine, who has lived in Taiwan for more than 15 years and speaks fairly fluent Chinese, still encountered barriers when she tried to locate jobs based on her professional skills. Despite her double degrees in journalism and communication art, the best job she could find is teaching English in college. She complained with a sigh, 'As an English speaker, the attitude of the company is that no matter what you are, [you are] *just the English person*' [my emphasis].

Western migrants are often in a predicament that I call 'cultural ghettoisation'. Evelyn Nakano Glenn (1986) coined the term 'occupational ghettoisation' to describe an employment situation out of which, due to racial discrimination and social exclusion, Japanese women who emigrated to the United States as domestic workers were usually unable to move, even after they became fully fledged citizens. For white English-speakers in Taiwan, their cultural backgrounds place them in privileged yet segregated job niches, because cultural essentialism is a double-edged sword that brings in ambivalent effects of positive racism.

Several informants feel frustrated with being seen only as 'an English person', a label that erases their professional skills and reduces their abilities to that of speaking their native tongue. One is Steven, a 45-year-old Canadian with a master's degree in social science. He described his feeling of disempowerment with gender metaphors—his masculinity and even his whole existence as a human being seem under attack, because English teaching is such a feminised (read as powerless) job or, as Scott (1988) says, gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power:

I don't feel real. Real is the word I use. Like a real person.

*Real, you mean not fully recognised?*

Not fully male, I guess. Being here demasculinises. English teaching is a feminised work. Virtually I'm hired here through my nativeness and my skin colour. But in Canada, that doesn't have any value at all!

Steven managed to find an English-teaching job in a college. Although the salary is not any higher, he feels more manly and respected in front of his Taiwanese wife's family. English teachers in formal institutions have an elevated social status, which is essential for foreign husbands, who feel urged to impress their Taiwanese in-laws with the role of the stable breadwinner against the local stereotype of Western men as bar-hoppers and womanisers.

Western expatriates positioned at the upper end of the status ladder usually keep their social circles separate from English cram-school teachers and tend to disassociate themselves from the latter's image as 'drifting losers' with a lifestyle of

excessive partying and drinking. The remark of Casey, the international-school PE teacher, is echoed by others in her league: 'Whenever people ask me if I'm an English teacher, I get really offended. 'Cause English teachers have a terrible name—being terrible people [with] attitude and all sorts of stuff'.

Most English teachers mentioned the idea of moving back home, albeit more wishful thinking than a concrete plan. They recognise many barriers on the way home: their Taiwanese spouses may not adjust well to their new life or find jobs easily; more importantly, they worry about their own job prospects in their native countries. David is a 35-year-old American who has a BA in history and has taught English in Taiwan for more than five years. He misses his life in the United States, especially shopping in Walmart and shooting guns as a hobby. Yet, he hesitates to leave his cushioned job and settled life in Taiwan, being aware of the risks and challenges on the route of reverse migration. He said: 'I am pretty much certain that I won't be able to find something in my major so I will probably start all over again. I don't know, doing sales or something'.

One American man, who experienced a hard time in the US job market after residing in Taiwan for a decade, stated: 'Remember, the longer you stay in Taiwan, the harder it will be to find a job when you get back here. This is especially true if you are over 35. No matter what level of brains, talent and skill you have'.<sup>15</sup>

Eric, the African American English teacher, had a similar experience when he moved back to the US with his Taiwanese wife after living in Taiwan for five years. He was shocked by the price of health insurance in the US after being used to Taiwan's affordable public insurance: 'Everything is so expensive. It is too expensive to start over'. Lacking credit records while living overseas, he received expensive quotes for car insurance and a mortgage. Most importantly, the years of teaching English overseas contributed little value in terms of job experience. After only one year, he gave up the dream of homecoming and resumed his 'easy life' and English-teaching career in Taiwan.

The value of English-language capital can be lucratively redeemed in many non-Anglophone countries, but the accumulation of such capital is nevertheless territory-bound. When Western migrants return to their native countries, the long tenure of English-based employment does not make an impressive résumé and employers may consider their human capital to be depreciating while residing overseas for years. Although Western high-skilled migrants could comfortably survive in Taiwan, the route of reversed migration, if intended, would not be as smooth; the fear and cost of starting over in their home countries often propel them to extend their sojourns in the global South as an unintended consequence.

## **Conclusion**

Drawing on the case of Taiwan, this article has examined high-skilled migration from the West to Asia, a phenomenon that has been overlooked by the migration literature. This topic also allowed us to explore the constitution of white privilege and racism in

the context of international migration. Ruth Frankenberg (1993: 6) wrote in the US context: ‘whiteness refers to a set of locations that are historically, socially, politically, and culturally produced and, moreover, are intrinsically linked to unfolding relations of domination’. Karen Kelsky (2001: 188) has criticised whiteness studies in the United States for their failure to attend ‘the circulation of whiteness globally’. Drawing on her research in Japan, she argues: ‘Whiteness has become the object of racialized aspiration all over the world under the conditions of deterritorialization ... [in particular] white men become the fetish objects onto which Japanese desire for inclusion into “global society” is projected’.

In non-Western contexts, whiteness is a marked, visible identity—the superior other—and a site of power intrinsically linked to the global circulation of capital, culture and people. I propose that we delve into the subjectivity and practice of Western migrants in order to comprehend the discursive and material (re)production of racial privilege in transnational arenas. This article has demonstrated how Western migrants, with the intersecting of ethnicity, nationality, class and gender, exert agency to negotiate their positions as non-citizens, privileged others and professional workers.

I have coined the term ‘flexible cultural capital conversion’ to describe how English-speaking Westerners can convert their native-language skills, as global linguistic capital, into economic and social capital and symbolic privilege. The practice is enabled with the active participation of non-Western subjects, who invest money or emotion in developing variable ties with Westerners as a means of capital enhancement, status bargaining, or aspiring to be ‘global’ or ‘cosmopolitan’.

The flexibility of Western migrants in capital conversion or transnational mobility is somehow constrained. It is difficult for them to move to job categories unrelated to their English proficiency or cultural background. The situation of ‘cultural ghettoisation’ is especially salient for English teachers, who lack mobility access to the internal labour markets of multinational institutions. The expansion of English-teaching industries in Asia has reinforced the *status quo* of neocolonial world hegemony. Yet, the cultivation of global linguistic capital has also increased the ability of Asian upper- and middle-class children to pursue a deterritorialised career future and cultural imagining. In contrast, the strategy of English-capital conversion for Westerners is territorialised and is context-dependent and field-specific. They occupy particular niches in the labour markets of the global South while facing grim job prospects on returning to their home countries in the North.

### Acknowledgements

This project was funded by the National Science Council in Taiwan (NSC 95-2412-H-002-001). I am grateful to my excellent research assistant, Lee Sat Byul, and I thank Peter Baiamonte for editorial assistance and transcribing some interviews. I also thank Tseng Yen-Fen, Scott Sommers and Joon Kim for their comments on previous drafts.

## Notes

- [1] I have applied this concept to demonstrate how college-educated, English-speaking Filipina migrant domestic workers manoeuvre their linguistic capital to enhance their status *vis-à-vis* Taiwanese newly rich employers (Lan 2003).
- [2] It should be noted that mainland Chinese are not counted as 'foreigners' in the statistics. Neither does this number include foreigners who overstay tourist visas to work in Taiwan.
- [3] The statistics for 1993 and 1999 are modified from Tzeng (2006a: Table 1) and do not include the category of 'unemployed'. The 2011 figure is compiled from data from the National Immigration Agency (2011).
- [4] Some employers who own a company or factory recruit migrant domestic- or care-workers through the venue of 'skilled migration' in order to avoid state regulations on the length of their stay. The category of 'others' covers a significant number of women from Vietnam, Thailand and Indonesia. It is a reasonable guess that some of them are hired for semi-skilled/unskilled jobs.
- [5] Griffith, S. (nd) 'Teaching English in Asia'. Web article at <http://www.transitionsabroad.com/listings/work/esl/articles/workinasia.shtml>, accessed 1 May 2008.
- [6] Website of the Bureau of Employment and Vocational Training, Council of Labour Affairs, Executive Yuan, Republic of China, [http://www.evta.gov.tw/eng/content/content.asp?mfunc\\_id=101&func\\_id=101&type\\_id=0&cata\\_id=0&id=9201](http://www.evta.gov.tw/eng/content/content.asp?mfunc_id=101&func_id=101&type_id=0&cata_id=0&id=9201), accessed 10 January 2009. Table 1, however, does not include the numbers of seafarers and ship-workers.
- [7] See, for example, Turton's website, which advises English teachers in Taiwan on how to protect themselves from the unethical or illegal operations of employers: [http://www.michaelturton.com/Taiwan/teach\\_protect.html](http://www.michaelturton.com/Taiwan/teach_protect.html), accessed 25 April 2008.
- [8] Under current immigration law, foreigners who apply for permanent residency have to have been present in Taiwan for at least 270 consecutive days per year for seven years and will have to stay in Taiwan no fewer than 183 days each year in order to keep the status valid. Only a few informants in my study had applied for it or planned to do so in the near future; the others considered it 'too hard to get but very easy to lose'.
- [9] Law of Nationality, Article III, Section 5. It should be noted that the law intentionally excludes foreign guestworkers from access to naturalisation, because their contracts are limited to a period of no longer than three consecutive years.
- [10] Two of my informants were originally from Belgium and the Netherlands. Their job prospects in the industry of English teaching were not as good as for native English-speakers—they were often paid at lower rates in cram schools. Although European languages—German, French and Dutch in these two cases—do not contain as much symbolic power and commercial value as the English language does in Taiwan, my informants were nevertheless able to work as translators by occupying particular market niches.
- [11] See Purnell, N. (nd) 'Teaching English in Taiwan', online at: [http://www.transitionsabroad.com/publications/magazine/0409/teaching\\_english\\_in\\_taiwan.shtml](http://www.transitionsabroad.com/publications/magazine/0409/teaching_english_in_taiwan.shtml), accessed 1 May 2008. Based on my interviews, the hourly rate of English teaching at kindergartens and cram schools ranged from NT\$500 to NT\$800 (USD\$16–25). The monthly income of a new teacher with 30 working hours was roughly NT\$60,000 (USD\$2,000). Private tutoring or teaching business English were more lucrative.
- [12] See <http://www.michaelturton.com/Taiwan/kids.html>, accessed 25 April 2008.
- [13] I borrow this term from Farrer (2008), who describes intermarriages between Chinese nationals and Western expatriates in Shanghai as a form of symbolic and social investment in 'global Shanghai', a hybrid international community situated within and beyond China.



- [14] My informants were all heterosexual. White men also enjoy certain advantages on the gay dating scene. 'Si-tsan-mei' (sisters who crave Western cuisine) is a term coined by the local gay community to refer to Taiwanese gay men who desire white men.
- [15] See <http://www.michaelturton.com/Taiwan/return.html>, accessed 1 May 2008.

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