

## **White U.S. Expatriate Professionals in Singapore: Desiring to be Cosmopolitans**

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### **Abstract**

Being a white encompasses a certain degree of privilege, status, class, and power, both social and discursive. This study explores how 19 white U.S. expatriate professionals construct their own social locations of whiteness and ascribe the meanings toward the consumption of cultural differences and diversities in viewing the non-Western Other. The idealized identity project (desiring to be cosmopolitans) participants have incorporated into their narratives of identity masks their whiteness and white invisibility. The data analysis reveals the way white reinforces its position of power and privilege to maintain the invisibility that is the sine qua non of white privilege among white U.S. expatriate professionals in Singapore.

### **White U.S. Expatriate Professionals in Singapore: Desiring to Be Cosmopolitans**

Being a white American always feels like I am one step removed, I am one step removed from really understanding how to relate and interact with people and one step removed from the red line and one step removed from really making the level of personal connections to having a richer experience, richer friendships or you know, confidantes. I am sort of one step removed, I have always struggled a bit as to am I here to impose my ways and my thoughts, my methods onto the people here to help them grow or am I here to grow from them? It might be things as simple as you know getting a presentation done by one of my employees and I look at it and I go, this is not how I will structure it, this is not how I will work, the grammar's different from mine and I struggled. I think, I give them some of my comments and I try to push them and teach them to be more American or does the Americans understand, oh that is how things are done by the Asians and I need to learn, that is how they think and how they act. So I am always sort of one step removed in not knowing am I really fitting in or am I supposed to be changing the environment? (James Smith, American, expatriate Director working in Singapore for 2 years).

It is a multi-racial, multi-culture society in Singapore. I am not aware of my whiteness, I'm just not, you know, neither any of my children. My children, which is one of the greatest gifts that I think my wife and I have given to them have a chance to grow up in Singapore. For example, my son, four, five years ago threw a birthday party and all the other boys, seven other boys and my son and all the other boys were Indians and one of the fathers pointed that out to me and I say you know what, my son won't even notice and neither will his friends. It just doesn't occur to them. That's one of the greatest gifts we have given to our children living in Singapore. The whole thing the race and culture and language doesn't

much matter (John Cook, American, expatriate Snr Vice-President working in Singapore for 9 years).

The participants in this study are 19 white U.S. expatriate professionals working in Singapore. The meanings these participants ascribe to their cross-cultural experiences as white U.S. expatriate professionals are situated in a collectively shared identity of white discourses through which they inscribe their life narratives, personal aspirations and outlook toward the consumption of cultural differences and diversities in viewing the non-Western other, and cosmopolitanism as a system of ideological discourses that expatriate professionals have incorporated into their narratives of identity as an idealized identity project. While the social construction of whiteness has been linked to relations of power, domination, race privilege and cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995), the ideology of cosmopolitanism alludes to aesthetic sensibility that differentiates cultural elites from the middle-class, social standing within the bourgeois circles of the global economy (Brennan, 1997; Rojek & Urry, 1997), their collective pursuit and aspirations of a cosmopolitan identity unveiled some commonalities among their respective self-conceptions, and outlook toward travel and cross-cultural adaptation.

The reflective, intellectualizing posture adopted by this group of white minority elite members in Singapore increasingly underscores “whiteness” as the normalized, invisible taken-for-granted identity (Martin, Krizek, Nakayama & Bradford, 1996), laced with socioeconomic power and privileges. Privilege is granted often without a subject’s recognition that he/she has it better than others. Even if a White person tries to dissociate himself/herself with the white race, privilege is nevertheless still granted. Whites rely on white privilege to avoid objecting to oppression. The option to ignore oppression means that privilege is rarely seen by the holder of the privilege (Wildman, 1996). Resistance to acknowledge one’s complicity in upholding systems of oppressions and the lack of understanding work hand-in-hand to maintain the invisibility that is the sine qua non of white privilege (Applebaum, 2003). Because whiteness is the “natural” state, being white means to be “normal,” (McIntosh, 1992, p. 69) or a good, kind, loving and benevolent “human being,” nonwhites are often seen as outsiders (Gallagher, 1997). While “what it means to be a white,” provides a compelling nexus of meanings from which these expatriate professionals acknowledge the privilege, benefits and often “unearned” rewards they enjoy as expatriates living in Singapore, they have to confront a myriad of intractable sociocultural barriers to penetrate the local culture. Other barriers to enact their cosmopolitan identity project (desiring to be cosmopolitan) arose from incompatibilities between their nomadic ideals and their countervailing desires for meaningful connections with Singaporeans. The meanings of “whiteness” played out by way of white discourses antithetical to the meanings of cosmopolitanism encoded in expatriate professionals’ narratives as an idealized identity project often create feelings of conflict and ambivalence. The countervailing ideological elements illuminate a system of dialectic tensions that embody their “whiteness” and their desire to be cosmopolitans make up the tapestry of their cross-cultural experience in Singapore.

### **Cosmopolitanism**

According to the Webster’s dictionary, a cosmopolitan is someone who possesses “worldwide rather than limited or provincial scope or bearing” (Webster online), the concept of cosmopolitanism is derived from kosmo-polites, a composite of the Greek words for

“world” and “citizen,” (Cheah, 1998). Simmel’s notion of a stranger is cosmopolitanism, someone who has a relatively high degree of communication with his environment (Rogers, 1994). Defined as individuals who are world citizens and belong “to all parts of the world” not restricted to any one country or its inhabitants, people who have chosen to live abroad (versus exiles or refugees who are forced to) and who can go home when it suits them (Robbins, 1998), cosmopolitans are identified with individuals who are “more mobile, more highly educated, traveled widely and had friendship networks with individuals outside of the community” (Rogers, 1994, p. 137). While cosmopolitan immediately evokes the image of a privileged person who can claim to be a citizen of the world by virtue of independent means, expensive tastes, and a globe-trotting lifestyle (Robbins, 1998), conceptualization of cosmopolitanism as transnational intellectuals who “seek out and adopt a reflexive, metacultural or *aesthetic* stance to divergent cultural experiences,” (Featherstone, 1990, p. 9) was dismissed with the argument that “aestheticism” “presume inequality and its spectatorial absence of commitment to change that inequality” (Robbins, 1998, p. 254). Rather, the identity positions of cosmopolitans are fully situated and manifested in the context of every day life, and the consumption of its myriad practices.

The construction of Western cultures, ideologies and theories that make sense as universals are not uncommon (Asante, 1998; Miike, 2003, 2004). “The privilege of standing above cultural particularism, of aspiring to the universalist power that speaks for humanity....is a privilege invented by a totalizing Western liberalism” (Clifford, 1988, p. 263). Clifford calls for the avoidance of “the positing of cosmopolitan essences” (Clifford, 1988, p. 274) of arrogance, elitism, and “western colonial image,” versus the fine-tuned “moral-political outlook” found in discourses that portray cosmopolitan proclivities in favorable terms such as “humility,” “free from provincial prejudices,” “urbane,” “sophisticated,” “attuned to complexities” (Malcomson, 1998, p. 241; Rabinow, 1986, p. 258).

Cosmopolitans are not fleeting moments of citizens that appear to exist everywhere and feel the sense of belonging nowhere. Rather, ideally, a cosmopolitan belongs to the age of a transnational world in which sojourners lived and worked abroad. Extending beyond the “proteanism” of cosmopolitanism (Hannerz, 1990, p. 240), the indication of a willingness to explore and consume an array of transcultural diversity is a culturally competent cosmopolitan steeped in communication competence skills; individuals who are sufficiently open-minded, humble, flexible, interculturally sensitive to the different socio-cultural-political scenes of other cultures (Chen, 2005; Chen & Starosta, 1996). Acquiring cultural communication competence skills hinges on being connoisseur of cultural differences that transcends superficial intercultural interaction as it points communication competence toward one’s ability to interact across multiple cultural identities in culturally specific situations; the cultural communication competence skills are inscribed within the framework of cognitive, affective and behaviorial process (Chen, 2005; Chen & Starosta, 1996). The meanings participants in the study ascribe to their cross-cultural experiences in Singapore underscores their aspiration and desire to be culturally competent travelers.

### White America

Despite the growing demands for multiculturalism, “becoming white,” and “Anglo conformity,” were the ways ethnic minorities in America are forced to integrate to make themselves Americans (Huntington, 2004; Schlesinger, 1998). With its history of white

hegemony and the wide power differential in the United States society white domination is daily recreated on both individual and institutional level. The social construction of whiteness continues to be built upon exclusion and racial subjugation. Whiteness and white privilege continue to position others as inferior and are taught to normalize their domination position in society. Given their identity is the “norm” white space is not up for negotiation or interrogation regardless of situation or context (Jackson, 1999). “Whites are never in a position where they must concede or exchange a part of themselves on any permanent or temporary basis. They always have a choice, which will not effect their well-being or standard of living unless they allow it to do so” (Jackson, 1999, p. 48).

White Americans who work and live abroad take on the “privileged minority” status that are attached to the strings of white privileges they enjoy in America, and the position of power and invisible privileges they carry with them to the foreign country (Chai & Rogers, 2004). Hedge (1998) sums it up very aptly: “Cultural identity is not just about what we are but also about what we have become. Identities are subject to the continual play of history, culture, and power” (p. 38).

### White Cosmopolitans

The influence of colonialism has charted an ineradicable hierarchically pattern of center-periphery economic power relations that still exists today (Said, 1994). An “expatriate” - means someone who has left the fatherland - is steeped in the legacy of white, colonial domination. Transported mainly from the imperial states, they are mostly professionals in positions such as diplomats, educators, CEOs, technocrats, managers, etc.:

The concept of the expatriate may be that which we will most readily associate with cosmopolitanism. Expatriates are people who have chosen to live abroad for some period and who know when they are there that they can go home when it suits them. Not all expatriates are living models of cosmopolitanism; colonialists were also expatriates, and mostly they *abhorred* ‘going native’. But these are people who can afford to experiment, who do not stand to lose a treasured but threatened, uprooted sense of self. We often think of them as people of independent (if modest) means for whom openness to new experiences is a vocation, or people who can take along their work more or less where it pleases them; writers and painters in Paris between the wars are perhaps the archetypes. Nevertheless, the contemporary expatriate is likely to be an organization man; so here I come back to the transnational cultures, and the networks and institutions which provide their social frameworks. (Hannerz, 1990, p. 243).

Historically, colonialist expatriates’ attachments to travel seem highly ethnocentric and racist. The legacy of colonial domination has framed “the other” in the periphery, standing at the outer edge of the metropolitan world (Hall, 1996) thereby they perceived themselves as bringing culture to the colonized land. Today, expatriates mostly resist “going native,” as the colonial domination mentality persists toward viewing “the other” not quite as civilized and intelligent as them. Juxtaposed to expatriates’ colonial mentality of bringing their culture to Singapore, inscribed within the narratives of U.S. expatriates’ discourses is the lionization of living and working in another culture as a the key to self-enhancement of their career and a more sophisticated, worldly outlook.

### **Singapore as a Host Society**

As a country with immigrant roots, Singapore has virtually maintained a liberal policy towards the admission of foreign skilled workers since its independence in 1965. A country whose economy is heavily dependent on free trade and foreign investments, Singapore's government has actively promoted a pro-business environment that encouraged foreign investment and multinational corporations to establish their business operations in Singapore. Foreign investment has been an important contributor to the rapid development of the Singapore economy. The economic policies outline the government's active role to create a very receptive environment for expatriate workers. To remain globally competitive "in a global network of cities of excellence", Singapore must realign itself as a "cosmopolitan centre, able to attract, retain and absorb talent from all over the world" (Lee, 2000, p. 14). The success of the economic and social policies is evidenced in the government's 2004 Department of Statistics report of foreigners that constitute about one-fourth of Singapore's resident population of just over 4 million. The one million workers consists of both low-skilled labors (e.g. domestic maids, construction workers) and high-skilled professionals (e.g. engineers, banking and finance, computer industry etc.). Singapore hosts about 17,000 American expatriates, ("Singapore," 2003), the United States is the largest Foreign Direct Investment.

### **Method**

The data reading is based on verbatim transcripts of in-depth, semi-structured forms of interviewing. Participants were recruited in a church attended by the researcher (a native Singaporean who conducted all of the interviews). The interview lasted between 1 hour and 2 ½ hours. The participants were all American born citizens raised in the United States, a criteria that I set for reasons of consistency across the dimensions of race, culture and citizenship. Americans were picked as they were most easily accessible. Instead of picking all respondents from the church, an organization that has an in-built social support system, I decided to interview expatriates who did not belong to the church organization. Of the 20 respondents, 10 are from the church and the remaining 10 were sought through a snowball method which uses a person or source for locating other persons (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Bernard (1995) stated that snowball sampling is useful "in studies of small, bounded, or difficult-to-find populations, like members of elite groups...and so on" (p. 97). Eighteen were white male Americans, 1 was a white female and 1 was an American-Born-Chinese.

The interviews were conducted in the participants' residences, places of work or in an office of the church building. All participants were assured of anonymity. A profile of the participants is presented in the appendix. All were professionals who had been in Singapore for at least a year. Except for 2, the rest of the participants had lived in Singapore for at least a year. Nearly half of the 20 participants had previous international postings.

### **Procedure**

All twenty interviews were recorded using a digital recorder. All 20 interview transcriptions were transcribed verbatim by a Research Assistant. The data were electronically transferred and saved into the computer hard drive. The transcriptions were checked and verified for accuracy by the Researcher (me). First, the entire set of interview transcripts were read, and salient thematic categories that emerged across interviews were noted. A theme was

noted when three criteria were present: (1) recurrence, (2) repetition, and (3) forcefulness. (Owen, 1984). In recurrence criteria, at least two parts of a report must have the same thread of meaning, even when different words/wordings indicated such meaning (Owen, 1984)

The second criteria repetition is an extension of the first. It is an explicit repetition use of the same wording, while criterion one involves an implicit recurrence of meaning using different discourse (Owen, 1984). The third criteria, forcefulness, “refers to vocal inflection, volume, or dramatic pauses....or messages that are emotionally charged.” (Owen, 1984, p. 275, italics added). The interpretations were synthesized and thematized using the three criteria of recurrence, repetition and forcefulness.

### **Results**

This section highlights the shared, recurrent meanings that emerged across different participants to show how whiteness and white identity influence their cross-cultural experiences in Singapore. Analysis show tangible rewards such as financial status that sets the stage for everything else: private homes and luxurious condominiums in prime areas, swimming pool, garden and maid services. The compensation package instantly changes the expatriates’ status.

#### **Homes in Prime Location/High Standard of Living**

U.S. expatriates live either in private condominiums or landed property, mostly in prime locations. An expatriate voiced the same sentiments of the rest when he recognized his socioeconomic status compared to most Singaporeans: “Singaporeans look up to me because they know where I live...because of the house I lived in....”

The affluent lifestyle of an expatriate is not a mere outward physical manifestation of big homes and plush apartments adorned with expensive furniture. They live the “high-culture” jet-setting lifestyle which is evident across their narratives surrounding their lifestyle and weekend activities:

How does a Singaporean relate to an expat who can travel at any time he wants, always has a car, always has a big apartment. I mean the money differences. The expat can golf, the Singaporean can’t afford to golf. The expats want to travel here and do this, the Singaporean can’t just pick up and go like that.....

#### **Millionaire Lifestyle but Not a Millionaire**

A lifestyle that clearly transcends parochial tastes and value systems, this particular expatriate, an ordinary middle-class American by America’s standard, lives in one of the most coveted prime areas among the well-to-dos sums up the sentiments among his peers of his job level:

The accommodations [in Singapore] are better than what I have in the United States, I can’t afford this place. I won’t spend this much money. You’ve got a wonderful place to live, wonderful accommodations, you got club membership; you got a golf membership, exactly a millionaire lifestyle but not a millionaire.

These expatriate professionals who enjoy “millionaire lifestyle” are mostly individuals who hold top management positions: CEOs, President, Senior Vice President, Vice-Presidents of the companies. They enjoy a full expatriate compensation package that includes provision of housing, car and private club memberships. 5 expatriate professionals fall under this category. The remaining 15 U.S. expatriate professionals fall in the upper and middle level management

(for e.g. Managers, Senior Engineers, Directors) may not receive a full expatriate package which may exclude car or full housing compensation but nevertheless still enjoy a relatively higher standard of living than most Singaporeans and compared to living in the U.S.

### **Higher Standard of Living than Most Singaporeans**

An expatriate who shared similar view with the majority of the expatriate professionals often talked about having “extra cash.” and “comfortable living.”

I am making more money that I've ever made. We have more disposable income. I don't have a full expat package..... so they are not paying for this apartment. I have to pay for that. ...I am embarrassed to know how much I make compared to what we are paying to some of the staff here. It's embarrassing.

Another respondent added: I couldn't afford this house in the United States. We probably live better than the Singaporeans do which is probably not fair in some regards.

While it is true that not all U.S. expatriates enjoy similar perks, they belong to the upper crust of the society as suggested in this study. Compare to the local hire, U.S. expatriates are more expensive and high maintenance. They draw higher salaries than most locals. Across the 20 expatriates, they were paid either full or subsidized rent in prime areas, more than half of the subjects of study are provided with cars, full tuition fee for their children at the Singapore American School which boasts of high quality education than most U.S. public schools. The companies may opt to pay one lump sum cash to U.S. expatriates for them to decide their own allocation of funds.

When asked about their white identity and whiteness, the themes that emerged from the framework of narratives were not spectacularly surprising. The narratives of these “globe-trotting” expatriates who have lived for an extended period of time in other cultures (international experiences) are not reflective of a distinct departure from popular discourses and strategies adopted by Whites who have lived mostly within their own cultural domains (American soil) when the question of their whiteness, or white identity, uncovered through self-reflective discourses - expressed in a myriad of fluctuating ways – are often replete with varying tones and rhetoric of white empowerment all intimately linked to hegemonic issues of power and privilege. White American expatriates who have lived and worked abroad are ideally individuals who are “different,” or ‘special,’ armed with an elevated level of personal and self identity consciousness/awareness as a consequence of their international assignments and overseas exposure. Most of the participants are well-traveled, and some speak quite fluently more than one language.

The possession of wealth and power, the forefront of the discussion on white privilege, may grant individuals across cultures and ethnicities special “privilege” stemmed from their ability to splurge on expensive goods and services. These are but “fundamental privilege(s),” whereas white privilege is about “the socially intrinsic privilege of being white...about the constructed privilege, not about what is earned by individual efforts” (Jackson, Chang & Wilson, 2000).

Some expatriates may recognize their privileged status as an expatriate but what is less salient to them is their white appearance and the white space they occupy confer automatic privilege.

### **White Means You're An Expatriate**

A respondent reflected on his status as an expatriate. He recognizes that he is

privileged as an expatriate and that physical appearance matters and has a powerful impact in the way they are being perceived and treated differently:

I mean, and I think that I know, US citizens of Sri Lankan descent that are expats. They are equally privileged. They are here on the same deal as I am. Are they viewed differently by Singaporeans than me? Possibly. But if I've made an assumption, I would say yeah because people could look at them and think that they're, you know.... their first assumption is that they (the Sri Lankans) are Singaporeans. They don't understand that they (the Sri Lankans) don't have physical appearance that would necessarily make them different. I think that any Singaporean that sees me on the street and they'll think well I might be an expat, or a tourist. But they certainly wouldn't be thinking of me as a native Singaporean because of my appearance.

The whiteness identifies them as expatriates. Whites occupy both cultural and physical space. White appearance stands out with other colored skins. White is regarded as purity and a symbolic manifestation of moral and aesthetic superiority (Dyer, 1997). The narratives that unfold in the later segment revealed Singaporeans' biased treatment toward their own local people in favor of the Whites.

### **Natural Than Cultural**

At least half of the expatriates echoed similar views about their ethnicity:

I think of white as a skin color. There is no white ethnicity

White means nothing. It means the color of my skin... it isn't a major part of how I define my identity.

Being white doesn't mean anything different... I have no roots to Europe."

White has been defined as cultureless, no ties or allegiances to European ancestry and culture. These findings are consistent with existing literature that whites do not have to define themselves as they already occupy a naturalized position.

### **Never Have to Think About Identity**

A standard luxury of being a white is they never have to think much about themselves in negative terms, their white space, white appearance, white mentality placed them on privileged ground. White racial identity is no longer important to define. Over time, whiteness ideology becomes merely the way things are as a participant deliberated on treatment of white against people of color:

Ok I'm a white person because most of the time I just don't think about it because I'm not forced to. But for a lot of people in the world, I think particularly if they interact with Caucasians or other groups, they do have to think about it. Most of the time I don't have to think about it. But for a lot of other of groups that interact with whites they have to think about it. Because the whites make them think about it.

### **Supreme Race As a Minority Group**

Entrenched in colonial mentality, the "purity" of whiteness is etched in the minds of Singaporeans as seen through the eyes of the majority U.S. expatriates:

I suppose I am a privileged minority in Singapore... there is a view in Singapore that the Caucasians are at the top of the ladder... Caucasians are up here, the Africans down here and then in-between there's all these you can disagree about... Chinese



and Japanese for example are a little lower than whites...

People in Singapore seem to be adjusted to the idea that expats are special.

We are spoiled and I love being spoiled I must tell you it is of course in the United States no one would ever get me coffee... here my wonderful PA even asks me if I like a cup of coffee, in the U.S. if I ask someone to get me a cup of coffee, he or she will say why not you fix it yourself?

Another respondent added: "I think there's the cultural racism here [in Singapore]. I think it probably exists for Indians for Malays but not for Caucasians."

Internalized racism occurs when people of color internalize the white model of humanity by measuring success, goodness, beauty and human worth relative to white standards and put down the capabilities of their own race (Tatum, 1997). Now and then, Singapore local print media forum report complaints by Singaporeans of double-standard customer service extended to white expatriates and local Singaporeans. It is not uncommon to hear accounts of Singaporeans who discriminate against their own race over the whites who are the "preferred" guests. In a local movie production titled "I Not Stupid," a scene reflected the inferiority complex of some Singaporeans' attitude and practices toward favoring Whites over Singaporeans in the hiring process for top management position. Whites were perceived to be more intelligent than the locals. Singaporeans compromise their self-confidence and participate in their own oppression. Some Singaporeans fail to recognize that "the social meaning of whiteness rests on the fact that people of color internalize the status of inferiority, as opposed to the superiority and privilege of being white....that whites have forced people of color to "hold" their insecurities, fears, anxieties, and other repressed facets about themselves so that they can concentrate on and celebrate the narcissistic dimensions of the White self." (Jackson et al., 2000, p. 72).

### **White Means Being Human/Being an American**

For most white expatriates, "being human," is what white means. White means I am part of the human race... so I am human. If White is a human being, other colors must mean something else.

More than half of the 20 respondents articulated becoming white to be synonymous with becoming American.

### **What do Whites Want?**

White oblivion is obvious and very relevant. Acknowledging privilege as an expatriate seems a comfortable tasks for the participants to freely discuss but what is less salient is the recognition of white privilege and white space. What do white people want and want out of their travel and overseas experiences? How do they want others to perceive them? While valorizing the ideal of personal growth and development through travel, the ideal identity project (desiring to be cosmopolitans) provided an ideological framework to mask their whiteness and white invisibility.

### **Being Respectful**

An average American, according to this respondent, is condescending and arrogant. He loathes being the "average American," thus the self-reflexive posture of wanting to be "different" rather than "average," he prefers to be seen as someone who is more

accommodating, respectful and deferent.

I don't want to fall into a stereotype of America. You know you see the big Texan, he pushes his around and wants everything his way. I hope I don't do that, I hope I am not perceived that way. In fact I actually try not to do that. I don't want to be the average American. I don't like the way some Americans talk to people, they do things and they think they are better for some reason, I don't know why but they do, I just don't want to give that impression because that's not the way I think.

### **Connoisseur of Cultural Diversities**

A distinct characteristic of a cosmopolitan is the love for diversities. Their outlook of "experiencing" is build around an ethos of curiosity and adventure. Curiosity to try new food, even exotic food, go to different places, be in touch with the local politics and social environment was the common thread of rhetoric of loving diversities in their quest for enriching cultural experiences.

One of the best things I like ... the experience... in Singapore...well I like some adventure, I like...getting to meet different people from different places and hear about their stories. Exposure to different styles.

### **Cultural Sensitivity**

Delving beneath the superficial intercultural experiences of their love for diversity, a number of expatriate professionals recognize the need for sensitivity, a particular mindset "that helps individuals distinguish how their counterparts differ in behavior, perceptions or feelings," and an "ability to develop a positive emotion towards understanding and appreciating cultural differences" (Chen & Starosta, 2000 p. 2). An expatriate illustrates the need for sensitivity in intercultural communication:

I think you have to be careful I mean strictly Americans, not to be too blunt. I mean um, Singaporeans take things pretty literally and so you have to be careful not to hurt feelings and to be sensitive to how they approach things and then make sure there is room for people to save face and so forth. there are issues about how you position things and allowing people some room to have face and being able to maintain their self esteem and so forth.

### **Language Accommodation –Attuning the Ear**

Understanding the English language in Singapore posed to be a challenge at the initial stage for the participants. Some expatriates recognized the need to adapt to the local speaking habit of "Singlish" which is deeply embedded in the Singapore culture.

An expatriate reflects on the need for cultural understanding of the way English is spoken.

...because someone doesn't speak English the way they do that they must not think very well either so their thinking process is a bit wrong but I, you know, one of the things we learnt is well first of all the question is whose English is it? I mean, Indians speak English differently too and whose English is it?

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

Recognition and confession of "white privilege" do not redeem the subjects of study from their complicity in systems of power, and oppression. While most white U.S. expatriate professionals recognize the taken-for-granted privilege, they fail to recognize the "whiteness"

that confers dominance in the construction of “others.” Their place in the world remains unquestioned and secure. Even with attempts not to reproduce “whiteness,” as a boundary, some of the subjects of study eschewed the conscious articulation of their whiteness, preferring defensive, self-abnegating construction. The rhetoric of whiteness is replete with boundaries, centers, margins and borderlands. The invisibility continues to exert influence over everyday life. The essence of striving to be a cosmopolitan and discourses of whiteness mapped out by the participants evoke a tone filled with contradictions, tension and defensiveness, for “‘the other’ is both an object of desire and derision, of envy and contempt, with the colonizer simultaneously projecting and disavowing difference in an essentially contradictory way, asserting mastery but constantly finding it slipping away” (Hall, 1996, p. 70). A prominent manifestation of the tensions between participants’ white identity and their aspiration to be cosmopolitans reproduced through the rhetoric of whiteness that manifests itself of “what it means to be a white,” is juxtaposed with the valorization of the cosmopolitan ideals. While they endorse and embrace cultural diversity, the canonization of the cosmopolitan reproduces the Western colonial image of rational, autonomous individuals, a postcolonial form of cosmopolitanism that masks and sustains the center-peripheral relations established through colonialism (Hall, 1996).

Singapore coined by expatriates as “Asia for beginners” was described as “deceiving,” purely judging from the outside. While these participants believe that a degree of authenticity still thrives and exist in Singapore, it remained largely inaccessible to them. Despite western influences, beneath those outer layers are guarded with deep-seated cultural traditions. Singapore remains steeped in Asian cultural traditions.

Participants of studies could no longer view the world as islands or spheres (Welsch, 1999). “The talk of a culture which evokes the idea of a homogeneous form is completely misleading. Indian culture, or Hindu culture consists of completely different cultures.....*And it applies to Singapore three main cultures of Chinese, Indian and Malay.* A completely homogeneous subculture is not to be found” (Welsch, 1998, p. 206, italics added). We live in a world of transculturality shaped not by a single homeland but are linked to multiple connections of multiple identities. Essentially we are “cultural hybrids” that cut through different social worlds “and that we possess ‘multiple attachments and identities’ - ‘cross-cutting identities’” (Bell, 1980, p. 243, quoted in Welsch, 1998). If cosmopolitanism is merely an encompassment of cultural difference, it has no content other than “cultural hoarding,” and “being there” (Friedman, 1999, p. 239). The evolutionary identity of a cosmopolitan is one that moves from lower to higher levels of “cultural integration” (Friedman, 1999, p. 238), one who has the ability to think and act in interculturally effective and appropriate ways in specific intercultural/social contexts instead of merely tolerating cultural diversity (Chen & Starosta, 1996, 2005; Starosta & Chen, 2003).

Whenever we encounter with something that is foreign, whether it is the way people eat or speak English in different forms and accents, readjusting our inner compass transcends monocultural standpoints. Transcultural citizens “aims for a multi-meshed and inclusive, not separatist and exclusive, understanding of culture” (Welsch, 1998, p. 200). Individuals aspiring to be globally competent citizens must continue to transform with the rides of the time in order to stay at the cutting edge of rapid change. To cultivate a more “open,” and flexible versus “closed” and rigid outlook toward consumption of diverse cultures and travel, an individual must be equipped with a sincere desire to make a conscious shift from a mere intellectual, rationale, logical and passive observer and participant to a more inward,

proactive, soul-searching individual. Ideally, the interplay of the mental, emotional and spiritual faculties are not separate functioning modes, but rather, integrated and intertwined functioning entities constantly engaged and infused in one's body, mind, heart and spirit (Chen, 2005). The "inside-out" approach starts with the unfolding of the self, the "most inside part of the self" that deals with one's paradigms, character and motives (Chen, 2005; Covey, 2004, 2005). When the inner vessel is constantly cleansed, individuals are more inclined to constant self-examination that would consequently raise their level of self-awareness and other awareness in people and their surrounding environment. They are proactive and are aware of their freedom and power to choose how they would respond to bridge the gap between the personal and social space, the space between stimulus and response (Chen, 2005; Covey, 2004).

White westerners in Singapore must recognize their whiteness serves as an impediment toward their aspirations of the ideal cosmopolitan project unless they are willing to break down the walls of inequality – instead of accepting it as the norm – and insists on equal treatment among the natives. The thick walls of barriers impinge on their ability to uncover the reservoirs of culture hidden beneath layers of superficiality. Singaporeans must raise their level of self-awareness and sensitivity in their attitude toward others, eliminate the practice of "internal racism," erase the colonial master/servant mindset and be equal in treatment toward all races. U.S. expatriates and Singaporeans must be aware of power and inequality inherent in the structure and understand how structure or consciousness prevents mutuality in communication and cultural learning. Singaporeans must unlearn the colonial mentality by demanding equality and mutuality in communication.

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## Appendix

<b>Background Information of U.S. Expatriates Professionals in Singapore</b>						
<b>Respond .</b>	<b>Length of Stay</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Previous Overseas Assignment</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Marital Status</b>
Resp. 1	2 yrs	53	M	None	President	Married
Resp. 2	5 yrs	59	M	Philip. – 2 yrs	Senior V.P.	Married
Resp. 3	1 yr	65	M	None	Senior V.P.	Married
Resp. 4	1yr 6 mths	39	M	None	V.P.	Married
Resp. 5	9 yrs	52	M	Philip. – 3 yrs Korea – 3 yrs Hong Kong - 1 yr Indonesia – 8 yrs	V.P.	Married
Resp. 6	1 yr 6 mths	55	M	Japan – 7 yrs Philip. – 5 mths Thailand – 5 mths	Diplomat	Married
Resp. 7	1 yr 6 mths	50	F	Australia – 2 yrs	Deputy Managing Director	Married
Repo. 8	3 mths	51	M	None	Veterinarian	Married
Resp. 9	2 yrs	48	M	None	Director	Married
Resp. 10	2 yrs 5 mths	47	M	Spain – 2 yrs	Plant Manager	Married
Resp. 11	3 yrs 6 mths	51	M	None	Principal Engineer	Married
Resp. 12	1 yr	31	M	None	Manager	Married
Resp. 13	8 yrs	48	M	None	Comptroller	Married
Resp. 14	2 yrs	35	M	None	Manager	Married
Resp. 15	2 yrs	41	M	Micronesia – 2 yrs	Consultant	Married
Resp. 16	6 mths	35	M	None	Manager	Single
Resp. 17	2 yrs	35	M	Japan – 2 yrs	Asst. Director	Married
Resp. 18	2 yrs	38	M	None	Design Director	Married
Resp. 19	3 yrs	48	M	None	Univ. Professor	Married
Resp. 20	5 yrs	40	M	None	Asst. Director	Married