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## They Are ‘Asians Just Like Us’: Filipino Teachers, Colonial Aesthetics and English Language Education in Thailand

Analiza Liezl Perez-Amurao and Sirijit Sunanta

Filipino teachers have become the largest group of foreign teachers in Thailand as English language education gains increasing importance in the kingdom. Their migratory experience, however, demonstrates that schools favour white native English speakers (NES) over them. Differential treatments of Filipino and white NES teachers in Thai schools are manifested overtly in the form of a pay gap and in more subtle micropolitics of bodily management. By examining a postcolonial view and the notion of English language teaching as aesthetic labour, Filipino teachers are found to face racialized and gendered discrimination in English language education in Thailand.

**Keywords:** Filipino educators, postcolonial approach, Thailand, English language education, aesthetic labour.

The number of Filipino migrants in Thailand has increased continuously over the last ten years. Filipinos are now considered the largest group of skilled workers supplying the growing need for English language education in the kingdom. Among the different groups of foreign English-speaking teachers in the country, the Filipinos comprise the biggest, followed by teachers from the United Kingdom and the United States. Migrating into the English language education setting in Thailand, Filipino migrants often find themselves in a relatively disadvantaged position compared to their white native English speaking (NES) co-workers. Filipino teachers are paid about half of what their NES co-workers make, and they enjoy less favourable housing arrangements and working

conditions. This article demonstrates that the treatment of Filipinos as ‘second-class English-speaking teachers’ in some Thai schools is embedded in the colonial view towards the English language. As English is perceived to be interconnected with whiteness (Motha 2014), white native English speakers are considered ideal English Language Teaching (ELT) teachers (Motha 2014; Sung 2011), while non-white teachers face discrimination in the workplace (Ramjattan 2015; Fujimoto 2006; Wong 2006; Lin 2006; Govardhan 2006).

Differential treatment of Filipino and white NES teachers in Thai schools is manifested overtly in the form of a pay gap and in more subtle micropolitics of bodily management. Unlike their white NES co-workers, Filipino teachers are expected to wear uniforms and embody kind and caring qualities, especially those who teach younger children. While the majority of NES teachers in Thailand are male, Filipino teachers in the kingdom are predominantly female, who are subject to stricter body regulations and expectations, as discussed in a number of cases in this article, to conform to gendered traits in doing their job as teachers.

Adopting a postcolonial approach to analysing workplace discrimination faced by Filipino teachers in Thai schools, this article shows that Thai discourses on the West, and by extension the English language, have shaped the relations between school administrators, Filipino teachers, and their native English speaking colleagues in educational institutions in Thailand. We share Jackson’s (2010) and Herzfeld’s (2010) views that although Thailand has never been formally colonized by Western powers it shares characteristics with colonial states in the region, and thus postcolonial theory should also be helpful in understanding the Thai sociocultural context. As the findings of this study demonstrate, school administrators favour white native English speakers because, coming from the West, they signify progress, modernity and cosmopolitanism, while their European features have added aesthetic value in Thailand. Colonialism also underlies the hierarchy of English languages in which certain variants (from the West) are set as norms and models while others (such as Philippine English, Singaporean English, Malaysian English, Indian English, etc.) are considered less prestigious (see relevant

discussion in this paper). This happens in the context of an increasing commodification of English language education where English language skills have become cultural capital and an instrument for social and economic mobility. Globalization, the global spread of the English language and thus ELT are embedded in the history of empire and colonialism (Motha 2014).

## Methodology

Research methods for this study consisted of document research and content analysis of foreign teacher recruitment websites and school policies, focus groups, ethnographic study and in-depth interviews. Statistical data of Filipino migrant educators in Thailand are drawn from Thai and Filipino authorities—the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA), Thailand Immigration Bureau and the Thai Teacher's Council—to account for an estimate of Filipino teaching professionals in Thailand in relation to migrants of other nationalities. Content analysis of job advertisements and school policies illustrate the commodification of English language education and the stratification of English language programmes and teaching professionals in Thailand. We used focus group discussions (FGDs), ethnographic observations and in-depth interviews to collect rich accounts of racialization experienced by Filipino teaching professionals in Thailand.

A Filipino educator who has worked in Thailand for thirteen years, the first author of this paper is a member of the Filipino migrant community in Thailand. She has first-hand experience of being a Filipino teaching professional in Thailand and is able to identify with issues brought up by the respondents in this study. Between the first quarter of 2015 and the last quarter of 2017, she carried out participant observation and subsequently conducted two FGDs, with fifteen Filipino teachers in the first group and ten in the second. Both the FGDs and interviews generally involved a total of fifty participants, forty-six of whom were Filipino overseas workers serving as teachers in different schools in Bangkok. The

first FGD took place one Sunday afternoon in the residence of one of the teachers. This teacher also served as one of the participants in the discussion. The second FGD happened during lunchtime in the school where Filipino educators taught. The same author arranged it with one of the participants in the discussion who, in return, asked his colleagues to participate. The same author conducted a total of twenty in-depth interviews with follow-ups thereafter, involving nineteen teachers and two school administrators. Her meetings with the teacher-interviewees were held in various locations convenient to the respondents. Interviews with two school administrators were carried out in the respondents' offices. Interviews with two Philippine Embassy officials were conducted in the form of an email interview after a preliminary face-to-face discussion on relevant issues. In FGDs and face-to-face interviews, a combination of English and conversational Tagalog was used so that the informants could articulate their thoughts easily.

### Theoretical Framework: English Language Education and Colonialism

This study is informed by postcolonial theory. Robert Young (2009, p. 14) maintains that “theory has been created from the political insights and experience that were developed in the course of colonial resistance to western rule and cultural dominance, primarily during the course of the anti-colonial struggles of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries”. English language education should be viewed from a postcolonial perspective. Globalization, the global spread of the English language and the very practice and institutionalization of English Language Teaching (ELT), Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) and Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) are embedded in the history of racialization, empire and colonialism (Persaud 2007; Motha 2014). Motha (2014) contends that because English language teaching has its roots in empire and racialization, it contributes to and reproduces racism even without the intention of those involved. Kachru (1985) criticizes hierarchies

among variants of the English language in which native English is valorized over world Englishes. This is particularly pressing when English language education has become a commodity for exchange in the market setting. Persaud (2007) connects the growth of English language education in Thailand to the privatization of education in the kingdom. Different market values attributed to different English language variants perpetuate preference for NES teachers at the expense of non-native English-speaking (NNES) teachers in EFL and TESL in non-native English-speaking countries (Lowe and Kiczowski 2016; Rivers and Ross 2013). At the national level, certain countries have facilitated visa-related requirements that make it easier for “native English-speaking” individuals to be hired, whereas the demand is more stringent for individuals who do not speak English as their native tongue (Selvi 2010, p. 157). Phongsakorn Methitham (2012, p. 149) talks about “imbalances and inequalities in employment” and argues that “In Thailand, such professional hegemony is evident in most institutions across the nation. Most participants who had English-speaking colleagues from both regions of the world recognized teachers from the West as native English speakers. On the other hand, they considered those from the Philippines as nonnative speakers of English”.

Scholars of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) have discussed the racialization of the English language embedded in the native/non-native English-speaking dichotomy and in hiring preferences for NES teachers. Although race and linguistic ability are not connected, social perceptions that associate whiteness with idealized native English speakers have detrimental effects on NNES teachers and NES teachers of colour. Mary Romney (2010, p. 26) clearly points out that the notion of “Native English Speakers” in ELT employment is a racial rather than linguistic reference, noting that “[i]t is the racial rather than linguistic factors that determine whether someone is perceived as a native speaker of English or not”. She further contends that because of “linguistic racial profiling” (pp. 26–27), TESOL professionals of colour are not fully considered native English speakers in the same way as white teachers are.

The racialization of the English language is problematic because it creates inequality.

Teachers with certain language backgrounds and racial backgrounds are sometimes perceived to have a kind of value that others do not have. The embodiment of this value can be referred to as “the idealized native speaker.” Both race and nativeness are elements of “the idealized native speaker,” or the most valued English language teacher. Where race and nativeness are the elements of the teachers in highest demand, there is also a tendency to equate race with nativeness, and nativeness with superiority. (Romney 2010, pp. 19–20)

The literature on experiences of non-white TESOL professionals attests to this linguistic racial discrimination (e.g., Fujimoto 2006; Wong 2006; Lin 2006; Govardhan 2006). Similarly, analyses of ELT job advertisements reveal that applicants’ Caucasian origin and American, British, Canadian and Australian nationalities were considered along with native-speaking ability (Haque 2006; Mahboob 2006). Kubota and Lin (2009, p. 5) criticize the preference for white native English speakers in ELT recruitment and employment protocols as a procedure that “produces and legitimates difference among social groups based on perceived biological characteristics ... carries a legacy of colonialism and often contains value judgments of the categories”.

The native/non-native English speaker discourse is underpinned by a colonial bias because it takes Englishes spoken in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and New Zealand—the concentric countries in Krachu’s (1985) three circles of world Englishes—as a model after which learners should take. Romney (2010, p. 21) points out that although the Anglophone Caribbean has a long history of speaking English, they are not included in Krachu’s traditional inner circle because Caribbean English is not norm providing. She further argues that the norm providing status of Englishes in Krachu’s concentric countries is derived from the political and economic power those countries wield on a global stage. The native English speaker discourse is therefore inaccurate

and problematic, yet it is still powerful in ELT and continues to dictate who the legitimate owners of the English language are. This NES favouritism reached such a point that even NESs from “non-Center countries like India and Singapore are often perceived as less credible and competent than their counterparts from the Center” (Selvi 2010, p. 157).

It is thus important to note that our use of the terms native English speaker (NES) and non-native English speaker (NNES) in this paper has to be understood within a specific context that does not aim to perpetuate the terms with a traditional monolingual and monocultural tenor. Instead, we argue that we use said terms because they are “nonetheless socially present, and therefore, potentially meaningful as an area of research in applied linguistics” (Moussu and Llorda 2008, p. 316). In fact, we agree with the critics that the NES/NNES dichotomy is long due for a reassessment.

Those who advocate for the eradication of White NES primacy in TESOL suggest that students, school administrators and other parties involved should be educated about the diversity of Englishes and their speakers (Romney 2010, pp. 28–30) as well as the benefits of the Non-Native-English Speaking Teachers (NNEST) approach (e.g., Mahboob 2006, p. 9; Ishihara 2010; Forman 2010). Our findings reveal that for Thai students studying English and their parents, it is not just about gaining a linguistic tool for work and communication. The desire for a proximity to and consumption of the beautiful and alluring West underlies English language education in Thailand. White NES primacy will not go away as long as whiteness continues to represent beauty, modernity and cosmopolitanism and British and American accents are perceived as more beautiful by Thais. An analysis of Thai views towards the West, and by extension to the English language, will be necessary in explaining the situation of Filipino educators in Thailand.

### Postcolonial Approach and the Thai View Towards the West

Although Thailand has never been officially colonized by Western powers, Siam/Thailand’s politics and economy were under heavy



Western influence in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In this sense, postcolonial theory is an applicable tool to understand Thai society and the way in which Thainess has been constructed through the relationship with the West. Herzfeld (2010, p. 173) posits that Thailand is under the condition of being crypto-colonial “in which the very claim of independence marks as symbolic as well as material dependence on intrusive colonial power”. In defence of a postcolonial analysis to understanding modern Thailand, Jackson refutes the “never-colonized Siam” belief, citing that being a non-colony does not preclude exemption from Western colonial impact (Jackson 2010, p. 38). He maintains that although the kingdom has enjoyed independence in its political administration and related activities, it nevertheless has been subjected to a position subordinate to the West, and that “while the country remained politically independent, economically and culturally it followed patterns very similar to those of colonized Southeast Asian societies” (p. 38).

Adopting a postcolonial perspective to studying English language education in Thailand, we pay attention to cultural logics in which *farang*, the Thai term for White persons or Caucasians, embodies “the allure of the West as a charismatic and appealing cultural site, worthy of imitation” (Harrison 2010, p. 3). Conceptualizing “Thai Occidentalism”, Pattana (2010, p. 60) argues that *farang*, the more powerful Other, is integral to the Thai modernization project and national identity formation. He contends that “[t]he Siamese/Thai agents have employed the discourse of *farang* as a tactical method for locating their cultural and national selves alongside and against the historically interweaving Western-initiated project of colonization, modernization and globalization” (Pattana 2010, p. 60). In the Thai context, *farang* is often a cultural signifier of cosmopolitanism, while the consumption of Western goods and adoption of Western manners are associated with social distinction and symbolic power (Pattana 2010, p. 68).

The allure of the West is also expressed in the perception of physical beauty. In her book *Seeing Beauty, Sensing Race in Transnational Indonesia*, Saraswati (2013) discusses how, in the Indonesian context, the notion of beauty has been shaped by the

history of cultural domination and colonialism. In contemporary Thailand the domination of Eurasians in the entertainment industry and beauty pageants speaks to aesthetic value attached to Caucasian looks. Discussing the *farangization* of Thai aesthetics, Pattana (2010, p. 72) argues that Modern Thainess is presented in the form of *luk-khreung* (mixed-race children), constructed as being cosmopolitan and self-confident, successful and beautiful, prepared to take its place alongside other ‘modernities’ on the global stage. In this paper we argue that colonial aesthetics, the notion of beauty constructed in a history of colonial power relations and Western cultural domination, permeates English language education in Thailand.

### Teaching English, the Body, Beauty, Gender and Race

We argue that colonial politics in English language teaching is attributed through the body and bodily aesthetics. Teaching constitutes a type of body work, interactive service work in which physical appearance and personality play an important role in one’s employability and desirability as a worker. Conceptualizing body work, Linda McDowell (2009, p. 1) points out the social division of labour in which “class, gender, ethnicity as well as age, looks, and weight are key attributes in explaining who is employed in what sorts of work in the first decades of the new millennium”. She highlights the unequal social and economic value given to different kinds of body for specific kinds of work in the service economy, e.g., waiters, domestic workers, bankers, nurses and teachers. While good looks, beauty and pleasant personalities are deemed important qualities for most types of employment in the service sector, Ramjattan (2015) argues that aesthetic quality for English language teachers is attributed to race and the variation of English one speaks. He contends that white native English speakers are preferred, while non-white NNES teachers are discriminated against because of their lack of these aesthetic qualities. He further points out that as expertise in English language teaching is determined by being a white native speaker of English, non-white, non-native English-speaking

teachers may experience employment discrimination and everyday racial slights. In this study of Filipino teachers in Thailand, we add that the racial hierarchy between NES and NNES teachers is also expressed in gendered ways.

Teaching is generally viewed as a profession that requires caring and empathy from its practitioners. The feminine traits desired of a teacher lead to the dominance of women in this workforce. Drudy et al. (citing Drudy 2008, pp. 311–12) explores why there are fewer men taking up the teaching profession. A number of findings demonstrate the belief that teaching is a profession meant for women, following the social construction of gender. Their findings include the following: teaching is “a woman’s job”, “a mother’s role”, primary teaching is “boring, hassle causing, stressful or requiring too much patience” (p. 8). They further posit that teaching is low-paid and viewed with a “bias towards seeing the ideal primary teacher as female, based on an essentialist belief that a woman’s nature tends to make her better with her children” (pp. 311–12). We demonstrate that Filipino and white NES teachers are not equally subject to the expectation to embody feminine traits deemed appropriate for teachers.

This article contributes to postcolonial critiques of English language education by pointing out that the body and aesthetics are an important site of cultural domination, while gender and race are implicated in the subordinate position of Filipino teachers in Thai schools. We observed gendered imbalance and the hierarchical division of labour between NES and NNES teachers in Thailand. While NES teachers are predominantly males, assigned as content teachers, Filipino educators are predominantly females who take up supporting roles as general teachers, teachers in lower levels, and teaching assistants. Both male and female Filipino teachers are subject to stricter bodily regulations such as requirements and expectations to wear a uniform, maintain an appropriate body weight, and keep up an attractive physical appearance. White NNES teachers, on the other hand, are considered good-looking by school administrators and parents without the need to comply with the same bodily

regimens. The aesthetic value of the white body is embedded in colonial politics in which whiteness represents progress, modernity and cosmopolitanism. Being ‘Asians just like us’, Filipino teachers do not carry this aesthetic capital, nor does their presence add the same symbolic value to the school.

Filipino Teachers and Their Migration to Thailand

Intra-regional migration from the Philippines to Thailand has been increasing but has not yet received close academic attention. The Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) Stock Estimate of Overseas Filipinos workers (OFW) per country holds a record of 14,910 Filipino migrant workers in Thailand in 2009. The Philippine Embassy (Bangkok), in its report to the Philippine Congress, states that there were 15,662 OFWs in Thailand from July to December 2015 (Novio 2018, p. 37). It should be noted, however, that this government data simply reflects the actual number of deployed migrants who maintain a record with the POEA by the time they leave, but not their aggregated number over the years. Based on data obtained by the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO) from 2009 to 2012 about the number of Filipinos working in Thailand, the number has gradually increased, except for a slight drop from 2012 to 2013. Table 1 shows that the increase in the number of OFWs was 44 or 0.3 per cent, 931 or 6.23 per cent, and 418 or 2.63 per cent, with a slight decline at 79 or 0.48 per cent recorded in 2013.

Unlike migration from the Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam (CLMV) Asian sub-grouping, migration from the Philippines to

**TABLE 1**  
**Stock Estimate of Overseas Filipinos Working in Thailand, 2009–13**

<i>2009</i>	<i>2010</i>	<i>2011</i>	<i>2012</i>	<i>2013</i>
14,910	14,954	15,885	16,303	16,224

*Source:* Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA)/Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO).

Thailand is marked by the flow of skilled migrants. In the 2017 report of the Department of Employment, Filipinos are now considered the biggest skilled group of workers in the kingdom. Sciortino and Surephorn (2009) reveal that despite the absence of a labour migration agreement between Thailand and the Philippines, the Filipino migrant community has been the fastest-growing migrant group in Thailand since 2003. In 2010, Filipino educators comprised the biggest group, at 65 per cent, in the professional occupational category (Overseas Workers Welfare Administration 2011; see also Huguet, Apichat and Richter 2011, p. 10).

Filipino migrants in Thailand are concentrated in the educational sectors, being employed by educational institutions across the country, especially in the primary and secondary levels. Among the different groups of foreign English-speaking teachers in the country, the Filipinos comprise the largest, followed only by teachers from the United Kingdom and the United States. The figures are a result of the first author's comparative analysis of the top ten sending countries of foreign teachers holding five-year Thai teaching and two-year teaching provisional licences, based on the raw data shared with her by the Teachers' Council of Thailand in 2015.

### The Commodification of Education in the English Language and Hierarchies among Teachers

The demand for English-speaking teachers has increased with the popularity of English as a medium of education in Thailand. For very high fees, private international schools provide English medium education with licensed curricula from the United Kingdom, Canada or Australia, and these schools are run by international administrative staff. International schools originally served the expatriate community in Thailand, but they also attract upper-class Thais who want to give their children an international education without going abroad. Private international school fees are prohibitive for most Thais, but more affordable options became available when the Office of the Basic Education Commission (OBEC) approved English programmes in

Thai schools in 1995. These schools follow the Thai curriculum, but some subjects are taught in English (usually science, mathematics, English and sports) (Pattanida 2007). The fees for English programmes are higher than those in regular programmes but lower than those in elite international schools. Thai parents view English language skills as cultural capital and a tool towards social and economic mobility for their children. English medium education is therefore a type of commodity in which parents invest for the future of their children. The private education sector responds to this demand and is an active actor in spreading English medium education in Thailand. Almost all international schools in Thailand are private, and the majority of English programmes are offered by Thai private schools. The market is segmented, ranging from the highest fees in international schools to the English programmes, bilingual programmes and mini bilingual programmes offered in Thai schools. The commodification and marketization of English medium education in Thailand is responsible for hierarchies of programmes, schools and teaching staff, as shown in Tables 2 and 3.

The data in Tables 2 and 3 are derived from an interview with Patara, a director who had overseen ten different English programmes in a large chain of Thai private schools in the Bangkok Metropolitan Area. Table 2 demonstrates that among the different options, programmes with more hours of English medium education cost more. In addition, students who pay higher fees are taught by NES teachers, while those who pay lower fees are taught by Filipino teachers or a combination of Filipino and Western teachers. For the most expensive programme, the International English Programme, content teachers are from the West, while homeroom teachers and teaching assistants are from the Philippines. The design of the programmes places teachers from the West at the top of the hierarchy, as they are hired as content area teachers. Non-native English teachers, such as the Filipinos and the Thais, rank second and third, respectively, as they play supporting roles in the classroom. Parents and students are viewed as ‘customers’, as demonstrated by their willingness to avail themselves of ‘packages’ that suit their preferences and budgets.

TABLE 2  
Types of Programmes Offered by a Large Chain of Thai Private Schools in Thailand (as of AY 2017–18)

Type of Programme	Features	Content Areas	Cost Per Year (baht)
Option 1: International English Programme (IEP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• All classes are conducted in English.</li><li>• Content area teachers are from the West.</li><li>• Homeroom teachers and teaching assistants (TAs) are from the Philippines.</li></ul>	<p>Taught in English:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mathematics</li><li>• Science</li><li>• Social Studies</li><li>• English Language</li><li>• Health Education</li><li>• Reading and Writing</li><li>• Physical Education (PE)</li><li>• Computer Studies</li><li>• Language Programme: Phonetics/Phonics</li><li>• Foreign Language (Chinese/Japanese)</li></ul> <p>Taught in Thai:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Thai History</li><li>• Thai Language</li></ul>	120,000 (excluding books and uniform)
Option 2: Bilingual Programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Half of the classes are conducted in English while the other half are conducted in Thai.</li><li>• Content area teachers are from the Philippines or the West or combined.</li><li>• Homeroom teachers and teaching assistants (TAs) are from Thailand.</li></ul>	<p>Taught in English:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Social Studies</li><li>• Reading and Writing</li><li>• PE</li><li>• Computer Studies</li><li>• Language Programme: Phonetics/Phonics</li><li>• Foreign Language (Chinese/Japanese)</li><li>• Mathematics*</li><li>• Science*</li><li>• English Language*</li><li>• Health Education*</li></ul> <p>Taught in Thai:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Thai History</li><li>• Thai Language</li></ul>	65,500 (excluding books and uniform)

*Note:* \* Taught by either a Western or Filipino teacher but assisted by a Thai teacher who translates the lesson.  
*Source:* K. Pattara, personal communication, 28 August 2015.

**TABLE 3**  
**General Classification of Teachers in Thai Private Basic Education Schools**

<i>Tier</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Entry Rate Monthly Salary (baht)</i>
1	United Kingdom, United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand	35,000 (native English speakers/NES)
2	South Africa and Poland	35,000 (non-native English-speaking/NNES Caucasians)
3	China and Japan	25,000 (mainly for Chinese and Japanese language courses)
4	The Philippines	17,000–18,000 (common courses, e.g., Science, PE, Social Studies) 20,000–25,000 (specialist courses, e.g., Music, Higher Maths, Physics)
5	Thailand	13,000–15,000 (for college graduates from Thai universities) 20,000 (with BA from universities abroad) 25,000 (with MA from Thai universities) 30,000 (with MA from universities abroad)

Students’ access to English language learning is generally determined by how much their parents are willing to pay.

Table 3 shows that the various tiers of foreign teachers are mainly based on one’s race and nationality, with a preference for English native speakers and Caucasians. Evidently, for teachers in tiers 1 and 2, the most basic entry requirement is simply to originate from the West. Filipino teachers are further classified based on courses taught, while Thai teachers, found at the bottom rung, are compensated based not only on their educational background but also on whether they have acquired their degrees locally or internationally. The four classifications alone speak obtrusively of a hiring policy that puts a premium on a qualification that is ‘imported’ into the country. A common rationalization for promoting the tiers of teachers in Table 3, which thus directly results in a disparity of both occupational compensation and workplace management among educators, is the preference for ‘original and non-accented’ use of English.



## Recruitment and Employment Protocols

A look at the job posts in various social media sites and job portals for teachers provides proof of inequitable and discriminatory recruitment practices, which the teacher-informants said all contribute to similar, if not the same, practices as observed in the workplace. Job adverts typically state the following: “Only for NES/NS” and “No Asians/Filipinos allowed”.

Table 4 shows a one-week summary of online job postings for teaching staff to teach in English. In the second week of May 2015, 70 per cent of the employers that posted adverts sought only native English-speaking teachers from the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and New Zealand. Meanwhile, for the sole vacancy that entertained Filipino applicants, the salary was much lower. Other schools that specified a preference for Filipino applicants capped their salaries at an average entry rate of a mere 15,000 baht per month, with an additional 3,000 baht monthly housing allowance. NES applicants were offered 30,000 to 45,000 baht monthly. Interview data revealed similar findings: Filipinos would start at 15,000 baht per month as opposed to 35,000 for NES and Caucasian/European nationals, with the exception of Filipino teachers who received 20,000 to 25,000 baht per month to cover housing costs in cases where the school did not provide any accommodation.

As the data in this study indicate, this is almost always the case of current recruitment, hiring and employment practices in the Thai labour market within the English teaching sector’s basic education level. And although the job advertisements surveyed by this study in 2015 and 2017 did not literally specify phenotypical markers—such as skin colour, eye colour, bodily and facial features—as employment requirements, the majority of the employers nevertheless cited a preference for specific nationalities and for native English speakers. Part of the explicit hiring preferences are the two often-mentioned and emphasized basic qualifications, namely, (1) nationality—such as British, American, Australian, New Zealander, and Canadian—and

TABLE 4  
A One-Week Summary of Online Job Postings for Teachers, 10–16 May 2015

FT	PT	Nationality	Age	Qualifications	Monthly Salary (baht)	Others
✓		Filipino	22–40	Bachelor's with teaching experience	20,000	Free visa/ accommodation
✓		–	–	Bachelor's with teaching experience	15,000–16,000	–
✓		NES (US, UK, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Ireland, South Africa)	–	With right qualifications	35,000–37,000	–
✓		NES (all girls high school)	–	BA/TEFL, CELTA, TESOL with experience	40,000	–
✓		NES (all girls high school)	–	BA/TEFL, CELTA, TESOL with experience	35,000	–
✓		English teacher (All girls high school) No Filipinos	–	Non-NS (But no Filipinos please!)	35,000	–
✓		NS only	–	BA/CELTA/TESOL	40,000	With visa, WP
✓		–	–	With experience/CELTA/TESOL/BA	30,000–33,000	
✓		–	–	–	40,000	–
✓		–	–	Qualifications	30,000	–
✓		NS (British, American, New Zealander, Australian, Canadian priority)	–	–	30,000	–
✓		South African/ European may be considered if qualified	58 or under	–	30,000	–
✓		NS	–	BA	33,000	–
✓		NS	–	TEFL	40,000	–
✓		NS	–	Teaching certificate with experience	400/hour	–
✓		NNS/NS/near native	–	–	30,000–32,000	–

Source: [http://www.ajarn.com/recruitment/browse\\_jobs/](http://www.ajarn.com/recruitment/browse_jobs/).

(2) native-speaker status that is attributed to the above-mentioned nationalities.

Employment preferences and hierarchies in the workplace among teachers of different racial, nationality and linguistic profiles in ELT are not unique to Thailand. A white teacher in a study by Bright and Phan (2011, p. 129) revealed how Filipino teachers in Vietnam were valued less by the market and perceived by students and parents as less favourable but more affordable English language teachers:

They're second class citizens ... important second class citizens, not unimportant ... but second class citizens ... they also know that because they're in many schools, including the one I work for ... because the majority of teachers are Filipinos ... they know that their parents cannot afford to get, and I don't know enough about the Hanoi schools yet, they don't have enough ... um ... money, whatever that would be on a monthly basis ... to send them to a school where there would be all ... white teachers.

The white NES preference in ELT is prevalent in non-English-speaking Asian countries where English language education has become a popular commodity. In a study of English language teachers in Hong Kong, Trent (2016, p. 306) maintains that “[d]espite widespread acknowledgement of the contribution of nonnative English-speaking teachers to teaching English as an international language, the privileging of native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) and native-speaker competency, and concomitant marginalization of NNESTs, continues in many countries”. In a study that involves Indonesian, Vietnamese, and Thai ELT professionals with a capability to recruit foreign English-speaking teachers, Ngoc Ba Doan (2016, p. 67) reports that “discrimination against NNS teachers is still evident among NNS ELT professionals ... that local NNS professionals hold judgemental views against the teaching capability of their expatriate NNS counterparts. Such judgement may lead these teachers to being seriously disadvantaged in their competition for ELT positions in Southeast Asia”.

Given the persistence of the native/non-native English speaker dichotomy and its colonial roots, we maintain that the discrimination

against NNES teachers is not unique to the Thai context. In the following section, we will scrutinize less obvious forms of discrimination that Filipino English language teachers in Thailand experience: gendered and racialized discrimination that operates at the microscale of the body and which is underpinned by a colonial notion of beauty.

### Because They Look Asian, Just Like Us: Filipino Teachers' Lack of Colonial Aesthetics

Pattara, a Thai director of English programmes in a large Thai private school chain, admitted that Filipino teachers are paid only half of what native English-speaking (NES) teachers make. She explains that this policy is determined by the market mechanism and customers' preference for native speakers. She points out that this preference is aesthetic rather than based on the quality of teaching and the outcome of education. She highlights the association of English with the West, modernity and development in the eyes of Thais.

But even if they [Filipino teachers] speak very well, they will not get the same salary because in Thailand ... the Thais still prefer native speakers.... Because I am Thai, too, I don't want to say [this], but many Thais don't have the knowledge.... They have stereotypes ... *farangs* are better than Asians because English is not the Thais' language. They believe that Filipinos have English as a second language and so it is better to have experience with native speakers.

... Only [that] the Thai parents think that they pay expensive [tuition] for their children to learn with native speakers.... Because [the] Thais think ... to speak English ... it should be with native speakers. But as educators we know the different abilities between Filipinos and [other] foreign [teachers] who just have a general degree.... So we can see the difference, the style and outcome of students' knowledge.... So any school gets to know that Filipinos are good, except for [their] accent and [that they] look Asian. It is a very Thai thinking. In Thailand, we are a developing country so they think that to go abroad in the West looks good. They see beautiful environment, nice buildings. They see [that] they have a better economy. It is nice to live

there. Because of this, they think that the Westerners are better than Asians. (Pattara, personal communication, 28 August 2015)

This narrative demonstrates the Thai imaginary towards the West. The presence of a *farang* (Western, Caucasian) teacher in a school carries a twofold signification. First, the school constructs itself as a venue where everyone—administrators, staff, students, and even parents—can experience the West through their literal physical proximity to Western teachers. Second, by hiring *farang*, the schools help facilitate Thai people's fulfilment of their Western-inspired aspirations by virtue of being taught by white teachers in the classroom. Being 'Asian just like us', Filipino teachers do not embody colonial aesthetics and, therefore, do not fulfil the Thai aspiration for proximity to the West.

### Teaching in English: Race, Gender and the Body

This section focuses on subtle discrimination operated at the microscale of the body in the form of bodily regulations required by the management. Filipino teachers in Thailand report that they experience micro-discrimination in the workplace because they are deemed less 'beautiful' than their white NES colleagues. In attempts by administrators to present their schools as attractive to Thai customers, Filipino teachers are subject to more bodily regulations than their white NES counterparts.

Maya was an *anuban* (kindergarten) teacher in a private school when she was interviewed for this study. The experience she recounted during the interview took place when she was teaching in a bilingual programme. She recalled how some Thai parents, during her conversations with them, had openly expressed to her their fondness for the white teachers over Filipino teachers simply because of their conception of how *suwai* (beautiful) or *narak* (cute) the *farang* teachers looked.

So, you see, this is what I was told by one of the parents. 'Teacher ka ... Philippine teachers and *farang* teachers, they're different, no? Because you see, *farang* they look *suwai-suwai*. The children

like them ... how they look.... They're *narak* na...'. (Maya, personal communication, 23 September 2017)

Juan, 39 years old, recounted that he and his colleagues were once told that Filipino teachers should wear school uniforms—while “*farangs* need not to because they *look good*, anyway, whatever their clothes are”. A female Filipino teacher who taught in a kindergarten had been told by the school administrator to put on make-up and dress nicely. Several other ethnographic observations noted during this study include the experience of a Filipino teacher in her fifties who was often criticized for wearing clothes that made her ‘look old’. She was thus occasionally advised to ‘update’ her clothing, whereas teachers from the West could generally wear any kind of clothing they wished when teaching.

Peter was a 32-year-old graduate from an American-founded teaching school in Manila, the capital of the Philippines. He first came to Thailand in 2009. At one point he was out of work for seven months. He had a difficult time finding a teaching job since most schools he applied to either preferred female teachers or wanted someone who looked ‘slim’.

And you know what ... this is what I was told by one of the Thai staff: “No fat, overweight applicants.” She asked me what my BMI was ... my body mass index, and then said: “Oh ... so you’re fat...” and then I got rejected. The interview was done on the phone.... They saw [from my CV] my weight. They said my weight did not match my height. They commented I wasn’t healthy. (Peter, personal communication, 29 August 2015)

In one conversation, the first author learned from a recruitment officer of a private school’s human resources unit that one teacher’s application would not be further entertained because of a reasoning related to Peter’s experience. The author learned about this discussion because she was the one who had forwarded the teacher’s (Arnold’s) application. When she followed up on the application, she was told the following:

TEACHER: Any news about the application sent in by Arnold?  
RECRUITMENT OFFICER: Oh, Arnold? No, we will not push through with it. We're not hiring him. He is too fat. Boss does not like him. You see, he is ... you know ... Boss says he is not really *narak*. The students will most likely laugh at his size. Boss wants someone who, at least, tries to make himself/herself look good. Presentable enough...

Evidently, the decisions not to hire Peter or Arnold were not based on their teaching skills but rather on aesthetic reasons. As Pattara claimed, it was an action that was suggestive of the Filipinos' 'being Asian' as opposed to the whiteness of the *farangs*. Lacking the aesthetic capital that whiteness harbours, Filipino teachers' bodies are subject to bodily regulations and monitoring. While *farang* embody whiteness that signifies beauty, progress and wealth, Filipino teachers are 'Asian just like us' and therefore do not enjoy the privilege bestowed on someone from the West.

While teaching in general is considered women's work, our study reveals that for English language education in Thailand, Filipino and white NES teachers are not equally subject to the expectation to embody feminine traits deemed appropriate for teachers. The majority of Western educators in Thailand are male, while the population of Filipino teachers in Thailand is predominantly female (see Table 4). This is partly because Western migrants in Thailand are predominantly male (Kwanchanok and Sirijit 2016; Howard 2009).

As shown in earlier sections, job advertisements for English speaking teachers in Thailand explicitly prefer NES applicants. Filipino applicants are offered much lower wages and, should employers entertain Filipino applicants, additional requirements for personal and physical attributes are often put in place, such that applicants should 'have a pleasing personality', 'be patient', and 'be considerate', among others. And while possession of either feminine traits or an aesthetic ideal is much desired among Filipino teacher-applicants, the same is not generally demanded of Western nationals.

The gendering or feminization of the teaching profession is another point essential to this discussion, as experienced by many

of the informants in the study. The experience of Joy and Jessie, for example—both 30 years old, each with one child, and who taught in kindergarten in the same private school on the outskirts of Bangkok—confirm this. They shared that in their school, no male teacher was allowed to teach kindergarten pupils, citing the school's preference for those with a 'motherly touch' and 'soft skills'. At some point Joy mentioned that, although not officially put into writing, it could be the school's way to deter potential sexual harassment issues.

Maybe because when you're a kindergarten teacher, you need to hug ... to cuddle and be physically close to small children. I once requested to be transferred to the secondary level, but I wasn't allowed to leave kindergarten. They said [it's difficult to find] a teacher [to replace me because one] who has a stern face can't teach younger kids. (Joy, personal communication, 16 August 2015)

The same was true with Mrs Anushika, an Indian national, who had been managing her own private international kindergarten school in Bangkok for fifteen years at the time of the interview.

I only hire female Filipino teachers in my school because kindergarten teachers need to be caring and compassionate. Women are naturally like that. They are delicate in handling the children. A male [teacher] might hold the child awkwardly ... he might not be able to handle them well ... women are more compassionate, more tolerant.... (Mrs Anushika, personal communication, 10 August 2015)

Although male, Migs could attest to the feminization of the teaching profession as well. At the time of the interview, Migs had been in Thailand for thirteen years. He recalled how he was often asked to teach younger students in the kindergarten and lower grade levels. What he said during the interview corroborated the findings above.

I was told that they [coordinators] like me to teach kindergarten and lower grade students because they find me gentle, even if I'm a man. That I seem to be fond of children and that I look friendly and approachable.... Maybe it's because they need someone who can play, be friendly and patient with the children...? ha ha ha That's me! (Migs, personal communication, 15 July 2015)



While other issues during the interviews with the informants on the gendering and feminization of the teaching profession were noted—such as the practice of school administrators assigning male teachers (or female teachers with qualities associated with men) to older children or to higher levels of schooling or grade levels—there had been no observed implications of this exercise on the salaries the foreign teachers, native speakers or otherwise, received. This applied to teachers handling various education levels, from kindergarten to elementary through high school, as both NES and NNES teachers were observed to teach practically in all levels. What this discussion aims to highlight is that most teaching vacancies meant for non-native English speakers are advertised with descriptions that feminize the teaching profession, putting emphasis on desired teacher traits such as ‘pleasant personality’ and being considerate and patient with children, thereby privileging white NES teachers/applicants by exempting them from the requirement to embody feminine traits deemed appropriate for a teacher. This privilege is reserved for white Westerners whose body and native tongue are bestowed cultural and aesthetic value in Thailand given the colonial traces in Thai social and cultural life. Despite their teaching skills and caring personalities, Filipinos and other NNES teachers do not possess the symbolic and aesthetic capital valued by the schools and parents/customers.

## Discussion and Conclusion

A growing number of skilled migrants from the Philippines fill the positions in English programmes in Thai schools and become a part of the hierarchical and marketized English language education in Thailand. Filipino teachers’ English language skills place them above Thai teachers with no foreign accreditation but below NES teachers from Western countries. Compared to NES teachers, Filipino teachers are overtly discriminated against. They are paid less, placed in less favourable housing arrangements, and assigned to supporting roles in the classroom/programme. Filipino teachers also experience covert discrimination at the microscale of the body. They are subject

to bodily regulations and monitoring and are required to embody warm, caring and pleasant personalities. Western teachers, on the other hand, are exempted from these expectations and requirements because they are deemed ‘already beautiful’, while their native English accent is highly valued.

We argue that the subordinate status of Filipino teachers compared to white NES teachers in Thailand can be explained by their lack of colonial aesthetics in the eyes of education marketers and consumers. Following Ramjattan (2015), we see teaching in the English language as a type of aesthetic labour in which looking and sounding white is expected and valued. At the same time, teaching in general is considered a kind of bodily work in which caring, empathy and pleasant personalities are desirable qualities of a worker. Filipino teachers are required to embody these feminine traits, but white teachers, deemed ‘already beautiful’, are exempted from the requirement. Conceptualizing whiteness and beauty in the context of Indonesia, Saraswati (2013) contends that the way Indonesians see beauty is politically shaped by the country’s history of cultural domination and colonialism. The same can be said in semi-/crypto-colonial Thailand, where the charismatic allure of whiteness stems from the association of the West with status, power, modernity and progress.

Scholars who study postcolonialism in the Thai context contend that the *farang* embody “the allure of the West as a charismatic and appealing cultural site, worthy of imitation” (Harrison 2010, p. 3). In this study, the presence of a *farang* teacher in a Thai school carries a twofold signification. First, the school constructs itself as a venue where everyone—administrators, staff, students and even parents—can experience the West through their literal physical proximity with Western teachers. Second, by hiring *farangs*, the schools help facilitate the Thai people’s fulfilment of their Western-inspired aspirations by virtue of being taught by white teachers in the classroom. Chakrabarty (2010, p. ix) elucidates the special place of *farang* in the Thai imaginary by declaring that

the very imagination of modernity and modern institutions in Thailand was over-determined by a certain cultural dominance of Europe. The figure of the *farang*, the European or white person, a person with a complex and pan-Asian genealogy, also haunted the politics of being modern in Thailand in the same way as it did in India. It was as though the *farang*, more than the Indian or the Burmese or the Malay or the Chinese or the Cambodian or the Lao, was *the* Other against whom the modern person in Thailand defined or measured himself or herself.

On a similar note, Pattana Kitiarsa (2010) asserts,

Objects labelled as *farang* often indicate not only their foreign origin and character but also the allure of *farang*-ness, which signifies some superior qualities compared to indigenous Thai counterparts. In the Thai context, *farang* is often a cultural signifier of cosmopolitanism.... (p. 61).

Being ‘Asians just like us’, Filipino teachers lack the colonial aesthetics, leading to their experience of discrimination in English language education in Thai schools. The identification of the main causes behind the inequitable occupational protocols in the employment practices of Thai schools can help address the need to diminish, if not eliminate, the observed polarities. Such an egalitarian move may empower not only deserving and equally able Filipino teachers but also other NNES teachers who, like Filipino migrant workers, are left on the sidelines because of biased and discriminatory occupational policies. Ultimately, this study contributes to the rich literature on the migratory experience of Filipinos across the globe in the hopes that relevant and appropriate measures on this issue may be formulated and employed by all stakeholders, especially policymakers, if only to protect the rights of the workers. Rather than letting the market rule, both the sending and receiving states should develop regulations that minimize the employment discrimination Filipino teachers in Thailand face. Several of the Philippine and Thai government leaders’ initiatives to develop a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the two countries for the hiring of Filipino teachers to work in Thailand need to be followed up and

realized. The formalization of government-to-government agreements for labour migration would be a promising first step to take.

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