

Asian American Racialization & Model Minority Logics in Linguistics

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With increased discussions of racial justice in academia, linguistics has had to contend with long-standing issues of inequality. We contribute to these conversations by considering historical and contemporary racializing tactics with respect to Asians and Asian Americans. Such racializing tactics, which we call model minority logics, weaponize an abstract version of one group to further racialize all minoritized groups and regiment ethnoracial hierarchies. We identify three functions of model minority logics that perpetuate white supremacy in the academy, using linguistics as a case study and underscoring the ways in which the discipline is already mired in racializing logics that differentiate scholars of color based on reified hierarchies. We urge language scholars to reject a superficial multiculturalism that appropriates embodied difference while perpetuating injustices under an inherently white supremacist framework. For those dedicated to greater racial justice in the discipline, we offer actions to critically reflect on and help dismantle existing racializing logics.

Despite popular understandings of the so-called model minority as a simple set of stereotypes, scholarship in Asian American studies has shown that the invocation of Asians as a model minority functions as a relationally racializing tactic that reinforces white supremacy on multiple scales.¹ Asian Americans have historically been racialized relative to the imagined Black-white racial dichotomy in the United States; thus, their treatment as a model minority reifies ideologized racial hierarchies and obfuscates the ways that racialization processes are mutually constitutive of one another.² Following scholars who conceptualize the model minority as an inherently relational concept, we use the term *model minority logics*, a decision that both rejects the flattening of racialization to a series of stereotypes and refuses the strategic positioning of Asians for the furthering of white supremacy. By model minority logics, we mean the racializing tactics whereby the model minority – an abstraction of minoritized groups whose relationship with the nation-state becomes historically resignified – is weaponized to further racialize all minoritized groups and regiment ethnoracial hierarchies.

Model minority logics are laid bare when institutions of higher education leave the work of racial equity to minoritized individuals under a framework of “inclusion,” uncritically defined. In the study of language, this tactic obscures the material and psychological ways that racialization pervades our places of work and training by reinforcing the quotidian mechanisms of white supremacy. For the purposes of our discussion, we focus on three functions of model minority logics as they relate to the racialization of Asian Americans in linguistics. First, model minority logics position Asian Americans as socially proximal to whites.³ Second, they strategically weaponize the racial visibility of Asian Americans and other minoritized groups by contrasting these groups’ respective historical and contemporary struggles for social equality as discrete and disconnected. Finally, they define inclusion in extremely narrow terms: namely, through numerical counting and neoliberal academic success.⁴ In defining these functions, we underscore not only the implications for how Asian American linguistic practices are studied (or not), but also the sociopolitical stakes of eschewing a superficial multiculturalism whereby “justice” is always conditional and relegated to a distant future.

In linguistics, minoritized language varieties and the people who use them are frequently argued to be “included” if they merely appear in a syllabus, a course catalog, or a research project.⁵ Sociolinguistic research, in particular, has tended to rely on distinctiveness-centered models whereby language varieties are ascribed to specific and discrete groups of people.⁶ Yet this process is itself driven by a specific linguistic ideology, one that often conflates nonhegemonic language varieties with racial visibility. The result is that the linguistic practices of groups perceived to lack a distinct “ethnolect,” including Asian Americans, remain undertheorized. Indeed, Asian American language use has received little attention from linguists; furthermore, the theorization of racial and ethnic varieties of English in the United States – specifically, what counts as legitimate language – is in need of radical reconsideration.⁷ After all, the assumption that a particular group must use a corresponding variety effectively homogenizes racialized groups and often obscures the way people actually use language. An examination of the historical and contemporary racialization of Asian Americans thus reveals how their perceived language use – and the study thereof – continues to be animated by hegemonic ideologies that reify a white listening subject and hence reinforce white supremacist frameworks that racialize groups unevenly.⁸

We begin by offering some contextualization for our collective musings that inspired and informed this essay. In January 2021, the Annual Meeting of the Linguistic Society of America (LSA), the largest and perhaps most important academic conference for linguists, featured the most programming by Asian and Asian American linguists in its history, including some of the first panels on interdisciplinary approaches to studying Asian and Asian American linguistic practices. Although the meeting was virtual, it had originally been scheduled to take place

in San Francisco, a city of historical significance to Asian migration to the United States and the birthplace of the nation's first school of ethnic studies.⁹ Among our various panels, we organized a special session entitled "Room at the Table: Locating Asian Identity in Linguistics and the LSA," featuring crossdisciplinary and intergenerational scholarship.

This session was long overdue, like other perpetually late discussions of racial justice in linguistics.¹⁰ Our collaboration was motivated by the need to continue critical conversations surrounding race as a social reality that affects our lives within and beyond academia. Prior to the session, there were few, if any, spaces for us to openly discuss our racializing experiences as Asian American linguists. Especially given the exigencies of global events unfolding in 2020 and 2021, events that led to increased threats and violence against Asian Americans, we craved community and solidarity, not only to share the latest research, but to have sustained conversations about Asian American linguists' racial positioning within our field. We wanted Room at the Table to lay the groundwork for a scholarly coalition of Asian American linguists within and beyond the LSA.

Ultimately, the session unearthed more questions than answers, as well as disagreements among participants. Who, exactly, is included in "Asian America"? Within linguistics, why is racial inclusion seen as primarily an issue for sociolinguists, and doubly so for sociolinguists of color, and why do some linguists push back against issues of social justice as "not linguistics"? In the months that followed, we held introspective critiques and discussions about our event. Crucially, we asked, what forms of belonging were we invoking when calling for "room at the table"? Did the session take a step toward dismantling dominant tropes that racialize, and thus harm, Asian Americans, or did it merely perpetuate them by creating another siloed space for marginalized scholars? Notably, the metrics for racial diversity used by the LSA in 2021 collapse important differences among Asian groups: Asian and Pacific Islander members are considered one large demographic category, with no accounting for the axes of difference of nationality and ethnicity, let alone disability, gender, sexuality, and class. Besides the shortcomings of this kind of ethnoracial classification, the Linguistic Society of America neglected to amplify our numerous programs, including those entities within the organization explicitly dedicated to uplifting minoritized scholars and their work. For us, the unresolved questions on Asian racialized experiences in linguistics that emerged from our Room at the Table session revealed how we are racialized as "the model minority" and at times erased altogether in the discipline.

Amid our conversations, we witnessed and grieved tremendous violence and loss, including assaults on Asian people in the United States and globally in the wake of COVID-19 and the racialized and gendered violence of the March 2021 shooting in Atlanta, Georgia.¹¹ These episodes of violence reverberated in our communities, and we incurred additional violence through institutional and in-

terpersonal silences regarding them, which forced us to reckon with the (de)valuation of our work and our very selves within our own discipline. Thus, we write with deep skepticism toward the dominant models of inclusion in the neoliberal academy, which have repeatedly failed us, and we assert the urgency of theorizing Asian American racialization in the midst of both spectacular and everyday violences.

We also write as Asian Americans, a label we acknowledge as fraught and in need of constant problematizing. Our decision to use this term here is both an insistence on its historical signification of political unity and a refusal to foreground our ethnic or other affiliations, lest we reproduce ahistorical understandings of racialized groups and unduly personalize our critiques of the discipline.¹² Furthermore, while our ethnic identities and the histories they represent are importantly diverse, these cannot be known *a priori* by readers. Given the long-standing disregard for the histories of minoritized peoples in the United States, coupled with the pervasiveness of hegemonic ideologies about Asians in the academy, we cannot assume readers will take stock of each author's multiple positionalities, the histories they index, and these histories' varied, fraught, and ongoing relationships to U.S. empire. Scholars of Asian American studies have critiqued not only the shifting historical terms of inclusion but also the obfuscation of violence by way of that very same inclusion. Put differently, inclusion of some Asian Americans becomes a proxy for other forms of exclusion, both of Asian Americans and of other minoritized subjects.¹³

We thus present this essay as a holistic product of conversations, not of individually produced parts. In the sections that follow, we detail the historical formation of the model minority trope, discuss its pervasiveness in the study of language, and provide some productive paths toward disentangling our discipline from dominant frameworks that continue to racialize and marginalize us.

Asian Americans' marginal and conditional existence in the United States has been shaped by the cyclical and interdependent reinventions of yellow peril and model minority discourses. With historical origins tracing back to centuries-old Orientalist imaginaries, yellow peril discourse emerges from a violent nineteenth-century white populist backlash against Asian migrant laborers throughout the Americas and projects a racialized Asian figure that is diseased, treacherous, and perpetually foreign.¹⁴ The creation of this threatening yellow body laid the foundations for modern U.S. citizenship and immigration laws and this figure was further repurposed for the circulation of American military propaganda, which helped justify the mass incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II.¹⁵ Having emerged from the world wars as a definitive global superpower, the United States emboldened its imperial campaign throughout Asia and the Pacific while declaring a cold war against communist states. Along

with this new American self-image as a global savior and perpetuator of free and liberal capitalist democracy emerged the figure of the good and passive Asian subject: the model minority.

To bolster the image of its imperial project as benevolent, the United States resignified its historical relationship to Asian subjects both domestic and abroad through a series of key legislative acts. The 1965 Hart-Celler Act abolished national origins quotas, and the Refugee Act of 1980 institutionalized refugee resettlement in the United States, leading to a mass increase in migration from across Asia.¹⁶ Importantly, the 1965 legislation systemically privileged family reunification and professional and skill-based labor, and thus previously dominant racial formations of Asians in the United States – as marginal workers, suspicious foreigners, and the like – were quickly eclipsed by new ones. The demographics of Asian America shifted in dramatic ways that appeared to validate their image in the media as self-reliant, highly educated, and apolitical. Previously antagonized as political enemies or expendable laborers, select Asian groups became the face of the ethnic minority who had “made it” within American society despite historical injustices. This discourse additionally came to be employed to dismiss and disparage civil rights protests spearheaded by Black Americans alongside their Latinx, Indigenous, and Asian allies. Yet even as these newer model minority discourses gained public traction, the specter of the yellow peril and other Orientalist tropes persisted in casting Asian Americans as perpetually foreign threats of dubious loyalty. Exclusion and vilification of entire groups have occurred repeatedly in the decades since, including acts of violence and accusations of terrorism against people racialized as being of Middle Eastern, North African, and South Asian descent following the 9/11 attacks, anti-Asian hate crimes in the wake of COVID-19, and the U.S. Department of Justice’s China Initiative, which falsely accused Chinese researchers of espionage.¹⁷

The ideological positioning of Asian Americans as “honorary whites” is based on selective and heavily skewed images of Asian American economic and educational achievements that circulate across institutional and dominant media channels. Sociologist Mia Tuan’s foundational study showed how different Asian American communities strategically articulate their identities with respect to institutional whiteness.¹⁸ Two early examples of Asians arguing for white status in U.S. legal cases – *Ozawa v. United States* and *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind* – point to the historical connections of whiteness to legal personhood, citizenship, and material advancement.¹⁹ Both *Ozawa* and *Thind* were ultimately determined to be legally nonwhite on the basis that they did not conform to whiteness as it was “popularly understood,” decisions that reveal the institutionalized discursive processes through which whiteness is made unavailable to certain bodies in order to maintain white supremacy.²⁰

In the context of contemporary higher education, model minority logics invisibilize Asian-raced bodies by approximating them with whiteness while exaggerating their racial visibility as evidence of campus diversity.²¹ The notion that students of Asian descent are sufficiently represented on college campuses often relies on the practice of problematically lumping together different ethnic groups, economic backgrounds, and national statuses when gathering demographic statistics.²² Even more egregiously, the “Asian” category in many campus climate surveys includes groups with different racialized histories and relationships to institutions of higher education, such as “Middle Eastern” (when not categorized as white), “Pacific Islander,” and “international.”²³ This aggregation results in a picture of satisfied Asian American students – alongside white students, who are consistently the most satisfied in campus climate surveys – while downplaying race-based marginalization and the need for any specialized resources. Numbers are used to account for campus climate as well as to establish eligibility for the federal designation of “Minority Serving Institution” and, hence, increased federal funding. Following the logic that numbers equate diversity, universities frequently use promotional material featuring racialized bodies.²⁴ Thus, while numbers are used to erase diversity across Asian students’ experiences by collapsing ethnic difference, a visual emphasis on embodied difference fortifies an illusion of institutional diversity and inclusion.

The racial positioning of Asians as honorary whites fuels linguistic ideologies whereby second- and later-generation Asian Americans are seen as linguistically and culturally assimilated to middle-class white norms. Moreover, racial ideologies that construct Asian Americans as model minorities who approximate whiteness are linked to language ideologies that imagine Asian Americans as necessarily speaking “Standard English” – itself an ideological construct – and lacking a racially distinct variety of English.²⁵ By the same token, Asians who speak other ethnolectal varieties are frequently seen as engaging in linguistic and cultural appropriation, if not linguistic minstrelsy.²⁶ Such linguistic processes cannot be divorced from broader processes of Asian racialization in the United States.

We frequently find evidence of such racial positioning in linguistics departments and professional organizations when Asian students are not considered “underrepresented” in professionalization activities, at departmental events, and even by granting agencies geared explicitly toward students of color. For example, a diversity workshop at an elite research university, billed as supporting underrepresented and marginalized students, identified its groups of interest as “Black, Brown, and international.” Besides the wholesale omission of Indigeneity, this language performs various types of erasure simultaneously: the disparate needs of different kinds of international students, the needs of Asian students who are not international, and the overlapping identities of some Asian students, who may also identify as Black and/or Brown. The explicit omission of Asian Amer-

ican students reproduces the erroneous notion that this group is sufficiently represented and resourced, like their white peers. Such language in antiracist efforts in our field only fuels the systemic exclusion of Asian bodies through which white supremacy maintains its hegemony.

Moreover, the treatment of Asians as honorary whites necessarily collapses the difference between Asian international and Asian American students. Despite these groups' differences and similarities (not to mention individuals who do not fit neatly into either category), national status does not prevent the racialization of Asians. Additionally, Asian Americans are frequently recruited to take part in xenophobic practices against Asian immigrants through differentiating and distancing tactics such as the creation of "fresh off the boat" stereotypes and the policing of "nonstandard" language practices, even as the racialization of Asian nationals continues to affect Asian Americans.²⁷ In higher education, Asian students are frequently characterized as bookish and overly competitive, and Asian international students in particular are represented as culturally disfluent hordes, a framing that renews yellow peril discourses of old.²⁸ Such pervasive xenophobic comments about, open suspicion of, and discomfort with Asian international students – especially, in recent years, Chinese students – shifts the blame onto students, rather than onto the decades-long project of accelerated privatization and commercialization of institutions of higher education.²⁹

From its earliest beginnings, the figure of the model minority has made and remade Asian bodies into perpetually imminent threats. As we have noted, Asian students are strategically and often intentionally rendered either hypervisible or invisible within academic institutions in order to fulfill particular white hegemonic narratives. The construction of white public spaces (such as in schools) is contingent on the processes through which non-white bodies are made invisible, yet made hypervisible when they transgress normative white expectations of belonging.³⁰ Thus, the (in)visibility of racialized Asian bodies depends on the situated context in which they are evoked. Within racializing discourses, everyday activities such as studying for a test or playing a musical instrument are constituted and denaturalized as alien or strange when carried out by Asian subjects.³¹ In performing such denaturalized activities, Asian students are then fundamentally made hypervisible as a model minority. In sum, the racialization of Asians in the United States relies on the discursive construction of exceptional figures like the model minority, whose visibility shifts based on the needs of white supremacy.

On one hand, the model minority is frequently invoked to signify a rosy portrait of American multiculturalism and class mobility, thus denying U.S. institutional culpability in systemic anti-Black racism. On the other hand, the model minority readily shifts into a threat to whiteness when Asian bodies are perceived as

too exceptional and too numerous, as exemplified in cases of suburban whites positioning their new Asian American neighbors as toxic and unwelcome, or complaints of the over-encroachment of Asian bodies on college campuses.³² Tenuous yet evocative, the figure of the model minority exemplifies how perceived racial visibility in academic spaces becomes a powerful and quantifiable device for institutional actors to reaffirm a white supremacist hierarchy, in particular through the essentialist logics of affirmative action and diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. One of the ways racial visibility is weaponized is through the tokenization of Asian faculty, who, like other faculty of color, are often given a heavier burden to serve, mentor, educate, and succeed compared with their white colleagues. Faculty of color who experience tokenism tend to respond to their situations using various strategies of (in)visibility, including socially withdrawing from their colleagues in order to cope with negative environments, working harder to counter their experiences of exclusion, and disengaging completely from their research.³³ Moreover, tokenized professors, especially women of color, may feel a disproportionate amount of responsibility and substantial social pressure to serve as *de facto* role models for students of color, an unspoken labor that is rarely included in job descriptions and seldom contributes to one's tenure and promotion portfolio.³⁴

Meanwhile, Asian and Asian American graduate students in linguistics are frequently rendered hypervisible when recruited to participate in extractive research that continues a long history of colonial linguistic projects: this is the double-edged sword of belonging to a minoritized community.³⁵ For example, it is not uncommon for non-Asian mentors and faculty to advise their Asian and Asian American graduate students to study a particular language or linguistic phenomenon based on their perceived ethnolinguistic connection to the language community. In these cases, the junior scholar's actual field of study, research interests, and ethnic background are neglected in the face of their advisor's agenda. Crucially, instances in which Asian Americans are invisibilized, hypervisibilized, or tokenized due to their racial background are never simply isolated interpersonal conflicts, but a fundamental part of the construction of broader racial hierarchies in the United States. More than just regrettable incidents of individual stereotyping, these microaggressions contribute to a framework of systemic and strategic structural exclusion that began centuries ago and continues today.

The weaponized positioning of Asian students' bodies in the mainstream media additionally attests to the model minority logics already at play in higher education. That is to say, the ideological perception of Asian Americans as the model minority precedes any one discursive event in which it is reproduced and made communicable. These discourses are then institutionally privileged and amplified by school boards, educational authorities, and media outlets, as notably demonstrated by the ongoing national controversy over affirmative action.³⁶ Within mainstream discourses, Asian Americans are essentialized and predeter-

mined as model students while their own voices and perspectives are simultaneously silenced and erased.³⁷ Hence, the media portrayal of a highly selective group of Asian Americans becomes a proxy for all Asians' positionality in the academy. This ideological work flattens inter- and intragroup differences among Asians, and also pits Asian Americans against other minoritized subjects.³⁸ If whiteness is the standard for inclusion in the academy, and its ideological counterpart, Blackness, a signifier of exclusion in the academy, Asian American experiences of racialization demonstrate that inclusion is often fraught and conditional.

Moreover, racialized perceptions about Asian Americans refract onto ideologies about Asian American language use and linguistic practice in general. Fundamentally, contemporary conceptualizations of race and language in the United States come from a dynamic process of conaturalization that regiments social formations and maintains white supremacy.³⁹ The overdetermination of racial visibility in and through language accordingly relies on entrenched racial formations, recognizable and typified in figures such as the perpetual foreigner or the model minority. These seemingly conflicting forms of racialization of Asian Americans underscore an unsettling raciolinguistic tension: that Asian Americans are treated in some instances as non-English-speaking foreigners and in others as "linguistically white," inauthentic, or deficient speakers of Asian languages, especially when measured against "real" native speakers.⁴⁰ In essence, raciolinguistic ideologies about Asian Americans as speakers of accented or "broken" English, Yellow English, or of only Asian languages draw substantially from the social positioning of Asian Americans as perpetual foreigners.⁴¹ At the same time, perceptions about Asian Americans as assimilated speakers of "standard" American English depend on the racialized image of Asian Americans as honorary whites. The linguistic practices of Asian Americans are simultaneously perceived as sufficient yet deficient, authentic yet inauthentic.

These paradoxes not only reveal the discrepancies within essentialist logics of language and race, but also point to the partiality and subjectivity through which raciolinguistic ideologies emerge and are strategically employed across social contexts. Within the discipline, such tensions shape the way Asian American language is studied while the weaponization of (in)visible language behavior in the project of racialization has ramifications in the broader context of academia as well. The linguistics of Asian America is consequently a necessary locus for a critical examination of race and racialization, including interrogating the overdetermination of already racialized embodied markers and other ostensibly visible cues.

Finally, model minority logics depend on, and in turn reify, a narrow version of inclusion that relies on numerical representation and neoliberal valuation. As argued above, Asians are linked to whiteness through their relatively large numbers on some campuses, a form of representation that is legible to uni-

versities through the terms of institutional diversity and inclusion.⁴² However, as we have also discussed, the accounting and aggregating of bodies is a mechanism by which Asian bodies are invisibilized. As scholars of critical race studies, ethnic studies, and cultural studies have noted, pushing for numerical diversity reflects the liberal multiculturalism of higher education, not the radical forms of diversity and challenges to hegemonic epistemologies championed by student movements of the 1960s and 1970s.⁴³ By treating greater numbers as the ultimate goal of inclusion, institutions flatten the differences between historically marginalized groups and mask intragroup needs.⁴⁴ When the term *minority* loses its valence as a signifier of ethnoracial political coalitions and becomes solely about enumeration, inclusion can be wielded to increase diversity for diversity's sake, but not to address systems of racial injury. Under this definition of *minority*, institutions and individuals alike celebrate Asians as part of a shallow neoliberal multiculturalism while denying the need to support them institutionally.⁴⁵ Some examples include decontextualized exhibitions of Asian scholars' research or highlighting the presence of Asian bodies in universities' advertising materials. Such practices have been found to position the minoritized group outside of the national collectivity and to hail multiculturalism as a consumable good while ignoring the racism that undergirds it.⁴⁶

Another related and equally narrow understanding of inclusion enabled by model minority logics involves neoliberal advancement in the form of (some) Asian American economic and academic successes, which are not the same as social equality.⁴⁷ In the context of higher education, high Asian American student enrollment numbers do not amount to greater feelings of belonging or fewer instances of racial injustice on college campuses.⁴⁸ In fact, the very trope of the model minority and its insistence on economically informed academic success has been shown to take a psychological toll on Asian American students and scholars by setting up racialized behavioral expectations while minimizing the everyday traumas inflicted upon them.⁴⁹ This reality affects how Asian Americans are treated in the classroom, as well as the kinds of teaching, research, and leadership opportunities for which they are considered. When we, the authors, have advocated for more resources and greater institutional support as Asian Americans, for instance, we have been told to be more humble and accommodating in the face of authority and hierarchy. We have also frequently been pressured to align ourselves along a single aspect of our identities (such as being a woman or being queer) at the cost of erasing our Asian identification.

In sum, linguistics maintains a façade of inclusion through the presence and labor of Asian American students and faculty, and through research practices that tokenize and essentialize them, as discussed earlier. However, the discipline has neither addressed the roots of ethnoracial exclusivity nor provided sufficient avenues of recourse for ongoing experiences of racism or institutional disenfranchisement. Displays of our talents and of the products of our labor do not solve

racism or dismantle white supremacy, but perpetuate a logic that claims that we are and will continue to be satisfied with simply being mentioned and in the room rather than by a genuine and sustained pursuit of justice and equality.

We have discussed how Asians in the United States have been rendered malleable within historical and contemporary racial formations, giving rise to model minority logics, which position Asian Americans strategically for the furthering of white supremacy and the oppression of people of color. Furthermore, we identified model minority logics as an essential racializing project for the maintenance of institutional norms. Within linguistics and the academy writ large, model minority logics ideologically position Asians in proximity to whiteness, weaponize the racial visibility of Asian-raced peoples for institutional gain, and advance narrow, uncritical definitions of inclusion. Having highlighted the ways that model minority logics have detrimental effects on Asian American linguists, we now offer some pathways to begin to disrupt these processes of racialization at the departmental and institutional levels.

First, the undertheorization of race in linguistics has left a theoretical void for understanding how language shapes and racializes Asians and Asian Americans and their communicative practices. Given its intimate links to Western colonial histories of studying the “other,” linguistics must be in meaningful conversation with scholarship on race and racism in critical race and ethnic studies and adjacent disciplines. However, we caution against simplistic appropriations of insights from studies of race into contemporary linguistics, which remains conspicuously white, U.S.-centric, and colonial. Despite sustained moves within the social sciences toward reflexive and decolonizing practices, linguistics has been slow to equip itself with the necessary tools to engage with its own complicity in histories of racism and colonialism. This failure is particularly egregious given that linguistics departments across the United States may recruit minoritized students, who are then confronted with largely inequitable conditions in academic and intellectual spaces.⁵⁰ Thus, we urge faculty to work actively and collaboratively with minoritized scholars – especially prospective and currently enrolled students – to reshape the very infrastructure of academic programs that continue to exclude and marginalize them. This work should always be done with equitable compensation. We call for continued reflexivity in the field and for a foregrounding of the whole scholar, which includes a sociopolitical interrogation of the purpose of linguistics research. Despite such steps, the inclusion of Asian American subjectivities and epistemologies must always contend with academic institutions’ propensity to subsume radical scholarship into a colonial structure of knowledge-making that ultimately reifies white hegemony.⁵¹

As linguists invested in racial justice, we must drastically improve the recruitment and retention of Asian American linguists in a way that reflects a deep under-

standing of the diversity of Asian America. As we have noted, Asians' numerical representation is often used to promote an illusion of institutional diversity. However, since numerical diversity is not synonymous with racial equity, we advocate for an approach that interrogates this version of inclusion and seeks to use alternative frameworks. Such efforts also require a thoughtful consideration of resources and their allocation in a way that does not compete with or draw false equivalencies with other minoritized groups. Departments and professional organizations should evaluate their current metrics for racial inclusion and subsequently develop or improve outreach programs for Asian Americans with active and appropriately compensated input from past and current students. Departments may also find that their undergraduate and graduate students of color are already laboring in grassroots initiatives to improve diversity and inclusion at the departmental or university level, efforts that should also be meaningfully compensated.

In the realm of mentorship, faculty would do well to consider the ways they actively invisibilize their students of Asian descent, ignore differences among groups, and lack general understanding of Asian diasporic experiences. As we have discussed, seemingly benign actions (and inactions) from institutional agents are reinstantiations of model minority logics that continue to racialize and thus harm minoritized students. We urge individuals with institutional power to consider the direct ways they might work to make Asians legible as people of color in their realms of influence and to ensure that they receive the institutional support they need. Mentorship also entails familiarity with existing campus resources for Asian students and faculty, as well as creative measures to partner with departments and campus centers to make these available to linguists. For students in particular, the dearth of Asian mentors in linguistics may be rectified in part by acknowledging that many Asian scholars study language outside the purview of what is traditionally considered linguistics; when we expand our field's horizons and strengthen interdisciplinary and collaborative scholarship, the entire discipline benefits by creating new research possibilities and opportunities for mentorship.⁵²

Even as we continue to grapple with and critique dominant frameworks of inclusion in linguistics, we ardently reject the liberal multiculturalist model in which our very embodied presence and the knowledge we produce are co-opted under the guise of diversity: a framework of inclusion that also, in and of itself, inherently excludes. We are especially wary of the ways that institutional inclusion blandly masquerades as racial justice. Instead, we look to the political project of Asian America: at once insurgent, anticolonial, and global. We thus urge the discipline to embrace a deeply relational politics rooted in historical and comparative understandings of race that refuses the interchangeability of minoritized groups. This work will require the learning and unlearning of histories that inform how we approach the study of language. We take these enmeshed histories seriously as we continue to envision a different linguistics in the pursuit of racial justice.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ Mia Tuan, *Forever Foreigners or Honorary Whites? The Asian Ethnic Experience Today* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1998); Ellen D. Wu, *The Color of Success: Asian Americans and the Origins of the Model Minority* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2015); and erin Khuê Ninh, *Passing for Perfect: College Imposters and Other Model Minorities* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2021).
- ² Claire Jean Kim, “The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans,” *Politics & Society* 27 (1) (1999): 105–138, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032329299027001005>.
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- ⁵ In sociolinguistics, *language variety* or simply *variety* refers to differences in speech patterns, for example: dialect, register, and general style. General American English is one of many varieties of English. For more on varieties in sociolinguistics, see Braj B. Kachru, Yamuna Kachru, and Cecil L. Nelson, eds., *The Handbook of World Englishes* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 2006).
- ⁶ Richard Bauman and Charles L. Briggs, *Voices of Modernity: Language Ideologies and the Politics of Inequality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); and Elaine W. Chun and Adrienne Lo, “Language and Racialization,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Linguistic Anthropology*, ed. Nancy Bonvillian (Abingdon-on-Thames, England: Routledge, 2015), 220–233.
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