

Review Article

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Race, Mobility, and the Contradictions of International Higher Education

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Abstract: This essay reviews *Parallel Societies of International Students in Australia* (Gomes, Catherine. 2021. *Parallel Societies of International Students in Australia: Connections, Disconnections, and a Global Pandemic*, 1st ed. United Kingdom: Routledge), *International Students at US Community Colleges* (Malveaux, Gregory F., and Krishna Bista, eds. 2021. *International Students at US Community Colleges Opportunities, Challenges, and Successes*. London: Routledge), and *International Students from Asia in Canadian Universities* (Kim, Ann H., Elizabeth Buckner, and Jean Michel Montsion, eds. 2023. *International Students from Asia in Canadian Universities : Institutional Challenges at the Intersection of Internationalization, Inclusion, and Racialization*. 1st ed. New York: Routledge). Collectively, the books elucidate the social and institutional conditions that govern the experiences and coping strategies of international students in three popular study-abroad destination countries: the United States, Canada, and Australia. Through interdisciplinary lenses (e.g., policy analysis, critical race theory, and media ethnography), they examine the lived experiences of international students in terms of mobility, exclusion, and adaptation, highlighting the disjunctures between internationalization rhetoric and practice.

Keywords: transcultural communication; international education; education policy; international students

Book reviewed in this article:

Gomes, Catherine. *Parallel Societies of International Students in Australia: Connections, Disconnections, and a Global Pandemic*. 1st ed. United Kingdom: Routledge, 2021, 142 pp., ISBN 9780367655358.

Kim, Ann H., Elizabeth Buckner, and Jean Michel Montsion, eds. *International Students from Asia in Canadian Universities: Institutional Challenges at the*

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Intersection of Internationalization, Racialization and Inclusion. 1st ed. New York: Routledge, 2023, 296 pp., ISBN 9781032360072.

Malveaux, Gregory F., and Krishna Bista, eds. *International Students at US Community Colleges: Opportunities, Challenges, and Successes*. London: Routledge, 2021, 266 pp., ISBN 9780367640705.

The global landscape of internationalization in higher education has undergone significant changes during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. News headlines in recent years have chronicled a variety of issues impacting international students, such as economic pressure, geopolitical tensions, housing crises, and visa restrictions. For example, while international students in U.S. colleges and universities are confronted with policy uncertainty (Specia and Abi-Habib 2020), those in Australia and Canada find it difficult to find affordable housing and are bombarded with inflammatory rhetoric (Aziz 2023; Stimson 2024). Issues like these have exposed the fragility of the systems that govern student mobility and revealed deep inequities embedded in the internationalization strategies of many Western universities. In this volatile context, three books published in recent years by Routledge provide urgent and timely interventions addressing the theory and practice of international higher education.

Specifically, the three books to be reviewed are: *Parallel Societies of International Students in Australia* (Gomes 2021), *International Students at US Community Colleges* (Malveaux and Bista 2021), and *International Students from Asia in Canadian Universities* (Kim et al. 2023). Collectively, they elucidate the social and institutional conditions that govern the experiences and coping strategies of international students in three popular study-abroad destination countries: the United States, Canada, and Australia. Through interdisciplinary lenses (e.g., policy analysis, critical race theory, and media ethnography), they examine the lived experiences of international students in terms of mobility, exclusion, and adaptation, highlighting the disjunctures between internationalization rhetoric and practice.

1 The Australian Context

Beginning with the context of Australia, Gomes' monograph presents a concise and cohesive analysis of how international students construct "parallel societies" in response to marginalization. Chapter 1 of the book introduces its core conceptual framework – "parallel society," arguing that international students form affective, practical, and semi-autonomous communities – necessitated by their transient status and structural exclusion in Australia. Chapter 2 delves into how these communities are maintained through both digital and face-to-face communications. In particular, platforms such as WeChat, KakaoTalk, and Facebook have served as critical digital

spaces for students seeking advice, maintaining diasporic ties, and fostering a sense of belonging. Interactions on these platforms are typically utilitarian and transient, providing information and comfort without demanding long-term commitment.

Chapter 3 focuses on the disconnection experienced by international students from both host communities and their peers in their home countries. It underscores the emotional impact of these disconnections and presents the concept of transience as a framework for understanding the emotional and communicative intricacies of temporary migration. Chapter 4 turns to the expectations, misconceptions, and misunderstandings surrounding international students. It addresses how spatial and discursive environments, such as media representations, perpetuate the marginalization of international students. It also criticizes host institutions and public attitudes for viewing international students primarily as revenue-generating outsiders.

Chapter 5 concludes the book by elucidating how student precarity in Australia was exacerbated by state and institutional decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic. The neglect and exclusion of international students from welfare systems and emergency responses are documented, which led students to increase their dependence on one another, thereby reinforcing the necessity and resilience of parallel societies.

Overall, the primary strength of Gomes' monograph lies in its conceptual clarity and ethnographic sensitivity. Drawing on over a decade of research, the book offers a grounded, interdisciplinary analysis that bridges media studies, migration studies, and higher education. Gomes' framework of parallel societies advances transcultural communication research by addressing the interplay between systemic exclusion and digital adaptation. Gomes also accentuates the vital role of communication in the provision of care, survival, and community-building in situations of structural vulnerability.

2 The U.S. Context

Moving on to the U.S. context, the edited volume by Malveaux and Bista provides an in-depth look at international students in the U.S. community college system from a variety of perspectives. Part I (Chapters 1–5) offers an overview of previous scholarship and the policy context regarding the internationalization of U.S. community colleges. Chapter 1 introduces the volume by positioning community colleges as increasingly pivotal, particularly due to their affordability and workforce focus, yet under-researched sites of international education. Chapter 2 presents a critical time-series analysis of published research, highlighting the marginalization of community colleges in international education scholarship. Chapter 3 summarizes long-term trends in student demographics, enrolment patterns, and the impact of COVID-19 on

the internationalization of U.S. community colleges by analyzing Open Doors data. Chapter 4 presents a comparative analysis of Canadian community colleges, illustrating how provincial disparities influence recruitment and support models. Chapter 5 contests the presumption regarding the financial benefits of internationalization, noting that, due to sector, state, and institutional heterogeneity, the correlations between international student enrolment and institutional revenue are not consistently robust.

Part II (Chapters 6–9) explores institutional barriers and practices. Chapter 6 elucidates how the career development aspirations of international students are hindered by the shortcomings in, community colleges' career services. Chapter 7 identifies key factors for the successful English language transition of Latinx ESL students, particularly emphasizing the importance of engaged faculty communication and intrinsic motivation. Chapter 8 addresses the acculturative stress encountered by international students, noting how increased cultural immersion in U.S. contexts alleviates their psychological distress. Chapter 9 examines the cumulative impact of U.S. immigration policy and pandemic-related restrictions on student advising services, pointing out practical challenges arising from time zones, technology, and the exclusion of international students from federal assistance.

Part III (Chapters 10–15) tackles questions related to justice, diversity, and sustainable support. Chapter 10 looks at the transfer pathways for international students from community colleges to four-year institutions, arguing that these students are frequently overlooked as a unique subgroup needing tailored support. Chapter 11 revisits previous critical research on international education and further advocates for the conceptual framework of critical internationalization studies, which aims to theorize systemic oppression and articulate an ethical imperative for equity-focused internationalization. Chapter 12 reflects on good practices for supporting international students during the pandemic. Chapter 13 returns to the Canadian context and reviews trends in international student enrolments in Canadian community colleges. It raises concerns regarding the Canadian higher education system's increasing financial reliance on international tuition fees and the depletion of resources for the provision of adequate student services. Chapter 14 looks at historically African American community colleges and tribal community colleges, highlighting their unique capacity to utilize their inherent strengths – legacy, identity, and culture – to enhance and broaden global programs for students and faculty. Finally, Chapter 15 concludes the volume by advocating for a persistent dedication to inclusive and equity-minded internationalization.

The major strengths of Malveaux and Bista's volume reside in its empirical scope and practical relevance. It offers a multidimensional portrait of U.S. community college internationalization by synthesizing policy analysis, administrative perspectives, and student experiences. The chapters emphasize the distinctive missions

and constraints of community colleges, rather than emulating the models of elite universities. For transcultural communication research, the volume provides valuable insights into the contested terrain of diversity, equity, and inclusion in traditionally marginalized educational spaces, as well as local-global intersections.

3 The Canadian Context

Regarding the Canadian context, the volume edited by Kim, Buckner, and Montsion provides a sharp theoretical intervention. It comprises three thematic sections that explore the contradictions of internationalization, inclusion, and racialization. Section I (Chapters 1–5) examines the institutional contexts underlying the rapid internationalization of Canadian universities. Chapter 1 discusses international student experiences through a critical analysis of federal strategies and policies regarding internationalization and multiculturalism. The analysis explicates the ideological framework that shapes international students' lives and frames them as economic assets. Chapter 2 offers a comparative analysis of the international strategies of 32 colleges and universities, highlighting that Asia is frequently perceived as a source of students, whereas Europe is regarded as a source of research collaborations. Chapter 3 continues the critique of treating international students from Asia as economic assets. It problematizes the erasure of culture and diversity among students in university settings by examining the Ontario provincial government's Strategic Mandate Agreements with three Toronto-based universities. Chapter 4 attends to the growing privatization of the college-to-university transfer system in British Columbia, revealing that although international students benefit from the system's flexibility, institutional responses to their needs remain inconsistent and opaque. Chapter 5 concludes the section with a critical review of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) policies implemented by Canadian universities, contending that these policies frequently overlook international students as individuals experiencing racialized precarity.

Chapters 6–11 in Section II bring the inclusion and exclusion experiences of international students to the fore. Chapter 6 utilizes survey data to demonstrate that international students often experience exclusion from campus life, notwithstanding their high levels of academic performance. In Chapter 7, the experiences of students from China who study at Halifax, an intellectual periphery, and at Toronto, an intellectual gateway, are compared to demonstrate that the barriers to integration are comparable in both places. Chapter 8 delves into how Chinese international students navigate their manifold transitions from Chinese high schools to a Canadian university Western Canada. It informs readers about experiences of systematic discrimination and social exclusion these students go through. Similarly, Chapter 9

looks at the experiences of Chinese students in Montreal and highlights the discrepancies between institutional support services and students' lived realities. Chapter 10 focuses on Ontario and analyzes the common experiences of academic, social, and linguistic exclusion among three students from different regions in China. Finally, Chapter 11 critically adapts and extends Alexander W. Astin's Inputs-Environments-Outcomes (I-E-O) model to better account for the structural and affective barriers faced by international students.

Section III (Chapters 12–16) focuses on anti-Asian racism and the politics of race. Chapter 12 reveals the disparity between the University of Toronto's portrayal of its international student body as multicultural and the fact that a significant majority (65 percent) of these students originate from China. This disparity, according to the chapter, implies the institution is worried about being viewed as "too Asian." Based on interviews with six Dalhousie University students from India and China, Chapter 13 explores their racialized experiences in the context of Halifax's anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racial politics and Dalhousie's international strategy. Chapter 14 similarly addresses racism and the institutional barriers to the effective integration of international students at the University of Manitoba, in the context of broader Indigenization efforts in Winnipeg. Chapter 15 focuses on the perceptions of anti-Asian racism among Chinese students in China and those studying abroad. The analysis indicates that Canada's reputation is declining among Chinese students, who are becoming more mindful of anti-Asian racism, linking it to geopolitical tensions. Chapter 16 explores the experiences of international students from South Korea during the pandemic, illustrating how racialized discourses of contagion and foreignness intensified their feelings of isolation and vulnerability.

In short, Kim, Buckner, and Montsion's volume contextualizes international students' experiences within Canada's settler-colonial and neoliberal structures, thereby broadening the inquiry beyond institutional contexts to encompass wider political economic systems. The chapters interweave critical race theory, institutional analysis, and student narratives to map the complex intersections of race, migration, and education. From the perspective of transcultural communication, the volume demonstrates that discriminatory discourses are inseparable from institutional, racial, and economic structures – an insight demanding greater critical engagement moving forward.

4 Conclusions

Taken together, the three books reviewed above offer three important implications for transcultural communication scholarship. First, they collectively reframe international students not as isolated, mobile learners, but as structurally embedded

actors within intersecting regimes of migration, higher education, and racial capitalism. This opens space for analyzing global student mobility from the perspectives of transnational governance and marketization in higher education. Second, these books foreground the centrality of race, precarity, and structural inequality in shaping the lived experiences of international students, emphasizing that communicative practices cannot be separated from their socio-political contexts. Finally, the books' investigations of how international students navigate, negotiate, and resist institutional constraints promote a shift from output-focused assessment metrics to critical, student-centered frameworks. In an era marked by the erosion of public education and populist backlash against migration, these works call for a revitalized dedication to justice-oriented, equity-conscious scholarship in international education and transcultural communication.

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