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Shanshan Lan
Miloš Debnár *Editors*

Migration, Transnational Flows, and the Contested Meanings of Race in Asia

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Editors

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Researching Race and Migration in a Transnational Context



Shanshan Lan and Miloš Debnár

With the diversification of international migrants in East Asia and their increased daily interactions with different groups of local people, issues of race and racism have become salient topics in China and Japan. For example, the controversial over racist representations of Black Africans in mainstream Chinese media (Lan, 2019) and the online backlash against the Afro-American heritage of Miss Universe Japan Ariana Miyamoto in 2015 (Lies & Ito, 2015). These represent just two examples from recent years where the racism of Chinese or Japanese became a heated topic of discussion among the public (mainly in English speaking countries) as well as among scholars. However, such debates are often centred upon an ontological question: are Asians racists or not? This edited volume proposes that such a diagnostic framework in analysing racism in East Asia tends to reinforce the Western-centric notions of race and White hegemony and fails to consider the intersections between the global expansion of Western racial ideology, its appropriation, contestation, and reconfiguration in localized non-Western cultural context.

This book addresses the multi-layered relations between migration and the transnational circulation of racial knowledge in East Asia. We understand racial knowledge as socially and culturally constructed and racial knowledge formation as a dynamic process embedded in daily life practices, institutional arrangements, state policies, and popular media. The multilayered and increasingly complex relations between migration and racial knowledge were scrutinized recently in the context of shifting patterns within European Union and U.K. (e.g., Erel et al., 2016), or in the context of migrations across Pacific with primary focus on minorities that are

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perceived as phenotypically “invisible” (Takezawa & Tanabe, 2022). The book attempts to contribute to these discussions by focusing on a still overlooked and understudied case of migration from White-majority countries of the global North to East Asia and contextualize the constructions of Whiteness vis-à-vis Blackness and local racial identities.

Historically, East Asian countries such as China and Japan not only regarded the West as an opponent, but a role model to emulate. Both have relatively successfully contested Western colonial subordination in the past, and Western economic, cultural, and geo-political domination in recent decades. This book attends to such particularities of context by moving beyond Western-centric theories and approaches in studying race and migration. It tries to answer the following questions: how do migration from the Western world impact racial knowledge formation in East Asian societies? To what extent do they challenge, perpetuate, and reshape unequal power relations based on the intersection of race, gender, class, nationality, citizenship, and migration status in East Asia? How are dominant Western racial categories such as race, Whiteness, and Blackness redefined and reconstructed in the context of migration and shifting geopolitical tensions between East Asia and major Western countries? The book is divided into three parts: race, language, and migration status; Covid-19 and the dynamics of racialization; gender and interracial encounters.

1.1 Integrating Race and Migration Studies

Existing literature on migration in Asia mainly focuses on three themes. First, labour migration from Asia to Europe, North America, and the Middle East; second, intra-Asia labour migration from underdeveloped areas to more affluent areas such as Hong Kong, Singapore, Japan, and Taiwan. In addition, there is a large body of literature on student migration from Asia to Western countries and between different regions of Asia (Coates, 2015; Fong, 2011; Liu-Farrer, 2009; Robertson, 2013). This book examines a reverse migration flow from major Western countries to Asia (specifically China and Japan), which is a relatively understudied field. Scholars have noted that “migrant”, “expatriate”, or “refugee” are racialized categories that are often selectively and exclusively applied to people of colour from third world countries and White individuals living outside the White-majority countries (Lundström, 2017; Cranston, 2017; Kunz, 2016, 2020). With the rise of Asia’s economic power and the decline of the job market in the Western world, more and more Westerners are moving to Asia for business, job opportunities, study, to pursue their cultural longings, or in search of better lives in general. Hand-in-hand with such development, the “currency of Whiteness” in Asia has been on decline (Farrer, 2018, p. 198) and with the increasing diversity of migration patterns, it became acknowledged that the boundaries between the categories of “migrants” and “expats” are becoming increasingly blurred (Farrer, 2018; Fechter & Walsh, 2010; Kunz, 2020). Despite such acknowledgement, there is still a lacuna in understanding how the race-migration nexus (Erel et al., 2016) in Asia operates and how a

diverse and increasing presence of migrants from the highly developed Western countries who are often (yet definitely not always) White contests or reproduces the global and local identities, racial hierarchies, or categories of mobility.

Various scholars have noted that the development of the concept of race in China and Japan is a complex process of interactions between Western racial ideologies and indigenous cultural concepts and values (Kowner & Demel, 2015; Dikotter, 2008; Russell, 2017; Kawai, 2015; Takezawa, 2005). Kowner and Demel (2012) argue that despite East Asia's emulation of Western racial thinking, "East Asia was the only region in modern times that had developed coherent theories and explicit policies that sought to actively undermine the Western racial worldview" (13). Lai (2012) observed that when China started interacting with Western colonial powers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the Chinese feelings of inferiority in relation to White Westerners was based mainly on economic and technological inferiority, rather than on cultural and racial inferiority. Similarly, despite the fact that Japan was one of the most eager adopters of the Western racial theories in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Kowner, 2018), the realization of the racialization of Japanese as inferior by the West came only gradually since the late nineteenth century when the aspiration to be considered as a "first-class nation" based on merits of development and progress encountered the White hegemony (Majima, 2014). The Western concept of race was amalgamated with indigenous ways of differentiation, adopted, yet contested at the same time as well, to differentiate the Japanese vis-à-vis 'Others' in the formation of the modern nation state and its relation to Whiteness was (and continues to be) complicated (Bonnett, 2000; Takezawa, 2022). However, most of these pioneering studies are based on historical and archival research and there is an urgent need for ethnographic studies that attend to the shifting meanings of race in the new historical context of changing power relations between Asia and major Western countries.

This edited volume tries to bridge the gap between race and migration studies by examining not only the movement of people, but the transnational circulation of racial knowledge, i.e., how racialized ideologies and practices are embedded in the transnational flow of images, commodities, beauty standards, educational philosophies, and consumer culture. Specifically, it highlights the intersection between global racial ideologies, such as White supremacy and anti-Black racism, and local ways of constructing self-other distinctions. We argue that the divergence and convergence between these different racial knowledge systems contribute to the dynamic and contested meanings of race, Whiteness, and Blackness in highly developed neoliberal Asian economies such as China and Japan. Intersectionality remains an important analytical framework of the book. While paying attention to the intersection of race, gender, nationality, immigration status and English language skills, we also want to highlight gender since existing literature on White Western migrants in Asia focuses predominantly on men.

This project also expands the scope of Whiteness studies by moving beyond Eurocentrism and explore new geographies and new dynamics of White racial formation in a transnational pandemic context. Steven Garner (2007) notes that "whiteness is a phenomenon unthinkable in a context where white does not equal power at

some structural level” (51). He also warns against several pitfalls in critical Whiteness studies, such as the reification of Whiteness as an object of study; the shift from researching Whiteness as power structure to researching Whiteness as individual identities; and the potential to compromise and even undermine anti-racist research agendas. This edited volume aims to critically engage with Garner’s important yet provocative arguments by considering the pluralization of the meanings of Whiteness in the new historical context of the rise of Asian economies, when White migrants no longer enjoy structural domination in Asian-majority societies. We try to highlight the tensions between privileges and precariousness, the flexibility in the conflation and division between Whiteness, Blackness, and foreignness in various groups of Western migrants’ lived experiences in China and Japan. Finally, we critically reflect on the feasibilities and limitations of applying Western racial categories such as “Blackness,” “Whiteness,” and “racism” in the East Asian context.

The study of migration and race are closely intertwined, yet the relationship between the two is distorted by the presumption of Whites racializing “Others” (Ang et al., 2022) that “obscured other kinds of migrants, particularly ‘White’ migrants” (Erel et al., 2016:1339). This book contributes to the abolition of Whiteness as a global hegemonic norm by incorporating the lived experiences of various groups of migrants and including White Westerners in the migration studies paradigm. It identifies notable similarities and differences between the racialized experiences of White migrants and migrants of colour in the broad context of changing immigration policies, neoliberal capitalism, and global pandemic politics in East Asia. It enriches existing literature on race, (post)coloniality and migration studies by exploring new dynamics and complexities in the transnational circulation of race and racism beyond the Western context and White vs “Others” dichotomy (see e.g., Ang et al., 2022).

1.2 The Transnational Circulation of Racial Knowledge

Stam and Shohat (2012) note that in comparative studies of racism in different cultural contexts, the “which is worse?” question is the wrong question (281). They argue, “the globalized era of asymmetrical interdependencies requires a heightened sense of the (partially regulated) flow of ideas, of crisscrossing messages and multidirectional but still power-inflected channels of exchange, where nations and states are not necessarily coterminous” (295). This calls for an epistemological turn in the study of race and racism in the larger context of globalization and social inequality. Scholars have noted that international migration involves not only the movement of people across borders, but the accumulation and circulation of racial knowledge in different cultural contexts (Bailey, 2001; Burgos, 2007; De Genova, 2005; Kim, 2008). Lan (2012) defines racial learning as “the development of knowledge about racial differences and racial hierarchies through daily life experiences in various transnational, local, institutional, and community settings” (5–6). However, existing literature on racial learning mainly focuses on how migrants of colour develop

knowledge about racism and racial hierarchies in the developed world. Little attention has been paid to the racial knowledge formation of White migrants in the global South. This book contributes to scholarly work on the reproduction and transformation of racial meanings in new historical contexts such as transnational migration, global capitalism, immigration control and nation-building, multiculturalism, and diversity (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Mullings, 2005; Omi & Winant, 1994; Thomas & Clarke, 2013).

The papers in this edited volume attend to the intersection between the global expansion of White supremacist ideology and culturally specific ways of constructing group differences in China and Japan. We try to highlight the importance of cultural context in mediating the perceptions and receptions of Western racial categories such as “Blackness,” “Whiteness,” and “racism” in a migration context. One important distinction in the racialization of international migrants in East Asia is the social construction of “foreigner” as a racialized category. While the spread of Western racial ideologies in China has been contested by various strands of racial nationalism in different historical periods (Cheng, 2019; Lai, 2012), Japan’s obsession with its national identity in *Nihonjinron*¹ also gives rise to racialized construction of Japaneseness in relation to Blackness, Whiteness, and other non-Japanese migrant identities (Sterling, 2011; Russell, 1991; Prieler, 2010). Due to the conflation of foreigner and White people in East Asia, White racial identity has been reduced to a highly visible minority status and the social privileges associated with White skin and Western looks can be significantly undermined (Botterill, 2017; Hof, 2021; Lan, 2022; Debnár, 2016; Leonard, 2019). Lan et al. (2022) theorizes precarious Whiteness during the early stage of Covid-19 in China by drawing attention to the triangular relations between Chineseness, foreignness and Westernness. In their comparative study of the racialization of Central-East European migrants in Japan and the U.K., Drnovšek Zorko and Debnár (2021) highlight how Whiteness is constructed in relation to different histories and patterns of immigration in each national context.

This book treats China and Japan not as homogenous entities, but as sites of transnational flows and new racial knowledge formation. We argue that the reconstruction of Whiteness and Blackness in East Asia is a transnational and relational process, which is embedded not only in daily life encounters between migrants and various local populations, but in language ideologies and media representations in the international education and cultural sectors. In their study of racialization in teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL), Kubota and Angle (2006) draw attention to epistemological racism, which attends to the unequal power relations between the West and the Rest in terms of racial knowledge production. Some of the papers in this book move beyond pedagogical studies in the English Language Teaching (ELT) sector and examine foreign English teachers as international labour migrants whose racialized experiences are deeply implicated in unequal power

¹*Nihonjinron* literary means theories of Japaneseness and this term is widely used to describe a genre of lay and academic writings on the characteristics of the Japanese people and its culture.

relations and shifting racial hierarchies in stringent immigration control and the neoliberal job market in East Asia. Eric Henry's paper in this volume addresses the shifting role of English as part of social and cultural transformation in China, when ideas such as cosmopolitanism, modernity, and elite status are racially indexed by the English language and mobilized as symbolic and cultural capital in middle-class Chinese people's quest for upward mobility and world citizenship.

The diversification of international migrant population in East Asia is not only reflected in nationality, but occupation, gender, and social economic status. In addition to transnational elites, English teachers, and migrants working in the entertainment sector, there is a new wave of middling migration from the developed world, which consists of self-initiated young professionals who seek business and job opportunities in rising Asian economies (Camenisch, 2022; Hof, 2019). The outbreak of Covid-19 in China in early 2020 and the restriction of transnational mobilities in Asia, coupled with geopolitical tensions caused by the Sino-U.S. trade war and bio-political nationalism at the global scale (De Kloet et al., 2020), have added additional layers of complications in the racialization of different groups of White migrants in Asia. This book denaturalizes the taken-for-granted connection between White people and White hegemony. When somatic Whiteness becomes a visible signifier of foreigner/minority status in East Asia, its association with White hegemony may be questioned or undermined by local immigration policies, historical and cultural constructions of self/other distinctions, and neoliberal workplace and consumer culture. In other words, the expansion of White hegemony in Asia not only depends on the presence of White bodies, but the incorporation of non-White individuals who demonstrate knowledge and skills traditionally associated with Whiteness. Both Helena Hof and Avril Haye-Matsui's chapters point to the importance of non-phenotypical factors such as citizenship, innovation, and skills in complicating the meanings of Whiteness and Blackness in the Asian context.

1.3 Ethnography and Intersectional Complexities

The contributors to this volume are mainly from social science disciplines such as anthropology and sociology. Our research methodology is mainly based on ethnographic studies, qualitative interviews, and analysis of representations in visual and other media. Such qualitative research methodology has enabled the authors to collect exceptionally rich data on the contradictions, nuances, and dilemmas in racial knowledge construction among both migrants and locals in Asia. Some of the research was conducted before Covid-19, while other was carried out in the midst of the pandemic. While we do not want to single out the pandemic as a prominent factor in shaping the racialization of migrants in China and Japan, by including both groups of scholarly works, the readers can see some of the continuities and changes in racial knowledge formation before and during a major health and mobility crisis in East Asia. The value of ethnography is highlighted not only by the extreme challenges of conducting face-to-face research in pandemic times, but by the

longitudinal nature of our research. Some of our authors maintained contact with their research participants while keeping a close eye on the Covid control policies in different Asian countries. Such sustained attention to our research field and participants enables us to attend to the materiality of race as embedded in neoliberal capitalism, local state policies in containing Covid-19, and grassroots anti-racist endeavours (Raghuram, 2022). It also helps strengthen the intersectional analysis in most papers.

Today intersectionality represents an established approach in gender or critical race studies to understand how different underprivileged identities intersect and interact in creating diverse positions of marginalization and oppression (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins & Bilge, 2016). Nevertheless, intersectionality has been recently identified as a useful analytical framework for analysing *privilege*, or particularly to identify the diverse ways in which White privilege works intersecting with other identities and in different social contexts (Garner, 2017; Kindinger & Schmitt, 2019). Several chapters in this volume pay particular attention to the intersection of race with other social identities and categories, such as gender, or nationality. For example, chapters by Shuling Wang, Elena Barabantseva, and Avril Haye-Matsui focus on a still understudied experience of women in Asia racialized as visible ‘Others’. They discuss the racialized and gendered hierarchies between White male head teacher and female Chinese teaching assistants, how White femininity and White bodies are valued and imbued with positive and normative meanings while being contested by the Chinese patriarchy, or how Black female teachers negotiate racialized and gendered stereotypes while trying to make a professional career in Japan.

This volume also aims to push the boundaries of intersectional analysis by investigating the embeddedness of racial formation in East Asia in multiple institutional and social contexts such as the global ELT industry, the transnational mediascapes, immigration policy, geopolitical tensions, nationalism, and pandemic politics. Several chapters discuss how the responses to the Covid pandemic by governments in East Asia influenced the experience, perceptions, and racialized subjectivities of White migrants. Together they demonstrate the nuanced ways in which Whiteness continues to be reproduced as a position of power and at the same time how the pandemic contributed to the continuous trend of contestation of Whiteness as a privileged and normative form of migration. What connects the contributions in this volume is the complexity of these intersections which goes beyond the conventional categories or social identities and beyond a framework in which Whiteness is assumed to represent the unquestioned apex in the imagined racial hierarchy. While this might seem to be in contradiction with the previous argument acknowledging that “Whiteness is a phenomenon unthinkable in a context where White does not equal power at some structural level” (Garner, 2007:51), the aim of this volume is precisely to scrutinize the extent of the “some” in this quote or, in words of Steven Garner again to “map more clearly the intersectional complexities of social relationships without losing sight of ... racialized “borders”” (Garner, 2017, p. 1591). In this way, the current volume builds on the insights from the intersectional approaches

to race and attempts to develop it further by focusing on contexts in which the global and local hierarchies are not aligned around the hegemonic Whiteness.

1.4 Structure of the Book

This book is divided into three parts. Part I consists of two papers which examine the relationship between race, language, and migration status. In Chap. 2 Eric Henry explores the racial dimension of language use in Shenyang, a city in Northeastern China. Based on ethnographic fieldwork, Henry utilizes various materials—from interviews, through billboards and advertisements to YouTube videos—to demonstrate the link between Whiteness and English and how it is juxtaposed with the standard Mandarin and local dialects (*Dongbeihua*). He adopts Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of "chronotope" to analyse the different configurations of space, time, and race connected with each of the languages. In contrast to more conventional approaches to race and its representations, he focuses on language—rather than body or skin colour—as a crucial piece in associating social practices with particular meanings. In Chap. 3 Pauline Leonard examines how foreign English teachers, mainly from the Western world, articulate their subjective positions in relation to China and its peoples. She deploys Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of "double voicing" to analyse various groups of foreign teachers' negotiation of their racialized status as foreigners in face of China's increasingly tightened immigration control. This chapter challenges the homogenization of foreign English teachers as one single group and shows the heterogeneity within the foreign teacher community and their shifting and contradictory identifications with their "foreigner" identity.

The theme of Part II is Covid-19 and the dynamics of racialization. It consists of four papers which discuss the multiple ways of racialization of migrants in the larger context of Covid-19 pandemic. In Chap. 4, Shanshan Lan discusses how White European migrants reflect on their racialized experiences amidst China's draconian zero-Covid policy. Her research draws on interviews and fieldwork conducted in the later stages of the pandemic. It identifies some of the important differences from the early stages that help us understand the shifting racial subjectivities of White Europeans in relation to Black migrants and local Chinese. Lan argues that some White migrants' mobilization of the hegemonic White gaze as a coping strategy to contest the disciplinary power of the Chinese gazes prevent them from identifying with Black migrants as the default racial other. In Chap. 5 Raviv Litman explores the shifting racial hierarchy in China's ELT sector as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and state policy to crack down illegal English language training centres. Based on ethnographic fieldwork in a third-tier city in China, his research adds a spatial dimension to existing literature by comparing the racialized hiring strategies in first-tier cities and third-tier cities. The chapter also shifts the focus from foreign English teachers to recruitment agents, who play a crucial role in reshaping existing racial hierarchy in the private English education job market. In Chap. 6, Miloš Debnár discusses the dual process of the formation of White

European racial subjectivities substantiated by state immigration policy and by personal narratives of migrants. Based on semi-structured interviews with European migrants in Japan and Europe, he examines the multiple layers of complexity related to the racialization of White migrants as “good migrants.” The chapter contributes to existing literature by addressing the nuanced ways in which White power is reproduced in a transnational context, where its global hegemony is also being contested by local identities and imagined hierarchies. In Chap. 7 Helena Hof draws interview data from her longitudinal study on young Western migrant entrepreneurs in Japan and Singapore before, during and after Covid-19. Her comparative analysis yields interesting findings on the ambiguous nature of White hegemony in different local contexts. Her research also points to a potential analytical distinction between somatic and hegemonic Whiteness since elevated status such as “White innovation” can be deracialized and re-racialized to incorporate non-White people who demonstrate attributes which were associated with White bodies in the past.

Part III of the book consists of three chapters which focus on gender and inter-racial encounters. In Chap. 8 Avril Haye-Matsui examines how the intersection of race, gender, and nationality impacts the workplace experiences and self-perceived identities of Black women in Japanese society. Based on semi-structured interviews from a longitudinal study on the female African diaspora community in Japan, this chapter shows the women’s multiple interpretations of Blackness and racism against Black people in the country. One interesting finding is the hierarchical ranking of Blackness in Japan based on nationality, with those from Western countries at the top. It also tries to recover agency among Black women by identifying their anti-racist pedagogy in the workplace. In Chap. 9 Shuling Wang zooms in on the inter-racial encounters between Chinese women teaching assistants and White foreign teachers in China’s private ELT industry. She contributes to existing literature on race and ELT by uncovering the marginalized and long ignored voices of young female Chinese teachers. She argues that these women’s feelings of fear, anger and exhaustion as a result of working with their White foreign colleagues are manifestations of racism and structural inequalities in China’s private English education sector. In Chap. 10, Elena Barabantseva analyses the intersection of Whiteness, migration, and gender in shaping the racialized experiences of migrant women from former Soviet Union who are married to Chinese men. Based on multi-sited and digital ethnography and semi-structured interviews, she demonstrates how White femininity is represented in China as valuable, yet only within the context of a patriarchal family structure. Her chapter contributes to literature on the pluralization of the meanings of Whiteness in social transformations in East Asian societies.

Together this edited volume makes an important contribution to existing literature on migration and the transnational circulation of racial knowledge. It also broadens the scope of critical Whiteness studies by exploring the contradictory and contested process of White racial formation in the non-Western context. In addition, we also hope to facilitate comparative analysis that moves beyond the East/West binary.

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Part I
Race, Language, and Migration Status

Chapter 2

The Whiteness of English: Raciolinguistic Chronotopes and Cultural Transformations in Contemporary China



Eric S. Henry

2.1 Language, Colonialism, and Race

They [the English school] don't particularly care too much about their curriculum. As long as they've got students coming in the door, paying the money, and finding teachers with a fair face who can speak English, whether or not they're educators or whether they're bums or whoever they are, they'll give them a job.

This quote comes from an interview I did with Patricia, a 52-year-old White English teacher from Australia. Having lived and taught in the northeastern Chinese city of Shenyang for several years at a range of different private language schools, she was one of the more experienced educators. Nevertheless, she was also somewhat cynical about the entire English-language teaching enterprise. Here, she critiques not just the pedagogy of her current school but its vacuous reliance on appearances to market its linguistic product to Chinese customers: the “fair faces” of its teachers who might be “bums” rather than “educators.” Why should the physical appearance of the instructors matter? Obviously skin colour acts as a point of competitive advantage for language schools—a means for getting students in the door—particularly in reference to a global, multinational language. But of all the attributes that teachers possess, such as educational qualifications, temperament, training, and even geographic origin, why is it race that counts?

Curiously, when I conducted interviews with school administrators, the traits they desired in their instructors had little to do with racialized characteristics. With few exceptions, they did not explicitly offer preferences for people with White skin or blue eyes or blond hair. Nor was it the teachers' qualifications, training or teaching abilities. Rather, most school owners focused on the “quality” (*suzhi*) of their teachers (both foreign and Chinese) as a way of projecting their organization's

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competence, of differentiating themselves from other schools offering an inferior linguistic product. This “quality” was by no means a readily apparent feature, but instead a metasemiotic category (Agha, 2007) involving a range of indexes and associations, including commitment, sincerity, friendliness, and communication skills. And yet, I will argue that “quality” is not race-neutral either. In my conversations with educators, students, parents and administrators in Shenyang, skin colour and appearance clearly acted as convenient proxies for this desirable attribute.

In other words, race and language are entangled with native frameworks of evaluation within the context of contemporary Chinese speech communities. Recent research in linguistic anthropology has promoted the adoption of a raciolinguistic perspective on such topics, one that challenges the naturalization of language and race. While we are accustomed to thinking of a language (or a language variety) as properly belonging to a certain group of people—Black people and African-American English for instance—such that a race and a language function as exclusive and comprehensible wholes, a raciolinguistic perspective perceives them as both emergent and mutually constituting categories (Alim et al., 2016; Bucholtz, 2011). In China, for instance, English is assumed to be a clearly defined and easily recognizable global language; knowing what constitutes English is as simple as referring to the linguistic intuitions of a group of people classified as native speakers. Language students (and even teachers) frequently approached me with questions about English such as “Can I say it this way?” or “How do I express this idea?” But who are these native speakers and what certifies the legitimacy of their judgment, particularly given the tremendous regional, class, ethnic and even idiolectal variation that fractures the totality of a coherent language? The answer, for most of the Chinese language students I interviewed, was that one could tell a native speaker by looking at them. As an evidently White male, people just knew that I was the right *kind* of person speaking the right *kind* of language, and therefore one who could answer their questions.

In this chapter, I ask: how it is that a language, in this case a global language such as English, has become positioned as the inalienable property of certain types of racially defined subjects? Or, to put it another way, in the context of Asia’s developing modernity, what makes English White? Language variation and evaluation is never a neutral process, but rather depends upon an authorized “listening subject,” one who epitomizes and embodies hegemonic frameworks and dominant language ideologies (Rosa, 2019; Roth-Gordon, 2017). A raciolinguistic approach therefore “interrogates the historical and contemporary co-naturalization of language and race,” by acknowledging the inherent contingency of language categories and the ways in which languages are valued or devalued on the basis of *who* the speaker is and *what* they look like (Rosa & Flores, 2017, p. 622; see also Barrett et al., 2023).

The power of English—its global ubiquity, its capacity to act as the primary medium regulating international communication and migration—is inseparable from the racial logics that permeate contemporary forms of modernization, development and capitalism (Errington, 2008; Heller & McElhinny, 2017). The postcolonial order, in which economic marginality, resource extraction, and political destabilization channel wealth from periphery to metropole—from developing to

developed countries—does not simply generate inequality on a global scale. As James Ferguson (2006) points out, it also perpetuates those asymmetrical relations by charting a singular path for developing countries to transform themselves into stable, prosperous, and advanced polities. The very practice of development entails modeling the mechanics of First World industrialized economies for Third World ones, with the implicit understanding that doing so will unlock all of benefits of Westernized lifestyles and advantages. “The effect of this powerful narrative was to transform a spatialized global hierarchy into a temporalized (putative) historical sequence. Poor countries (and by implication, the poor people who lived in them) were not simply at the bottom, they were at the beginning” (Ferguson, 2006, p. 178).

The temporal disjuncture between rich and poor countries, which finds its origins in the slave trade and European colonial expansion, lends itself well to expressions of racial determinism—with the colour of one’s skin an inescapable mark of belonging within this developmental scale. But in following the template of Western development, colonial and postcolonial nations reify those racial determinisms in their own quest to become modern. Racialized thinking in China, particularly the growth of a Han-Chinese centred nationalism in the nineteenth century, was itself a reaction to the presumed dominance of Western culture and technology during the period of encroaching European colonialism on the Chinese mainland (Cheng, 2019). As Michael Keevak (2011) argues, the quality of “yellow” in China was gradually transformed, in the late nineteenth century, from an expression of the emperor’s power to a skin color of the Chinese people and representation of themselves as a “race.” That Chinese intellectuals frequently elevated the status of this race to a level of equality with European Whiteness—highlighting the glory and splendour of Chinese cultural traditions—does not mitigate the fact that this new racialized thinking was an inherently hierarchical colonial invention.

Language likewise plays an important role in understanding the racial logics of colonialism, particularly for subject nations attempting to catalyze their temporal movement forward and into the future. From the perspective of colonizers, the administration of vast multiethnic, multilingual territories required the creation of a native administrative class conversant in both the European colonial language and their own tongues. These new colonial technocrats could function as surrogates for Europeans in the infrastructures of colonial exploitation (Errington, 2008, p. 124). Even after independence, accessing foreign technology, capital, political assistance and even charity all rely upon the expertise of leaders, elites, and professionals to communicate their wants and navigate the complex systems of diplomacy and capital investment successfully. Over time, these desires were built into educational systems that further the dreams of both leaders and ordinary citizens alike. Foreign language ability becomes a mark of social power and distinction in such contexts.

The dynamics of colonialism are therefore inextricably tied to ideologies of race and inequalities of language. There are two points to be made about this raciolinguistic framework that guide my analysis here. First, if non-Western, non-English proficient, undeveloped countries are configured as at the *beginning* of a temporal process that has already been realized for Western, English-speaking, and developed ones, then the discourses of modernization are embedded within spacetime

configurations known as chronotopes. In the work of the early twentieth century Russian linguist Mikhail Bakhtin (1981), a chronotope is a fusion of particular linguistic registers with spatiotemporal values. Jonathan Rosa (2019) has noted the ways in which, due to population growth and migration, Latinx groups in the United States are frequently posited as a demographic of the future. Their ability to speak English or not, standard or not, accented or not, is taken as a commentary on the nation's multicultural future. Speaking Spanish is therefore an act suffused with semiotic import far beyond the conversational frame in which it is employed, pointing to one or another destiny (racial segregation or assimilation respectively). In other cases, a particular accent or communicative style may point to the past, to a sense of heritage and tradition that, while valuable as an ethnolinguistic identifier, locks the language out of equal status as a communicative medium for modernity. This is one critique often leveled at linguists studying Indigenous languages in Canada, for instance, in that by highlighting "traditional knowledge" or "language preservation" Indigenous languages lose the potential to serve as forces of social change (Perley, 2012).

The second point to note is that both languages and their ideological frameworks—including chronotopes and racializing ideologies—are altered as they pass into new speech communities and discourse contexts. As Jan Blommaert (2010) argues, "languages and discourses move around, but they do so between spaces that are full of rules, norms, customs and conventions, and they get adapted to the rules, norms, customs and conventions of such places" (p. 80). In other words, as languages travel across the globe, their values are reterritorialized, imported into local systems of meaningfulness (Zentz, 2015). Discourses of race and language in China today are therefore neither a simple extension of pre-modern thinking about blood or nation, nor merely a reflection of hegemonic discourses disseminated from the West; instead, they are a product of China's ongoing post-Socialist experiments with modernity, capitalism, and social transformation.

Imperial Chinese scholars did often meditate on the biological and cultural differences between themselves—as properly socialized Confucian imperial subjects—and the wild barbarians on the frontier—who were literally granted animal ethnonyms and other objectifying labels (Fiskesjö, 2011). Although primarily couched in terms of cultural beliefs and practices, attitudes in imperial China equated the qualities of Whiteness with the civilized centre and Blackness with peasants or with the ethnic periphery (Dikötter, 1992). In the Republican period, Western discourses of race were recruited into the development of a Chinese nation. The first president, Sun Yat-sen, accepted the division of humanity into distinct races as a means of promoting ethnic nationalism and one of the three foundations of Chinese national consciousness (Sun, 1927).

Neither of these frameworks provides a direct lineage to racialized thinking in China today. The simple valorization of one particular race or racial characteristic is at odds with the complex and layered semiotic landscape of China's contemporary racial dynamics. As many contributors to this volume note, Whiteness retains a sense of hegemonic value and superiority, but my concern in this chapter is how race is entangled with everyday actions and conversation in Shenyang. The logic of

Whiteness is a product of a rapidly changing society where conventional value frameworks have been upended, to be replaced with anxieties about progress, belonging, and success in a newly fashioned neoliberal economy. Those ideas circulate along with movements of people—educational migrants, entrepreneurs, urban elites—as they move back and forth between inside and outside, familiar and strange; in other words, between the idealized domains of China and the West. Social status, racial identity, and language choice are all related within the chronotopic moment of modern China.

The ethnographic data in this chapter are based on 16 months of field research conducted in Shenyang over several trips from 2001 to 2013. Shenyang is a city of roughly nine million people located in the northeastern province of Liaoning, for which it serves as the capital. Since the economic reforms of the 1990s that privatized many factories, Shenyang has experienced many years of economic stagnation. There is a pervading sense in the city that it has fallen behind more dynamic coastal areas that receive greater levels of foreign investment. Several languages and linguistic registers are spoken in Shenyang, often seamlessly mixed together in everyday conversation. The predominant language of education, professional work, and government administration is Mandarin Chinese (*Putonghua*). At both school and in the office, people are expected to conform to the standard language in terms of lexicon and accent. English is common among people connected to life outside China through work, migration or education. English marks a person's speech as global and trendy, and can be heard in places like foreign retail outlets, Western restaurants, or modern spaces such as upscale hotels and international businesses. Finally, there is Dongbeihua, or Northeastern Speech, a widely spoken regional dialect of Mandarin. Dongbeihua is associated with rural areas and poorer neighbourhoods that are home to older residents. My research focused on this mixture of languages, particularly the adoption of English as an educational requirement. Private language education that supplements the foreign language component of the public school system has become a multibillion-dollar concern in China. I visited and observed a range of private English language training schools while interviewing students, their parents, teachers, school administrators and other participants in China's English language teaching industry. My analysis of race and language in this chapter therefore derives from the perspectives of multiple participants in the enterprise of creating China's new generation of globally-competent, English-speaking social actors.

2.2 Temporalities of Language

Rather than turning directly to English, let me start with a photograph I took in 2013 of a banner adorning the facade of a building under construction (Fig. 2.1). During construction, new buildings are enrobed in green mesh to protect pedestrians and other onlookers, which are often used to display banners with patriotic slogans. The horizontal red banner (which is the default colour for such emblems) identifies the



Fig. 2.1 Banner erected by the Liaoyang No. 4 Construction Company

name of the company, the Liaoyang No. 4 Construction Company. The two vertical banners, arranged much like rhyming couplets that decorate household doorways during the new year, offer the following message:

Shi jintian wei luohou.

“Regard today as backwards”

Shi chuangxin wei yongheng.

“Regard innovation as eternal”

These types of banal government messaging are ubiquitous on banners such as these, but also on billboards and placards throughout the city, such as in public parks and in city squares. I was likely the only person who paid much attention to this sign, but taken collectively, such messages speak to common Chinese notions of transformation and change that are embedded within the ideological frameworks of language use and sociolinguistic attitudes towards different language varieties and their speakers.

Notice in this poster the juxtaposition of temporal periods. Today is *luohou*, “backwards,” not just a physical orientation but a moral judgement. To say that something is *luohou* in China identifies it as being traditional, old-fashioned, out-of-sync with the modern world (Zhang, 2006). It is an identity frequently applied to the countryside, the poorest and least developed areas of the nation. In contrast, we have the idea of *chuangxin*, “innovation,” which indexes a sense not only of creativity, but also newness and forward momentum. Next to the unchanging countryside—which appears to be much the same as it was during the Socialist era—the city is a place of change, transformation, and advancement. Therefore, temporal distinctions

of past and future are mapped onto geographical space and the divide between rural and urban.

The sentiment expressed by this banner is so normative in China today as to be almost entirely unquestioned: today is backwards in comparison to a dynamic global future yet to come. In other work, I have documented how this outlook manifests itself in descriptions of the local environment (Henry, 2021). Different places are presumed to have different chronotopic values, developing at different rates from different starting points. Nations, regions, cities, and neighbourhoods are all assigned varying temporal quality based on their physical characteristics, such as buildings, vehicles, infrastructure and so forth. Take, for example, the biographical narration by a Chinese English teacher who went by the name of Fanny. She was born in a small village but had migrated to the city with her family and later studied abroad in Britain, earning an undergraduate degree. After returning to Shenyang, she took a job as an English teacher for a large private school.

My home, my hometown, is called Zhangwu, a small county seat in Hebei province. When I first came to Shenyang, this place was rundown and old. Everywhere was just dingy old mountains, dingy old factories. But in the last few years? I feel that the appearance of the city has changed a lot, which is really good. And another thing is, Shenyang has just developed a bit in the direction of a metropolis. There's a lot of culture here now, and it makes us [villagers] feel a bit left behind. But there's no way you can compare this place with Shanghai. In the 1930s, Shanghai was on the same level as New York and Washington...

Look, Shenyang is a city that developed late. I feel like it has a weak foundation, you know, like the cultural base here is lacking. No matter how many skyscrapers they build, the character of this city is just old, its spirit is frail.

Speaking in standard Mandarin, Fanny locates her origins in a rural village before describing her impression of Shenyang upon arrival as dismal and dreary. But while that village remained static, the city changed, advancing towards a state of modernity. At the same time, however, places like Shanghai stand as the pinnacle of that progress, to which Shenyang cannot compare. Her final critique of Shenyang, its deficiency of spirit, positions herself as someone who has transcended those backwards spaces, who can look back and view them with a critical eye. Her language abilities, in both Mandarin and English, therefore serve as evidence that she has surpassed first Zhangwu's, and then Shenyang's, limited social horizons.

Categories like “modern” (*xiandai*) or “backwards” (*luohou*) are therefore not simply idiomatic phrasings but represent a distinctive approach to time in contemporary China, one that sees gradations of civility, wealth, technology, and so forth as temporally discontinuous in space (Henry, 2021; Solinger, 2013; Steinmüller, 2013). Such characteristics are exemplified by language, by the ways that the people inhabiting those spaces speak. Language thus acts as a convenient index of where one is located within these shifting temporal, social, and geographical landscapes. Consider how various Chinese dialects (*fangyan*) are perceived as not only localizable (Shanghai dialect or Northeastern dialect) but also historicized (Xu, 2021). They are languages “of the past,” representing heritage, identity, and tradition. Mandarin is positioned by the state, in contrast, as essentially ahistorical—indeed, to explore its development and instantiation as the language of the nation-state

would expose its contingent development (Spolsky, 2014; Tam, 2017). As Jie Dong argues, the timeless universality of Mandarin is the product of “deliberate institutional practices... part of a tacit and ideological process of enregisterment, through which the symbolic dominance of Putonghua is being accepted as natural and normative” (Dong, 2010, p. 274). In turn, Kevin Carrico (2017) has noted the ways in which “properly spoken” Mandarin has been amalgamated with a resurgent sense of tradition-oriented Chinese nationalism, comprising one pole of a tripartite axis of ethnic identity comprising Chinese language (*Hanyu*), Chinese characters (*hanzi*), and traditional Chinese clothing (*hanfu*). These processes have positioned Mandarin not only as a national language, but as *the* language of the Han-Chinese centred nation-state.

Despite this partitioning of Dongbeihua, Mandarin and English into different spaces, I would argue that they should still be regarded as ideologically constituted, rather than readily apparent labels for various speech practices. For instance, despite the numerous grammatical descriptions of Dongbeihua, in actual practice speech in Shenyang exists on a dialect continuum: speakers can deploy a greater or lesser number of Dongbeihua features in order to calibrate their identity to appear more or less local. Similarly, English is frequently deployed in forms that might not be recognizable to a native Western speaker, or in ways that are embedded within local systems of meaningfulness rather than globally transparent ones. Public images and texts, for instance, frequently blend several languages together in ways that are communicative (in that they convey direct information to the audience) and meta-communicative (in that they inform the audience how to interpret the underlying connotation of the message). In Fig. 2.2, for instance, an advertisement for a new housing development lets potential customers know the size and location of the apartments that will be for sale. The large text at the top, however, reads “CLUB *yangfang, jingying shenghuo xiguan*” or “CLUB foreign-style apartments, elite living habits.” By juxtaposing the high-quality experience of living in this new development with the English word “club” and the image of a British-style bowler hat, the advertisement conveys a complex series of semiotic associations to the audience incorporating language, race and social class. This housing development, it implies, is not like the socialist-era gray concrete buildings that most modest families live in. This will be a place for sophisticated and wealthy urbanites, like the affluent Britons the poster nods towards, to expend their newfound wealth in opulent surroundings. All of this can be conveyed by adopting some foreign imagery and a few English words.

2.3 Narrating Spatiotemporal Belonging

The semiotic frameworks of language and time I described above are not static. They exist in constant dialectical tension with the people who inhabit or move through those spaces. People recognize these as chronotopes, each space with its own temporal texture, which allows them to deploy their own linguistic resources to

Fig. 2.2 Advertisement for a new housing development in Shenyang



orient themselves in different ways: as locals deserving of friendship and generosity, for instance, or as savvy cosmopolitans able to traverse China's borders. To see how speakers navigate these complex spatiotemporal frameworks, consider an interview I did with a professional translator and native Shenyanger in her late 20's who used the English name Amanda. Over coffee, elaborately brewed at the café in what looked like a chemistry set at our table, she explained her own dissatisfaction with living in Shenyang. She described the entire region as "very shallow, very superficial." In comparison, she told me, Shanghai is not only economically developed, but it also has what she called a "humanistic aura" that is evident whenever people speak. Northeastern people, she argued, serve food by derisively flinging it on the table, which she mimed for me with a derisive "here, here." But in Shanghai, even the most common person speaks with elegance.

If you are in Shanghai or southern China, you can find this kind of situation, like imagine an old woman in pyjamas calling down to you from the second floor. She'd tell you to try the delicious dumplings. She has the bearing of a hero! She'll teach you how to integrate with the culture. But how do we say it in the Northeast? We just tell you what to do, with that kind of I'm-sick-of-you attitude.

In Amanda's narration, she therefore compares speech from two different places that have two different attitudes, one brusque and rude, the other generous and elegant. Those differences are attributed to their varying chronotopic characters: Shenyang is behind Shanghai, which has developed faster economically and culturally. Of course, despite her own status as a Shenyanger, Amanda subtly positions

herself as someone closer to the Shanghai model of personhood, and it is significant to note that she used both English and standard Mandarin throughout our interview, with barely a hint of Dongbeihua.

In contrast to Amanda, Professor Sun was in his 60's when I spoke with him. A retired professor of Chinese, he was an avid fan of local culture and traditions, particularly the use of Dongbeihua which suffused his own speech. One day, as he carefully described for me the phonological properties of Dongbeihua, I asked about the dialect's origins. He told me the original inhabitants of the Northeast, the Khitan people, were assimilated by the Chinese, but that their speech blended with ancient Chinese. Later, the northeastern Liao and Jin dynasties (from roughly the tenth to the thirteenth centuries) moved people to regions near Beijing.

Beijing speech is a dialect, right? Well, Beijing dialect originally came from here too. Beijing was mainly Manchu at the time [of the Qing dynasty] and the Jin, the Liao, they brought the speech of the northeast with them. When the Manchus became officials in Beijing they had to speak Mandarin, and this was the formation of the Beijing dialect. Qing dynasty officials who went to Beijing were all from Shenyang, and after they went there, it combined with the local accent.

Professor Sun argued that the blended dialect gradually disappeared in Beijing but was retained in the Northeast by local officials. Needless to say, this is an overly fanciful—and not quite historically accurate—account of the dialect's origins. Dongbeihua is more likely to be a result of the wave of nineteenth-century Han migrations into the region (Simmons, 2016). Nevertheless, what is significant here is Professor Sun's attempts to certify Dongbeihua with an imperial pedigree, and in fact to claim that it was the dialect of Beijing itself three hundred years ago.

From here, Professor Sun transitioned to a lament about how Chinese culture has been weakened and appropriated by other East Asian nations. He told me that the kimono is just a derivation of Chinese Tang dynasty clothes. Chinese culture, he claimed, is more popular in Japan right now than in China. "You think about it," he admonished me, "when people from Taiwan and Hong Kong speak, that's the Guomindang era [early twentieth century] Mandarin. The radio and television stations all use that language. Now our [Mainland Chinese] announcers don't speak like this anymore. The language is changing now. This is the language difference."

Professor Sun's imagined trip throughout Asia, from where Japanese have appropriated Chinese tradition, to where Taiwanese and Hong Kongers speak the language of one hundred years ago, to a China where a classical language is being altered by the media, traverses both time and space. It locates his beloved Dongbeihua as high language of the imperial past, but one that has been unceremoniously lost by the urban elite. This serves Professor Sun's broader point about social change. Whereas Amanda praised the genteel speech of modern Shanghai, Professor Sun deplores new and cosmopolitan ways of speaking. He identifies these as superficial, while for Amanda it is the Northeasterners who lack cultural legitimacy. Both therefore use language to orient themselves towards varying chronotopes in the context of Shenyang's speech community. Amanda uses English and standard Mandarin to align herself with the modern, progressive world represented by Shanghai and the

West. Professor Sun, on the other hand, offers up Dongbeihua as a language of imperial stature linked to China's glorious past.

"Development," in the sense that the word is used in Shenyang, is therefore not simply a matter of technological or economic progress. It is the coordination of social activity—the cultivation of particular habits, ways of speaking, and social presentation—that place an individual within the social fabric of China's urban landscape. Sophie, a Chinese English teacher who worked for a company teaching aspiring MBA students who desired to study abroad, once quoted me the Chinese idiom *zhengxian kanghou*, meaning "striving to be the first, fearing to be the last" to describe this dynamic. She repeatedly called China a "striving society" (*nuli she-hui*). Everyone, she told me, is fighting: to buy a bigger home, to get more money, to go abroad. Why else, she asked, would they bother learning English? "It is the best way to get all three." Her nephew, she told me, had just been enrolled in a private English-medium elementary school, and the students were being encouraged by the headmaster to enroll in the school's golfing club. Having a child that can speak fluent English and drop the ball on the green with a perfect five-iron are all ways of propelling them into a prosperous future, head-and-shoulders above China's other striving millions.

2.4 Race Talk: Chronotopic Whiteness and English

To this point, I have shown how speech practices in Shenyang, drawing upon multiple linguistic resources, are inherently embedded within spatiotemporal landscapes: in other words, within chronotopes. The chronotopic identity of the location, context, and participants of conversation is what regiments speech into particular codes that are properties of particular kinds of people (the modern professional worker, for instance, or the guardian of local tradition) (Agha, 2007). A further characteristic of these chronotopically identifiable figures is their inherent racialization. It is no coincidence that Sophie's nephew was learning golf and not ping pong or boxing. With its European roots, steep cost of entry, and high-status reputation, golf indexes race in ways that are both subtle but also widely recognized. In this section I consider the ways that the temporalities of language in China are inherently racialized.

Consider discourses of Blackness in Shenyang. The Belt and Road Initiative, launched by President Xi Jinping in 2013, has sought to build trade through infrastructure investment, development projects, and cultural exchange with countries throughout Asia, Europe and Africa (Chong & Pham, 2020). This has increased the number of non-ethnic Chinese in Shenyang through international study exchanges and corporate joint ventures. Many students now arrive from Africa, mixing with other foreigners in Shenyang who were previously primarily Euro-American. But no matter their actual place of origin, Black people (*heiren*) are almost always presumed to be African, while White people (*bairen*) are assumed to be European, American, or Australian. One of the foreign teachers at a large English school, a

fair-skinned South African man named Kevin, frequently encountered shock from his students when he told them about his home country: “but you look so White,” they would tell him.

When the topic of Blackness came up, it was almost always with an undercurrent of both fascination and discomfort. In a conversation between one of my informants, an aspiring English school owner named Dylan, and some of his friends, one person mentioned seeing a Black person on the market street that day. “Could you smell him?” inquired another, adding, “I can’t take the smell of Black people.” Dylan jumped in, “And the bright White eyes with the Black face! It’s so frightening!” Dylan, who always adopted a stance of allure and admiration for all things foreign in both his teaching and in our conversations, fell back on racist tropes and stereotypes of a person that, for all he knew, could be a native English speaker and reflection of his own aspirations as a cosmopolitan and mobile global citizen.

Within the chronotopic topologies I have been discussing, the lamination of Blackness and Africanness naturalizes a sense of displacement from modernity, an identification of this racial category with the sense of backwardness mentioned above. If Africa is imagined as backward, then Black people are too. This geographical and temporal amalgamation also distances Black people, in the popular imagination, from one of the key markers of global modernity: English. As I said, school owners were greatly concerned with the “quality” of their foreign teachers, and non-White teachers, especially those perceived as Black or Asian, were considered notoriously problematic. Parents would always be suspicious of their English (“Do they know the right kind of English?”) and Black teachers often moved from school to school, picking up whatever work they could, but always at the margins of the English teaching industry.

In contrast, when Jasmine, a teacher I worked with quite extensively throughout my fieldwork, asked me if I knew a *bairén* who might be willing to teach part-time at her school, I asked if the teacher had to be White. Jasmine paused for a moment and then answered, “Well, any kind of foreigner is okay, but...” and then shrugged her shoulders. That “but” invokes the presumed racial characteristics of the native English speaker even as it concedes the diversity contained within the term. And we can see these types of semiotic representations of a particular model of English-speaking foreignness in marketing for English schools around the city (see Fig. 2.3). Schools frequently feature White bodies and faces in their advertising, demonstrating how, for instance, students can participate in foreign culture or participate in the modern world as equal co-participants with White people (Henry, 2020). By drawing upon existing semiotic links between Whiteness, English and modernity, the schools effectively promise their students that they can be elevated to the same racial status, even if they may not become White themselves.

A parallel to this kind of raciolinguistic marketing—where Whiteness and English are positioned as consumable products for a desiring Chinese audience—is the way that Mandarin itself articulates with White bodies. When I first arrived in China in 2001, the university where I studied had a hodgepodge of students from all over the world learning Mandarin together. I was part of a class that included people from Korea, the United States, France, and Egypt. Yet there was always a palpable



Fig. 2.3 Public advertisement for an English school named California International University in Shenyang. The slogan at the top reads “International education creates international people”

sense of strangeness and fascination from the general public when White people used Mandarin as opposed to, for instance, my Korean classmates. My halting and half-grammatical Mandarin was invariably, and embarrassingly, praised by almost everyone I met. My Korean classmates were generally ignored. When our class participated in a Chinese New Year festival gala performed for the entire school, it was my White classmates and me who were most prominently featured.

There is a long tradition in China of White people performing Mandarin in film or television (Feng, 2013; Lee, 2006; Song, 2015). Two of the most recognizable are Mark Rowswell (known as *Dashan*) and Charlotte MacInnis (known as *Ai Hua*). In televised galas, advertisements, talk shows, and even dramatic roles, they draw upon years of language study to perform perfectly standard Mandarin for an adoring and fascinated audience. What role does their Whiteness play in this very public kind of self-presentation, especially in light of the relative absence of non-White, non-Chinese Mandarin speakers in the same media? Rowswell and MacInnis leverage their racial characteristics in highly stylized ways, combining signifiers of both Western modernity (their Whiteness) and Chinese culture (their adopted Asianness). Rowswell frequently dresses in *dagua* in his performances, a long Qing Imperial-style robe, evoking a sense of traditional artistry and authenticity (see Fig. 2.4). In one interview I watched of MacInnis on Shenyang television in 2010, she performed tai chi and sang classical Chinese songs for the audience. It is not just the incongruity of non-Asians speaking a Chinese language that is the source of the fascination, but a certain *type* of non-Asian: the racially marked, thoroughly modern White person, blending together racial characteristics from the highly desirable global world and the already familiar Chinese one. In this sense, Rowswell and MacInnis are



Fig. 2.4 Screenshot from a video on the Youtube channel of Mark Rowswell (*Dashan*), a popular Mandarin-language performer in China

fascinating because they appear as racial anomalies, English speakers who locate themselves within the chronotope of China's traditional past.

Talk is never just the straightforward communication of information, but contains also the stances, alignments, and intentions of the speaker. As Erving Goffman noted long ago, navigating the cultural norms of conversation entails the projection of a particular model of the self. "When an individual projects a definition of the situation and thereby makes an implicit or explicit claim to be a person of a particular kind, he automatically exerts a moral demand upon the others, obliging them to value and treat him in the manner that person of his kind have a right to expect" (Goffman, 1959, p. 13). Those identity claims are possible because we understand the various nuances that constitute the variety of speech repertoires within any given community, with each repertoire identified with particular social types (Agha, 2007). In this section I have shown how the chronotopic ideologies of particular linguistic registers in Shenyang articulate with various racial identities. Whiteness inheres in English through the social values that link it to ideas of progress, modernization and future prosperity.

2.5 Conclusion

The city of Shenyang is undergoing a period of rapid development and change. Within the material landscape of the city, old neighbourhoods are being cleared away to make room for the markers of modernity: luxurious residential developments, five-star hotels, foreign-brand shopping malls. Urban citizens are embedded within this changing landscape, grappling with social change that has reconfigured state-society relations at a fundamental level (Anagnost et al., 2013; Zhang & Ong, 2008). How does one locate oneself within this complex geographical and social

topography? Is one in control, living at the core of the change itself and directing its movement? Or is one helplessly cast aside by the forces of modernity and global capitalism?

In this chapter I have considered how these questions are imagined through a focus on temporality, with different spaces located at different points on a developmental timeline. Material changes to that landscape (by tearing down old buildings and replacing them with skyscrapers) push those spaces into the future. Language also plays a clear role in demarcating these spaces, marking them as past (Dongbeihua), present (Mandarin), or future (English). By manipulating their speech, urban residents can occupy multiple subject positions depending upon the circumstances: from locals deserving of friendship and trust, to global cosmopolitans able to navigate the world beyond China's borders and draw upon its social capital.

These chronotopic frameworks challenge us to think about race in new ways. Race is not simply a product of biology, or even of appearance. In China, Whiteness is an experiential category tied to particular configurations of language and time and filtered through culturally mediated acts of perception and interpretation. It naturally inheres in certain kinds of people who are marked by particular forms of language. The inverse, of course, is true as well—the discourse of Blackness acts to cast into doubt the language and global belonging of those people who, to many Chinese, represent its opposite. The valorization of Whiteness is therefore not the desire for White bodies per se, but rather for what they represent. Whiteness is an attribute that can be appropriated through forms of social practice: acting in certain ways, talking in certain ways, eating certain foods, demonstrating correct manners, playing golf and so forth. That is the magical power of English in China today. It is the medium through which Shenyangers, newly conscious of the possibilities offered by wealth and mobility, articulate their claims to global citizenship. This makes race a form of social practice, and one that will shape China's ongoing development in the twenty-first century.

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Chapter 3

“Because I Am a Foreigner”: Western Migrants’ Navigations of the Chinese State



Pauline Leonard

3.1 Introduction

China’s rise in the global economy over the last 30 years has been matched by an escalation in the desire to learn English across all levels of its population. As skills in English become increasingly important to compete in China’s labour market and increase wages (Wu et al., 2014), numbers of English language learners and users have grown to approximately 400 million, the largest in the world (Wei & Su, 2015). Despite the rise in acceptance of Global Englishes, which recognizes the multilingual nature of contemporary English use, in China, most sought after is English learnt from ‘native speakers’, foreign-born teachers for whom English is their first language. The reasons for this are multi-faceted: native speaker models are well codified and thereby viewed as ‘standard’ and, more sociologically, they represent power and have (more or less) historical and global authority and status as ‘superior’ (He & Zhang 2010). Extra layers of distinction are added through race and nationality, with White Euro-Americans being the most favoured (Leonard, 2019; Litman, 2022). This preference pertains not only to learners and for children, their parents, but also the Chinese government. In 2016, the China government started to require all offline education institutions to hire only native-speaker foreign-language teachers (Service System for Foreigners Working in China, 2017; Litman, 2022).

The British Council estimate that there are one million foreign English language teachers in China (British Council, n.d.). China’s Administration of Foreign Experts Affairs agreed with this figure in 2019, noting however that only 10% had valid

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work permits (China Highlights, 2022).¹ Before the pandemic, young Westerners, keen to travel and experience China, as well as escape the regular recessions and periods of unemployment which hit Western economies, were quickly and easily able to find work in the many private language schools springing up all over China, or as private tutors (Leonard, 2019), without necessarily going through formal channels. Teaching contracts could be picked up over the Web or even while backpacking around China, with offers of work routinely being made on the streets to young people with the desired attributes of ‘native’ language skills and Western appearance (especially White). A quick search of the internet in June 2023 suggests this phenomenon is bouncing back: there are numerous adverts for young English-speaking people to come to China and teach English. However, many of these now demand higher levels of qualifications than previously, such as a bachelor’s degree and a Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) Certificate.

Within the teaching profession generally, the key criteria for selection and recruitment rest on the possession of such formal academic qualifications. Depending on the level of the role, as well as a university degree and a teaching qualification usually being mandatory, several years of teaching experience may also be demanded. In most societies, educational institutions fall under national legislation and policy and are often subject to high levels of scrutiny and evaluation, with key metrics to measure success. However, the surge in demand for learning English in China, and especially from native English-speaking teachers, has led to a diversification of, and even a departure from, these criteria and standards. A broad range of teachers and schools are involved in the delivery of English language education, from well-qualified teachers with experience in professional language schools to completely unqualified people taking classes in non-accredited facilities (Stanley, 2013; Li & Jin, 2020). Further, from my own research (Leonard, 2019) and the literature (e.g. Stanley, 2013; Lan, 2022; Litman, 2022), it is clear that as well as formal skills, qualifications and experience, a range of other demographic and social characteristics contribute as important factors in determining who becomes a Foreign English Language Teacher (FELT) in China.

This diversity in skills and social background has generated mixed responses by the Chinese state and its citizens. The state is keen to stamp out illegal migration and undocumented foreigners with low skills levels and, fortified by the Exit and Entry Administration Law 2012, migration policies were already tightened (Haugen, 2019) before the Covid-19 outbreak. The pandemic led to even sturdier border restrictions for foreigners, and many migrants who left the country at the start of 2020, thinking they would soon return, then found their foreign visas were blocked (Billman, 2020). Similarly, while the presence of enclaves of young, and sometimes fun-seeking, Westerners had also triggered hostility within some local communities (Lehmann & Leonard, 2016), the pandemic brought outright enmity in some areas (Kuo & Davidson, 2020). Yet, as English language teachers remain increasingly important to China’s economic development, attracting ‘top tier’ foreign talent

¹This research was conducted before Covid and the Double Reduction Policy (Eryong & Li, 2022)

remains key to the policy agenda (CCG, 2017). The wide diversity of FELTs thus presents some interesting questions for this category of foreign migration in China. How do foreign language teachers experience migration to China? How do social background, skill levels and motivations make a difference to settlement processes, relations with the Chinese state and local people? The answers to these questions are important for both sides. If China wants to draw well qualified teachers to live and work in China, good quality employment and living conditions, clear and transparent procedures, and welcoming communities need to be pull factors (CCG, 2017). On the other hand, if foreigners wish to improve their economic prosperity and everyday lives through migration to China, the political, legislative and social contexts of migration need to be negotiated with understanding and tolerance.

This chapter explores these questions. My discussion begins with an outline of my theoretical approach to understanding the construction of FELT subjectivities in China, and the roles played by social identities such as race, nationality, and skills levels. Connections are made with Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1984 [1963]) theoretical concept of ‘double voiced discourse’, which highlights awareness of the concerns and agendas of others (Baxter, 2014). I then present some contextual background to research on English Language teaching in China, revealing the longstanding history of employing foreigners for this work. Drawing on my own empirical research on foreign English teachers in China (Leonard, 2019), I proceed to present a typology of the different characteristics that were revealed within my sample of participants, identifying four ‘types’ of background and motivations. I then turn to apply the concept of double voicing to analyse how this diversity relates to differences in perspectives of and relations towards the Chinese state. I argue that this provides a valuable tool to investigate the ways foreigners seek to establish a viable subjectivity for both themselves and others, in China’s complex migratory context.

3.2 Conceptualizing Foreign Language Teachers in China

Since the opening up of China in the late 1970s, and the subsequent liberalisation of the economy, immigration to China has increased modestly. From the initial entry of 300,000 ethnic Chinese fleeing from Vietnam, China now has nearly 1.5 m immigrants (Bickenbach & Liu, 2022). These continue to be mostly of Chinese ethnic heritage from Southeast Asia and North America, enticed by incentives to return to their homeland. While difficult to obtain figures, illegal migrants arrive mainly from North Korea and Africa, seeking economic opportunities or escaping political repression. By 2020, there were an estimated 500,000 Africans residing in China, with around 100,000 in Guangzhou (Bodomo, 2020). While not classified as immigrants in the statistics due to their transitional residence patterns, the British Council calculation of one million FELTs means that they are a sizeable community within the larger population of foreigners in China. In many areas of China, only passport holders of Canada, US, UK, New Zealand, Australia and South Africa with native-level English and a bachelor’s degree are accepted (China by Teaching, n.d.).

It is also estimated that roughly 250,000 foreigners are teaching English illegally; that is, without a Z-class work visa (Chiesa, 2021).

Foreign English Teachers first arrived in Macau in the 1630s, to teach in missionary schools and Christian colleges. The teaching of English spread to China in the nineteenth century but was greatly reduced during the liberation period of 1949–1956 and further through the Cultural Revolution of 1966–77 (Rao, 2013). Since 1977, there has been what is termed ‘a second renaissance’, as English language education has become strategically linked to the quest for modernization. As will be discussed more fully in the next section, native speakers are highly sought after and opportunities for foreigners to migrate exploded. During Covid however, many training centres closed. While these are now increasing, terms and conditions are less advantageous than before the pandemic, although remain higher than in many other international contexts with free housing and flight reimbursement as standard.

In many ways therefore, foreign language teachers who migrate to China can be understood as ‘privileged’ migrants: their decision to travel has usually been made voluntarily, motivated by a desire to change or improve their quality of life, their economic resources and/or experience new cultures and landscapes. While some may have been pushed to move through a lack of work opportunities or economic recession in their home context, this is still far removed from the category of ‘forced’ migration, whereby people involuntarily flee their homes through internal displacement and/or political oppression (Adelman, 2001). Neither can FELTs be neatly conceptualized as ‘lifestyle migrants’ however: people who ‘imagine that they will be able to improve and take control of their lives...part of a search for a better way of life’ (Benson, 2011: 7). While some may hope to enhance their lifestyles, the complex political and legislative context of China means that few are able to exercise full control over their lives; complete freedom to make choices will always be ambiguous for China’s international migrants, who are monitored and policed by an often-confusing range of rules and regulations exercised by multiple policymakers and law enforcement agencies (Haugen, 2019). Yet while foreign language teachers come to China to work, conceptualising China’s international migrants as labour migrants is also inadequate. Intermingled with hopes to improve working lives are often touristic ambitions of ‘seeing China’, a desire to explore new opportunities from China’s fascination with the West (Lehmann, 2014; Leonard, 2019), as well as augmenting CVs and perhaps improving economic and social status in the process. For motivations such as these, it may be worth accepting that their lives will be politically, socially and materially constrained in some ways; perhaps more so than at ‘home’. This acceptance is borne out of their privilege: most will have the ability and the resources to return home should they wish.

For many foreigners from the West, this privilege is augmented by a range of ‘unearned’ social advantages (McIntosh, 1989; Lan, 2022). These include nationality, race and ethnicity, gender, ‘native’ English language abilities, social class, age and other embodied capital features such as height and hair colour. When people migrate, social identities such as these can take on new meanings (Leonard, 2010). For those with a White skin, this may prove to be a useful or even powerful resource from which to draw upon in the construction of new identities in the host context.

This is not however exclusively the case: the meanings of Whiteness are far from stable or predictable, interplaying critically with time and space. It is important to make the distinction here between ‘Whiteness’ as a regime of structured power and White individuals. Whilst Whiteness represents a powerful racial discourse and system of power, the ‘category of white people represents a socially constructed identity usually based on skin colour’ (Leonardo, 2002: 31). It is not necessarily the case therefore that White people routinely reinforce Whiteness; their ability to exert power and privilege will be framed by the political, social and temporal context within which they are situated.

China has never been a colony nor subject to White structural dominance within its national boundaries. Bracken (2018) argues that any feelings of inferiority within China’s relations with the West in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were due to economic and technological factors rather than racial, political or cultural associations. Arguably, contemporary China is subject to Whiteness on the global stage, but it is, as a nation, a superpower. Within its boundaries, the total number of White migrants is small and, as they are denied citizenship and institutional power, their privileges are limited (Koh, 2020).

For those with a black skin, exclusion is pervasive. While meanings attached to members of minority ethnic and Black communities are also highly variable, in China these have long been dominated by overt prejudice, stigmatization and discrimination (Haugen, 2019; Ouassini et al., 2022). Anti-Black racism is embedded in Han-minzu racialist ideologies, which perceive Blackness as ‘occupying the bottom of the racial totem pole’ (Ouassini et al., 2022: 61; Dikötter, 1992, 1997). Within this climate, non-White foreign language teachers are experienced as, at best curiosities, to be met with confusion and denial of racism (Lan, 2022), and, at worst, vulgar racism, hate-speech and discrimination (Leonard, 2019). While hostility and xenophobia were experienced by both White and Black communities during the during the Covid-19 pandemic (Kuo & Davidson, 2020), Black people were particularly targeted and excluded from public life (Marsh, 2021).

The difference in treatment of foreign migrants according to their race reflects deeply embedded assumptions about racial superiority within Han Chinese culture (Joniak-Lüthi, 2015). But while non-Han communities are Othered, this works both ways: foreigners also Other the Chinese. In my research, this is notable through the talk of their interviews, as I will analyse later in the chapter. To do this, I draw on the work of the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975), who coined the phrase ‘double-voiced discourse’ in relation to the study of drama and fiction as well as the ordinary speech of everyday lives. Double voicing means that when a person speaks, they have a heightened awareness of, and responsiveness to the views, concerns and agenda of others, which is then reflected in the different ways in which they adjust their language (Baxter, 2014). This usually contains a ‘power’ dimension, in that double voicing can be used as a strategy to resist or mediate threats from more powerful others to silence or, even, to imagine others and/or give someone a voice. The use of double voicing is closely implicated with the ways in which power relations are constructed between people and institutions according to the interplay of social categories such as gender, age, race and ethnicity, profession

and status. It can reveal the perspective-taking of ‘double-alignment’, where the primary orientation is to the self and to one’s own agenda, and a second orientation is to an ‘Other’, whether this be a group, larger community or, as in this case, the Chinese State.

Bakhtin demonstrates how we all use double voicing in diverse ways within our spoken interactions in our everyday lives: we bring in the voices of others, as well as our own voice to construct meanings and social relations. The different forms and functions of double voicing can provide a rich understanding of the nuanced ways in which identities are constructed. In this chapter I focus on four principal types:

- Authoritative: to display personal power and heighten impact, particularly when threatened
- Anticipatory: to anticipate and dilute possible criticism
- Corrective: to correct or repair a mistake or error, usually their own
- Parody/Mimicry: to mimic the voice of the other, usually to criticize it.

In what follows, I argue that double voicing helps to expose a relationship between the power and status possessed by the different teachers and their understandings of, and relations to, the Chinese authorities, their Chinese employers and the Chinese people. I commence with an overview of English Language Teachers, and the different ‘types’ within this broad group.

3.3 Foreign English Language Teachers in China

Most Chinese people favour learning English from ‘native’ speakers; a preference which can be dated back to the early 1960s, when China recognized that good standards of English were needed to learn from ‘foreign experts’ to boost skills levels and gain global economic competitiveness (Brady, 2003). As the opportunities for FELTS mushroomed, so did the numbers and quality of language schools. The more established schools and universities continued to demand and attract well-trained and highly professional teachers, but a proliferation of ‘back street’ suppliers over the past 20 years meant that demand for foreigners willing to teach English outstripped supply. Before the Covid-19 outbreak, unqualified ‘fortune seekers’ (Pieke, 2012) were easily able to pick up teaching posts, although these ‘new’ migrants were met with a mixed reception by both the Chinese state and local people. Long-lasting ideologies of Sinocentric superiority and patriotism and xenophobic communications framing foreigners as ‘devils’ (*yangguizi*) (Gries, 2006) led to their employment and residence being tightly governed through time-consuming and complicated immigration procedures (CCG, 2017). The preference for ‘top tier’ migrant talent is thus jointly pronged, desired by both the Chinese state and local people and alike.

My research on FELTs emerged from this context, as part of broader research on the ‘new wave’ of international migration in China. Interested in stories prevalent in Xiamen, Fujian, of overt hostility towards young FELTS, I was keen to investigate

further. My research commenced in Xiamen, where I had contacts through my collaboration with the University. After gaining ethics approval and funding, face-to-face interviews were held with teachers working in the city. These then widened, through snowballing, to include interviews with FELTS working across China, conducted online (Leonard, 2019). My final sample included 17 teachers (10 male and 7 female), mostly under the age of 30, but 5 of the male teachers were in their late 30 s to 50 s. 15 were White, one woman was Turkish and Black, and one man was British-born Asian. Interviews were semi-structured, and focused on participants’ life stories of how they came to be teaching in China, their backgrounds and their motivations. Through these biographical narratives, I identify four broad ‘types’ of FELTs in China as follows:

3.3.1 *Old Professionals*

Teachers within this category were well established, with good educational and teaching qualifications, including recognized TEFL qualifications. They held previous experience, often at senior level, were highly professional in their approach and clearly delivered high standards of teaching and learning. Often motivated by career aspirations and a desire to use their skills in a new national context, this was sometimes in combination with personal factors such as divorce. Old Professionals knew how to recognize and select a good school: what to look for and what to avoid. It was clear that those within this group worked in top-tier private schools, were highly paid and enjoyed good conditions of work. While their skills and high levels of qualifications were clearly sought after by their employers, native English speaking and Whiteness were also rewarded.

Stacey, 30, is British graduate who had studied English and linguistics at university. After university and wanting to travel, she undertook an intensive TEFL course in Europe, which was good quality: all classroom based, with lots of teaching practice and feedback on her performance. She now enjoys excellent pay and conditions, including flights home and accommodation:

Everything is sorted out for you. If you need to move because of the landlord or anything, then the school finds you a new one. If you request to move, because you don’t like your apartment, they will sort you out. If anything breaks in the apartment, then you just let someone know at school and someone will come around and fix it pretty sharpish.

She was immediately impressed by the school:

Everyone here is so friendly; the school was amazing. It was just so clean and nice-looking and modern, and everyone is just so accommodating and helpful, and everything was just so easy for the first few days. Incredibly welcoming atmosphere, and instantly I was “yes! I can quite easily be here for a long time”.

Stacey recognises that the typical image of a FELT is someone who is young, but she is noticing that:

there has been a slight increase recently in older people coming out, I think that is because they have started to offer ‘experience money’, more money if you come here with experience. It is starting to attract people who have been teaching for a bit longer, to come and join us.

Conor, now in his 50 s, is within this older group. He originally obtained an undergraduate degree in the UK and then trained to become Primary School teacher. Within 5 years he was a Deputy Headteacher, where he remained for about 20 years. Then, in his late 40 s, his marriage ended, and his children had grown up and left the family home:

‘So, the family split, and that was a big thing, the family splintering. So, this gave me a choice to either stay at home and cry or do something interesting with my life.

I thought “where do I want to go?” And there was no question in my mind that I wanted to go to China. Because all my life I have heard about the good behavior of children. So, China I knew would be a good place to live. I chose Xiamen because of the weather pattern; the city wasn’t too big, and I read blogs on the internet saying it was a friendly city and it was not too far from anywhere.

3.3.2 *New Professionals*

New Professionals also tended to be slightly older: in their 30s, 40s and 50s, with previous work experience but not in teaching. Thus, in contrast to the Old Professionals, New Professionals typically were *not* trained teachers and often not graduates, although many had other professional qualifications and skills from their previous careers. New Professionals had come into ELT (English Language Teaching) following a career change but, perhaps as they were older and had experience of work and a disciplined approach to training, most were now very committed to their new careers and aspired to be good teachers. However, their lack of educational qualifications meant that they were not able to access work in the ‘top quality’ schools but found work in ‘second tier’ schools. For example, Claudia, a White Australian in her late twenties, works for a private language school in Xiamen. She originally came to China 10 years ago as a dancer and choreographer. However, after several years of dancing and dance teaching, she suffered an ankle injury which meant that she could no longer dance professionally. She enjoyed living in China however and did not want to leave. As she explains:

I wasn’t sure what I wanted to do, and everyone said, ‘why don’t you teach?’ And I was like ‘no’ but it kind of seems the ‘in’ thing to do...

She applied to the school where her flatmate worked as they were desperately in need of native English speakers. She was accepted immediately, but the school did insist she do a week’s observation of other teachers before being given a class of her own. Claudia, already quite confident and used to being in front of an audience, teaching dance and working to improve herself, explains:

It’s been a massive learning curve for me because obviously it’s not something I’ve been trained in, but I said that from day one in my interview, “I haven’t been teaching English, but I have been teaching children. And English is my native tongue, I’m willing to work hard and I’m willing to learn and I’m willing to take it all in”.

She is now studying online for a TEFL qualification and reflects *it’s funny because obviously I’ve had quite a transition from the club scene to this new life, but this job is very rewarding. I didn’t think I would love it as much as I do.*

Mark, White British and in his mid-50 s, had a previous career in the army, before working in business all over the world: Israel, Spain, Norway. He eventually returned to the UK but missed living abroad. One of his friends was a TEFL teacher, and suggested he train too. The qualification was hard work, but Mark did well and came top of the class. He felt his army background helped “*I was very disciplined*”. He was also highly motivated and immediately got a job in China. He explains:

I chose China simply because my EFL teacher said, “The business is big out there,” she said, “It’ll be easy to get a job, and you need two years’ experience for anyone to accept you anywhere else.”

Mark hit lucky with his first job:

I got a message from a guy called Mr X who ran a private university in Zhengzhou, in the countryside. He showed me the pictures, answered all my questions honestly and offered me a contract. I went over there, and it was exactly what he said, conditions were very, very good, I signed a year’s contract. And lo and behold, a year later he calls me in the office, and he said, “We’d like you to be head of department.”

Mark’s career took off and, for the past 20 years he has worked in senior positions in a range of language schools and universities. He has married a Chinese woman, also a teacher, and together they have now set up their own language school. Having seen a lot of bad practice, he aims to run this very professionally:

I realised very quickly that if you’re going to do this, your plan has to be to be a good school, but not to be the biggest school in the city. It has to be high quality. So, we realised that the quality is not the walls, not the doors, it’s the teachers, but finding teachers is a very difficult thing. I regard myself as a professional and a good teacher.

Compared to the Old Professionals, the New Professionals enjoy less benefits and prestige. Not in the top-flight schools, they earn enough to pay for their own accommodation and other living expenses but receive no additional benefits. All those in the New Professional group were, however, White. This delivered status within their work environments, with parents keen for their children to access their classes, preferring native English teachers over their Chinese colleagues.

3.3.3 CV Builders

The Curriculum Vitae (CV) Builders are younger than the previous two groups, consisting of graduates and postgraduate in their 20 s keen to strengthen their work resumes for the future. They tended to either be studying Chinese for their

qualifications or, in some cases, bidding time while unable to find their work of choice in the West, due to economic recession and unemployment. CV Builders also included ‘gap year’ students who had just finished Level 2 education, taking a year out to gain some experience before attending university.

Shannon, 23, is an example of the first sub-group. White American and a graduate of Chinese, she had come to try to gain more fluency in the language having never previously visited China. Shannon is teaching English to fund her time in China, although she is now finding she rarely gets the chance to speak Chinese due to the long hours she spends teaching. Having had no previous experience, Shannon has found the job very challenging:

I was very thrown in and the Chinese communication is quite poor, so I just was like, “Maybe they just assume that I know what I’m doing” or they assume that if I didn’t, I would ask. So, after struggling for a week and a half, two weeks: in a half hour you can be told you have to teach a class and some classes were two hours and this would be with a class you don’t know. So, you don’t know the level, you don’t know the behaviour and you’re just kind of thrown in and that’s frustrating as a new teacher with very little experience. I finally was just like, “I have to man up and figure this out so that I’m not stressed” because it was stressing me out.

Also in this group were five young people I interviewed who were only 18. I interviewed them when they were back in the UK, now in their first years at university, after having spent a year teaching English in Chinese state schools located all over China. The young people, all seeking experience by working abroad before they started university, had each raised about £5000 to pay to an agency in the UK which, in return offered to find them employment and oversee their time in China. After a brief week’s teacher training in the UK, the young people arrived in Beijing and were then put on long train journeys—some lasting 28 h—to Chinese schools in remote rural areas. It was only then that they discovered that they were part of a government scheme to bring native English speakers to schools across China, and that their low remittances were paid by China’s Ministry of Education. Their experiences were taxing:

So, trying to teach it had to be 60 14-year-olds, no matter where in the world, it’s not going to be easy. Some of the classes were more just like right out of control! Some of the younger-age classes I kind of could teach more and do more.

Although provided with accommodation, this was not of high standard:

When we got to the apartment it was filthy and not furnished. So, it kind of took quite a while to sort of, tell the school, or tell somebody influential in the school to get furniture and stuff

Although they were on a government scheme and working in state schools, the young people were not issued proper visas. As a result, they had to keep paying for themselves to travel in and out of China, to renew their tourist visas in Hong Kong. However, the group stuck with it, knowing that their aim was to see China, do something different and that at the end of the year they would be returning to the United Kingdom. At this age and with no experience, they were unlikely to be providing

high quality teaching, but White skins and the fact that they were native English speakers meant that they were usually treated well, albeit with curiosity and even some degree of hero-worship. For the British Born Asian in this group, life was more complex, however. He experienced being stopped and searched on occasion being mistaken as Uyghur.

3.3.4 *Tourist Teachers*

The final group were those teaching English by chance, having come to China as tourists but open to seeking out any opportunities available to foreigners. While many in this group were White native English speakers, this was not always the case and amongst my interviewees were a German woman and a (Black) Turkish woman, both teaching English and ‘passing’ as native English speakers in low quality schools unsure of Western diversity. For the White native speakers in this group, it was their race and nationality that brought what can be called ‘native capital’: providing them with resources which Chinese students and their parents desire and are happy to pay for, often at the expense of proper skills and qualifications. For example, John, a White Canadian in his early 30 s and with a somewhat itinerant background, arrived in China ten years ago, having lost all his money overnight in a casino. He had seen a TV programme about China and, having nothing to lose, thought it was about time he saw more of the world than the Canadian prairies: *I was 22 at the time, still quite young and whatnot, and I figured, “Well I’ve never seen much of the world,” so I decided to come on out. And then that was the thing, by the time that I came out here, and started to kind of live off... What I notice is like a lot of the people that decide to stay, you kind of thrive off of like having the difficult life, where everything’s a challenge. And I noticed every time that I went back it was just too easy, too mundane. So, yeah, I kind of just learnt to enjoy that.*

John travelled around China for a while and then got a job in a public school where:

You were kind of treated like a superstar back in the day, that’s since kind of changed a little bit; but the main thing was there was an absolute interest in me because I was white, I could speak English, they had an interest in me... His lack of training meant that:

It’s all song and dance at that point, it’s literally just entertaining them, trying to get 60 people to talk to you is impossible; even if you give them a minute each it takes up the entire class, so...

In contrast to John’s upward social mobility, Asli who is Turkish, Black and in her late 20 s, has had to face considerable challenges:

I was in China and was in a bit of a personal crisis. I couldn’t stay in Turkey anymore; I was just so uncomfortable with everything; I’m quite opinionated and I’m not a very typical Turkish woman. I just found myself in China just taking time, and I decided to stay. I mean it was not just a visit. I planned to find a job while I’m in China but if you’re foreign and not white in China it can be really difficult. Well, for me at least because I don’t have a British or US passport and it just makes things really difficult to find jobs.

Although not a native speaker, Asli speaks good English: she tells me she taught herself by watching American and British comedy shows on the internet. However, her lack of a native English speaker identity, her colour and her nationality have caused her some difficulties in securing jobs, particularly in schools which operate the visa system properly. When her tourist visa expired, she.

didn't know if I could find another legal job because although there are many teaching jobs, they're not legal. Coming from Turkey, I just can't get long visas and I'm not comfortable being on a tourist visa working at the same time because it's so stressful- I would always be looking over my shoulder.

Asli eventually managed to get a job, but the school she was working in was not of good quality and did not provide her with a proper visa. She also found she had to travel to schools in neighbouring cities and pay for the transport herself, teaching different classes all the time. Without her visa she was vulnerable, but when she complained they fired her. However, as she explains, she *'didn't have the proper release documents'*. She is now 'stuck' in China, working illegally at a number of schools, unable to leave.

These vignettes demonstrate how the differences between FELTS are stark. This leads to very different subject positions in relation to China, as I now discuss.

3.4 Navigating the Chinese State

In interviews, as well as in our everyday lives, many of us will use 'double voicing' in our talk. In this example, Claudia, a New Professional who we met earlier, displays irritation at her regular loss of internet services, meaning she can't talk to her family and friends at home on Western social media sites. She demonstrates linguistic expertise in deploying a double-voiced explanation, anticipating what she sees as the likely views of Chinese officials and the reasons behind what she perceives as discriminatory treatment towards foreign migrants. This small comment: **'because I am a foreigner'** indexes the speaker's reflexive ability to enter the world of Chinese officialdom as a way of building solidarity with others in her situation, as well as with me, her interviewer, who is also a 'foreigner' in China.

Drawing on my interviews and the four forms of double voicing identified earlier, I now turn to explore attitudes towards China within the different FELT categories. It is important to say at this point that while examples of each type of double voicing being used individually can be found, multiple forms of double voicing may also be used together in the same piece of talk, as I will demonstrate.

3.4.1 *Old Professionals*

Well-qualified teachers such as the Old Professionals were the group that used double voicing the least. This finding is in common with other research into double voicing (Baxter, 2014), which finds that more powerful groups: White men for example, tend to use double voicing significantly less than groups with less power: women and people of marginalized backgrounds. Where instances of double voicing can be found by the more powerful, it is predominantly **authoritative** in style, revealing senses of autonomy and personal power.

Conor, who we met earlier, an older, well-qualified teacher from the UK, reveals through his use of double voicing that *he* was in charge of the selection process in terms of which kind of school he would work for in China.

I searched across China and this school was very well reviewed, it had a very good reputation. The way I looked at it was that I couldn’t find anything bad about the school. I just kept searching and searching and searching for bad reviews and nothing. Searching on the internet is vital if you want to choose the best school.

Conor displays power through the way he reports on the views and experiences of other FELTs already based in elite schools. He was able to draw on these unknown voices to inform him of his choice to be employed in a top-quality institution with good working conditions. In terms of Conor’s relationship to China, he knows he is a valuable asset and is able to ‘call the shots. In his authoritative final sentence to me, in which he anticipates my voice through a question I might ask, he also establishes himself as an expert on the FELT labour market in China.

Stacey, trained with a degree in English and linguistics, also shows how the voices of her social networks led to her accessing a top-quality job. By way of contrast to her own experience, she also double-voices other, less confident applicants to reveal her sense of empowerment:

Two of my friends were actually at the school in China that I am at now, and were just raving about it, nothing but praise for it, and said I should go out there, and I said yes, had an interview and that is what happened. As far as I know, a lot of people who come out here are concerned ‘is it okay? am I going to be safe?’. But I didn’t really have to do that, so I never really had too many worries really about coming out here. I knew it was all legitimate and stuff like that, that never crossed my mind, so I was quite quick in saying yes and accepting it.

Stacey’s double voicing ostensibly identifies her ability to secure an elite position as a consequence of her social networks. However, her subsequent double voicing of other, more vulnerable applicants is a demonstration of her own personal power and her recognition that, as a qualified teacher with the desired demographic features, she is likely to be well treated by the Chinese state. She uses the comparison of an alternative, very different and less powerful subject position to emphasise her confidence in her own positionality in China as legitimate and secure.

Noteworthy in the Old Professionals' talk was the absence of references to the Chinese state and any problems encountered with visas or residence. This indicates that they felt unthreatened in terms of their relationship towards China. They were also positive about their relationships with the Chinese Education system and their students, revealing little awareness of the political and social intricacies of race and migration issues experienced by some other FELTs in China. Safe in their positions of privilege, they are able to live in a bubble and rarely come up against the authorities. This group embody the type of 'good migrant' that China welcomes.

3.4.2 *New Professionals*

New Professionals also drew on **authoritative** double voicing, but this often took a very different form than that used by the Old Professionals. Whereas Conor and Stacey use other voices to *support* the construction of their privileged subjectivities, for the New Professionals, the second voice becomes the object of criticism and attack. Bakhtin (1984) describes the rhetorical art of **parody** where a type of speech or behaviour is mimicked in order to criticize it.

An example of the intertwining of authority and parody in double voicing is provided by Mark, who has taken a great deal of interest in the social relations between China and its international migrants over the years. For example, like many host societies, China attempts to restrict in-migration to migrants with the skills needed to boost the national economy. However, the visa system is unevenly managed across bureaucratic authorities, and it is relatively easy, as discussed above, for language schools and other employers to bypass the system using 'tourist' visas. The state responds with waves of investigation into the legal status of foreigners. Schools that are renowned for hiring teachers illegally are subject to frequent police raids. As Mark talks about such a raid which occurred in another language school in the city, his use of double voicing reveals how he assumes authority to speak *for* the Chinese police, mimicking them and in the process implicitly criticising them:

The place got raided and all four teachers were sent home, deported. One of them was actually married to a Chinese national with a child. 27 police turned up at that school, locked the lifts, went up and arrested everybody in sight, including the Chinese staff. And why they wanted to do that is because they were afraid, when they see a foreigner in there they'd say, "What are you doing here?" To stop that they arrested everybody and said "Right, you're working illegally."

In a somewhat different example, which this time intertwines **authoritative and anticipatory** double voicing, Mark, displays authority through what he positions as 'superior' knowledge and understanding held by foreigners compared to the 'ignorance' of the Chinese. In his explanation to me of what Chinese people think, he shows linguistic expertise in using a double-voiced comment, which anticipates what Chinese students will think when they see a Black teacher. His comment shows his interpretation of cultural assumptions demonstrated by some of his Chinese students and their parents: that the Chinese are superior and more

‘developed’, that all Black teachers are from Africa, and that Africa is a poor and less ‘civilized’ nation. This quote indexes the speaker’s self-reflexive ability to enter the world of his audience as a way of building authority, as well as expressing difference -and moral superiority- between ‘us’ and ‘them’:

Although they don’t admit it, the Chinese are actually quite racist. When they see a black teacher they think, “Well, I’ve seen pictures of Africa and we’re more developed than they are,” that’s what they think. They use a word in Chinese called *choca*, they say ‘the chocolate teacher’, they use that word, so you’re going to get this. A lot of people say racism, but I think this is down to ignorance, that’s where it comes down to.

Other New Professionals clearly felt threatened by some of the actions of the Chinese state. Some demonstrated anger or irritation that they were not treated with sufficient respect. Claudia’s speech above about ‘Because I am a Foreigner’ is a good example of this, where she inserts what she sees is the rationale used by the Chinese authorities for her lack of VPN access.

Purely because I was a foreigner, I had to wait a week to get my VPN back, and purely because I was a foreigner, I had to go with my passport. Just stupid segregation like that, like, we can’t access certain things on our phones because we don’t have an ID card. So, there’s stuff like that which starts, you know, eating away at you....

She continues:

There’s talk about they want to shut down all use of VPNs... that’s my connection to my family and my friends, so like if I found out that that was getting taken away from me I’d lose it, to be honest, and I think you want us to come to your country to provide either goods for whatever reasons or services, you want us to teach English to your children, how would you feel if you couldn’t talk to your children? So, you know, that’s how we feel when you take away these VPNs; why do you think we’re going to stay? We’re not going to stay. and you think about how many English teachers are in this country, that’s a lot of people. So, if you’re going to cut off their connection to their family, you can guarantee people are just going to be like, “Bye!”

Here we can see how she double-voices the Chinese state and Chinese education policymakers and has an imaginary conversation with them (‘you’), in which she demonstrates power and status. In reality, she does not have either the power or the status to ever have such conversations. In the imagination of her authority, she reveals her *lack of* power in relation to the Chinese state and her frustration about the lack of perceived respect and voice given to foreigners.

3.4.3 *CV Builders*

Many of the teachers within this group commented on the benefits delivered by their Whiteness and native English-speaking status, and anticipated criticism connected with their ability to secure teaching posts on these grounds. The **anticipatory** versions of double voicing are often used when a speaker wishes to deflect personal criticism of their abilities or actions. It can also take the more assertive form of the

pre-emptive strike: where criticism from another speaker is anticipated and the speaker strikes back before the interlocutor has a chance (Baxter, 2014).

An example of this is provided by George, the CV builder/gap year volunteer teacher, who explained how he felt the FELT occupation itself is *bound up* with voices of criticism from the Chinese authorities and some members of the public:

It almost makes me feel embarrassed to be an English teacher, because it comes with an assumption that it's not a particularly well-qualified job, that you're not really taken that seriously as a professional person. Especially in China for some reason the Chinese consumer market doesn't really seem to be able to discriminate between qualified teachers and less qualified teachers.

Parody and mimicry were also used by this group, often less confident about their teaching abilities and their position in China. These versions of double voicing were used to explain that their current situation had been inflicted on them by their Chinese employers. Shannon, the young American who had come to China to improve her Chinese, explained that she struggled in her first teaching post because:

My main training, if you could call it training, was just to observe other teachers. They just told me to observe, and they would assign me classes to watch. I would take notes or ask questions and then I finally started getting my own classes and then it was like, "We're done and now we can have you be useful".

Shannon also uses **corrective** double voicing here, to pre-empt any criticism of her work and defend her position as a completely untrained English teacher put in charge of classes for which Chinese parents are spending a lot of money as, in part, the fault of her employers. For many of the respondents, Chinese school administrative systems were described as confusing and even illogical, acting as an additional strain for the language teachers. CV Builders, who predominantly worked in less prestigious schools, often complained that they were expected to teach long hours, with little time to prepare and sometimes no warning of what sort of class they will be teaching next. As a new teacher, Shannon found this particularly stressful, and in her recollections of what was said to her by her boss, she again uses parody and mimics the behaviour of her employers:

With half an hour to go, I would be told to teach this class, and it could be two hours long. This would be with a class you don't know. So, you don't know the level, you don't know the behaviour and you're just kind of thrown in and that's frustrating as a new teacher with very little experience.

Through her interpretation of what her employers are thinking, Shannon learnt new qualities of resilience and determination:

I was very much thrown in at the deep end and the Chinese communication is quite poor, so I just was like, "Maybe they just assume that I know what I'm doing!" So, after struggling for a week and a half, two weeks, I finally was just like, "I have to man up and figure this out so that I'm not stressed" because it was stressing me out.

3.4.4 *Tourist Teachers*

As unqualified teachers often in very vulnerable situations, the Tourist Teachers demonstrated a heightened awareness that they are not perceived favourably by the Chinese authorities. Many were on temporary visas and feared that they could be expelled without notice. Going to the police station for registration and visa issues was often described as an unpleasant and highly stressful experience, as Asli, the young Turkish teacher explains. Her non-native speaker/non-White status have been additional factors for her to negotiate. She double voices her White British and American colleagues somewhat bitterly: *‘they are not usually concerned with these issues at all’*.

In contrast, she feels that she is subject to frequent harassment by the security bureau. She double-voices the Chinese security officers who challenge her nationality and English-speaking status, using parody to interpret their motives, accenting their behaviour with her indignation at the way in which she is treated:

I have to submit the paperwork for my permit every six months and it’s a nightmare, it’s a total nightmare. Mine is due in a month and every time we go there, we almost are totally harassed by the public security officers, they’re not really fond of us, they just don’t like foreigners. I mean I might sound like I’m simplifying it but really their behaviour is the most unfriendly behaviour I’ve ever seen!

It is interesting here that Asli **anticipates** that I might think she is ‘over-simplifying’ but **corrects** this assumption by reiterating the parody and mimicry:

The last time I was they were suspicious and hostile. I got asked the same questions again and again and because they couldn’t find anything, they went through the paperwork and finally the police officer asked whether my passport was fake. It’s peculiar to law enforcement- we’re treated like illegals without all the proper paperwork. It used to be once a year. But they changed the regulations. No explanation has been given and now I get anxious. it’s quite unfriendly. I don’t know what’s going to happen next. They just snap at us for no reason, at me...

As Asli transposes what the police said to her into her own words, she infiltrates the reported speech with her ‘authorial retort’ (Baxter, 2014: 35); embedding the tale with her understanding -and criticism- of the security bureau’s attitudes towards migrants such as herself. In the process she reveals her senses of personal powerlessness and vulnerability in her relations with the Chinese state.

3.5 Discussion and Conclusion

In this chapter, I have used the concept of double voicing to explore the differences in the ways that FELTs from different backgrounds articulate their relations to China. I argue that double voicing provides a valuable lens by which to unpick relative positions of power within the different groups. Double voicing provides insights based on a discursive perspective: namely that when a person speaks, their choice of

language reveals wider social-cultural aspects of their identity such as race, nationality, educational and professional background, status and context, which may either enhance or constrain the ways in which they are positioned (Baxter, 2014).

The findings discussed in this chapter demonstrate that there are distinctive and complex relationships between the enactment of power and the use of double voicing. Fairclough (2009) identifies three forms of power: *power to*, *power over* and *power behind*. 'Power to' is the productive capacity to achieve things, and Old Professionals such as Conor and Stacey show how they are able to draw on the voices of other successful FELTS to inform their ability to access the best employment opportunities in China.

'Power over' refers to the coercive or repressive power of one individual or institution over another. This is demonstrated in interesting yet complex ways by the New Professionals. From a poststructuralist perspective, speakers may constantly shift in their subject positioning between being either more powerful or powerless (Leonard, 2003; Davies, 2010); and 'power over' reveals how, in different contexts, certain people have greater capacity than others to exploit the resources and agency of others. Some people are positioned more powerfully than others by virtue of institutional discourses that privilege certain social categories over others, such as a person's race, nationality and status etc. (Baxter, 2014). Thus, Mark on the one hand demonstrates awareness of the power of the Chinese security system, and the relative powerlessness of FELTS to withstand the execution of punitive policies. However, on the other hand he attempts to 'strike back' by suggesting 'they are frightened'; in the process, asserting his own power over them. Further, he privileges his own moral position over that of some of his students through his assertion 'they are racists'. Similar complexities are demonstrated by Claudia who on the one hand demonstrates that she is powerless to the Chinese state's ability to cut off her digital resources and submit her to burdensome bureaucracy. On the other, Claudia identifies that she, too, has resources to exploit: her labour. She knows that her race, nationality and native English speaker status are highly desired social characteristics that deliver her some degree of power.

'Power behind' refers to 'the habitual, often institutionalised forms or practices which shape or influence what people actually do' (Fairclough 2009: 514). This is demonstrated clearly in the talk of the CV Builders, who recognised the 'power behind' held by both the Chinese state and the ELT labour market. George's use of double voicing reveals his full awareness of the low status given to unqualified FELTs such as himself, while Shannon shows how she needed to submit to her employer's practices and just 'man up'. Through this acceptance of their relative powerlessness, both are, however, able to benefit from the opportunities they can access. In contrast, Asli, the Black Tourist Teachers, shows in her double voicing how powerless she feels in the face of the power behind China's migration policies. She is left marooned with nothing to exploit but her illegal labour.

Foreign English Language teachers are highly diverse in terms of social characteristics and skills, but most come to China with big hopes to enjoy new opportunities. The extent to which they are successful depends on the possession of the forms

of capital desired by the Chinese state and its people: a mix of cultural attributes including race, nationality and skills. The variations in power that these delivers are clearly recognised by the participants in this chapter, who through their double voicing demonstrate the complex linguistic work that must be done to construct a ‘viable subjectivity’ for both themselves and others in relation to the Chinese state.

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Part II
COVID-19 and the Dynamics
of Racialization

Chapter 4

“Now We Are No Longer Needed!”: How White European Migrants Talk About Race and Covid-19 in China



Shanshan Lan

Niels, a 55-year-old Danish entrepreneur in Guangzhou, first came to China in the 1990s and did business in different Chinese cities. I met him in a middle class neighborhood near the Canton Fair exhibition center in May 2022 when China was still in the middle of the zero-Covid campaign. Residents in the neighborhood were allowed to move around freely as long as no new cases were discovered. But once in a while, there would be a mass PCR test. As one of the few foreigners residing in the neighborhood, Niels stood out due to his super-friendly attitude towards others. He would wave and smile at every Chinese he met as if they were old friends. Some residents were surprised, others waved back. Most people got used to the sight of this smiling *laowai* (a colloquial term for foreigner) who walked his dog almost every day in the neighborhood. Niels' performance of the image of the friendly foreigner needs to be contextualized by the stigmatization of foreigners as “virus carriers” or “foreign trash” during the early stage of the pandemic. When I asked him about the changing status of foreigners in China, Niels replied, “Back in 2000, we were still treated like superstars. I used to have privileges as a white person, but being a foreigner is no longer a status symbol. Now we are no longer needed!”

Niels is in the PPE (personal protective equipment) business, selling face masks and self-test packs made in China to clients in Europe and North America. He admitted that with many foreigners leaving, his business became more essential and profitable. However, Niels had a personal dilemma. Niels wanted to visit his father in Denmark, who was very sick, but he was worried that he would not be able to return. He said, “When people leave China, their visa will be cancelled. They have to apply for a new visa to come back. China is not giving new visas to foreigners now, except those who are married to Chinese. They are using Covid-19 as an excuse to kick out foreigners.” When I mentioned discrimination against Black

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Africans during the early stage of the pandemic, Niels confessed, “My life would be quite different here if I was black. Black Africans used to have a hard time renewing their visa. Now it’s difficult for all foreigners to renew their visa.” Niels’ lamentation on the declined status of foreigners in China, his initial differentiation and later inclusion of Black Africans in the foreigner category points to the racialized yet elastic nature of the foreigner category: while it mainly refers to White foreigners in general, it can also strategically include Black foreigners as a critique of China’s visa policy during the pandemic.

Existing literature on international migrants in China usually treats the experiences of White and Black migrants separately. While White migrants are often associated with expatriate studies (Farrer, 2019; Lehmann, 2014), research on Black migrants tends to focus on race and low-end globalization (Bodomo, 2012; Lan, 2017; Mathews, 2017). Recent scholarship in migration studies tries to challenge the binary between migrants and expatriates (Lundström, 2017). Fechter and Walsh (2010) call for a postcolonial approach to expatriate studies which takes into account the unequal power relations between White expatriates, local people, and other groups of transnational migrants. Kunz (2020) emphasizes the importance of examining the relationship between the social construction of expatriate and migrant as racialized categories with fuzzy boundaries. The participants in this research belong to a new wave of middling migration which capitalizes on increasing business and job opportunities in China’s rising economy (Camenisch, 2022b). While most self-identify as foreigners in China, this paper prefers to call them migrants. By analyzing White experiences within the migration paradigm, this paper highlights the racialized nature of their interpretations of pandemic politics. It also contributes to existing literature which renders Whiteness visible in migration studies.

Current research on the experiences of international migrants in China during the Covid-19 crisis mainly focuses on the early stage of the pandemic, when different groups of foreign migrants tried to leave China (Kefala & Lan, 2022; Sier, 2022). Little ethnographic research has been done on foreign migrants who remained in China and who went through the state’s draconian zero Covid policy. This paper fills the gap by examining how different groups of White Europeans discuss, reflect on, and make sense of the (ir)relevance of race and Whiteness in their navigation of the zero-Covid policy. Current scholarship on race in China is marked by the high visibility of Black Africans and the relative invisibility of various groups of White migrants (Castillo, 2020; Cheng, 2011; Lan, 2016). Although there is an emerging scholarship on White Westerners in Asia, little effort has been made to distinguish Whiteness as a hegemonic power structure and White people as embodiment of corporeal Whiteness. This research treats the pandemic as a historical conjuncture when the relational and precarious nature of Whiteness in China is both highlighted and contested (Lan et al., 2022). I ask the following questions: How does the Covid-19 pandemic challenge, reinforce, or transform the racialized subjectivities of various groups of White migrants? How is White hegemony rearticulated in new languages as a result of the intersection between migration, Covid-19 pandemic, and geopolitical tensions between China and Western countries?

This paper divides the Covid-19 crisis in China into three stages, depending on the state's pandemic control policy. The early stage (from December 2019 to April 2020) was marked by the Wuhan lockdown (January 23 to April 8, 2020) and the state's successful suppression of the spread of the virus. The second stage (May 2020 to November 2022) represents the normalization of prevention and control. It can be further divided into two periods. Between April 2020 and July 2021 the state propaganda was dominated by the fear of imported cases from overseas, which led to the stigmatization of foreigners as virus carriers and the rise of nationalism and xenophobia among Chinese citizens (Camenisch, 2022a). Starting in August 2021, China adopted a new strategy of dynamic zero policy in order to combat the more contagious Delta variant and later the Omicron variant. The goal was to “deal with localized COVID-19 cases precisely, to quickly cut off the transmission chain, and to end the epidemic in a timely manner” (Liu et al., 2022). However, the zero-Covid policy was also marked by stringent control of individual mobility via a complicated health code system and other Covid-related mobile apps developed by different local governments. From March 14 to June 1, 2022 Shanghai went through more than 2 months of lockdown due to an outbreak of Omicron. Residents reported lack of food, daily necessities, and freedom of movement, which had become headline news all over the world. The third stage (December 2022 to April 2023) marked the end of the dynamic zero policy and the relaxation of China's Covid control policy in general.

This research is based on ethnographic fieldwork in South China from April to August 2022, which fell into the second stage of the pandemic. The primary data consists of 26 semi-structured interviews with White-looking European migrants aged from 30 to 56. Their length of stay in China ranges from 1 to 20 years. Twelve of them are married to a Chinese spouse. Only five of the participants are female. In terms of nationality, six were from Germany, three from the Netherlands, three from Belgium, three from Finland, three from Great Britain, two from Italy, two from Bulgaria (a couple), one from Russia, one from Denmark, one from France, and one from Lithuania. In terms of occupation, they consist of foreign language teachers, university professors, self-initiated entrepreneurs, White-collar workers, and housewives. The secondary data consists of semi-structured interviews with one English teacher from Australia, two Filipino musicians, and six English teachers from the United States (two self-identified as African American, two self-identified as multi-racial American, one self-identified as Chinese American, one self-identified as German American; three had been interviewed by me in 2019). I choose not to focus on White Americans in this chapter due to the difficulties of recruiting Americans beyond the teaching English sector. Covid-19 and geopolitical tensions between China and the United States had compelled many Americans to leave China. My main way of recruiting American participants was by reconnecting with the English teachers whom I interviewed before in 2019. Nevertheless, I try to incorporate some interview data with American participants to contextualize the data on White Europeans. This chapter is also informed by open-ended interviews with 16 Chinese in close contact with foreign migrants. They are related to foreign migrants as partners, colleagues, or clients.

Due to Covid-related travel restrictions and social distance regulations, about two thirds of the interviews were conducted by phone. I first used my personal network to recruit research participants, then followed a snowball sampling method. Although the primary data presented here cannot represent the larger foreign community in China, it still provides rich ethnographic descriptions on some White European migrants' personal and structural feelings of anxiety and precariousness during the Covid-19 pandemic. I took hand written notes during the interviews and then typed them on my computer, usually within 24 h. All participants were based in China during the time of the interview except one British entrepreneur. He was in London but was scheduled to return to China in 2 weeks. Participant observation was mainly conducted among Chinese friends and family members. Such data helped contextualize the larger social and political environment in China during Covid-19 and also helped me interpret the interview data in a more nuanced way.

4.1 Race, White Migration, and the Chinese Gazes

Existing literature on race and migration mainly focuses on the accumulation of racial knowledge for migrants from the developing world, usually about their awareness of White racism (Bailey, 2001; Gualtieri, 2001; Lan, 2012). However, little research has been done on the racial learning of White Westerners who migrate to the global South. Historically race, racism, and Whiteness (or White hegemony) are not salient discourses in China since the major parameter for constructing self/other relations is based on the Chinese/foreigner binary. However, China is not immune to the transnational circulation of colonial racial knowledge. Inspired by literature which examines the intersection between indigenous concepts of group differentiation and Western racial ideology (Guridy, 2010; Kim, 2008; Lan, 2012; Stam & Shohat, 2012), Lan et al. (2022) propose that it is the triangular relations between Chineseness, Whiteness, and Blackness that define the shifting meanings of race in contemporary China. The diversification of foreign populations in China and the outbreak of Covid-19 has provided a new historical context to examine the reproduction and reconfiguration of Western racial ideology in a post-colonial non-Western context, where racist institutional structure was largely absent. This paper suggests that White migration to the global South involves the crossing over of both national and racial boundaries. I am interested in whether the predominant race-mute culture in Europe gets reproduced in the Chinese context or gets articulated in new languages as a result of White migration.

Frankenberg (1993) conceptualizes Whiteness at three levels. First, it is a location of structural domination; second, it is a stand point from which White people look at the world; third, it consists of a set of unmarked cultural practices. The first point is less relevant in China due to the structural marginalization of White migrants in the Chinese administration system. However, the second and the third points are still quite valid in the context of international migration. Together they speak to the global circulation of White norms and values, which nevertheless remains largely

invisible to White migrants themselves. As noted by Ahmed (2007), “whiteness is only invisible for those who inhabit it, or those who get so used to its inhabitance that they learn not to see it” (157). In her study of corporate expatriates in Jakarta, Fetcher (2005) finds that despite their experiences of being categorized as the racial Other in Indonesian society, White Westerners still hold on to the notion of Whiteness as unmarked and the universal norm. This research furthers Fetcher’s study by examining how White migrants interpret and respond to their Othering experiences in China during the Covid-19 crisis, when social privileges associated with White skin and Western looks are called into question and corporeal Whiteness is susceptible to social stigmatization. It finds that Whiteness as a standpoint from which to view racial others and as a set of unmarked cultural practices remains largely unchallenged in China since it serves as the background for the lived experiences of European migrants.

In my research on Black Africans in China, Lan (2019) identifies multiple Chinese gazes. I have argued that the Chinese gazes do not command the same hegemonic power as the White gaze, yet they contribute to the racialization of Black Africans in various ways. This research suggests that White European migrants in China are also subjected to multiple Chinese gazes. Farrer (2019) notes that expatriates in Shanghai are perceived as the privileged Other in China. Henry (2013) argues that the figure of the (White) foreigner is frequently perceived as “an archetype without individuality, an actor in a play dictated by Chinese expectations and norms” (223). This research finds that a big part of White migrants’ racial learning in China is their keen awareness of the Chinese gazes due to the predominance of the Chinese/foreigner distinction. I interpret White narratives in this paper as strategic responses to the disciplinary power of Chinese gazes. By resorting to Whiteness as a standpoint, a world view, and a racial habitus (in the sense that they have inherited White privilege in the home country environment where they were brought up, socialized, and educated), my participants consciously or unconsciously launch the hegemonic White gaze as a weapon or coping strategy to contest the Chinese gazes (Ahmed, 2007). I argue that the dynamic interactions between the Chinese gazes and the White gaze helps generate new tropes on Chinese racism and White fragility.

4.2 Changing Perceptions of Foreigners in China

Since the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, the presence of a foreign population has been strictly controlled by the state. In the 1950s and 1960s, foreigners were divided into friends and enemies based on their political affiliation with the Chinese Communist Party. In the early reform era between late 1970s and 1990s, foreigners were evaluated by their contribution to China’s economic development (Brady, 2003). In the 1980s there was a notable conflation of Whiteness and foreignness since the majority of the foreigners in China were White Westerners who worked as investors or top managerial staff in multinational corporations. The association of White bodies with wealth and social prestige was perpetuated by the

state's *waishi* (foreign affairs) policy, which pursued a segregation doctrine prohibiting daily life interactions between foreigners and ordinary Chinese (Brady, 2003). With China's accession to the WTO in 2001 and the rapid growth of the Chinese economy, the images of foreigners became more diverse in popular media due to the diversification of international migrants (Pieke Frank, 2012). News about foreigners hustling in China with part-time jobs and dubious legal status helped foster the changing perception of Whites as beneficiaries of China's economic prosperity (Hu, 2012). Meanwhile, obnoxious behaviors of Whites towards Chinese citizens in public spaces also gave rise to periodic outbursts of popular nationalism on the Chinese internet, which sometimes resorts to using derogatory racialized language such as "foreign trash" (Lan, 2017).

In response to the rising tide of popular nationalism, the state has been reforming its immigration policy to make distinctions between desirable and undesirable foreigners (Haugen, 2015). In July 2013, China implemented a new immigration Law, which contained tougher provisions for illegal immigrants. Meanwhile, it also introduced a new visa category to facilitate the inflow of foreign talent. In 2016 China introduced a new work permit system which divided foreigners into three categories: A) top talent, B) professional talent, C) unskilled workers. The goal was "encouraging the top, controlling the middle, and limiting the bottom" (Tatlow, 2016). In 2018, China established the National Immigration Administration to streamline and centralize immigration control. With its emphasis on the "Chinese spirit" and the "great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation," Xi's Chinese Dream contains a heavy dose of racial nationalism. The outbreak of Covid-19 in China in early 2020 and anti-Asian racism in the Western world during the early stage of the pandemic has triggered a rising tide of biopolitical nationalism in China. De Kloet et al. (2020) define biopolitical nationalism as the dynamics between body, geopolitics and affect, manifested in the myriad ways in which the biopolitical efforts of nation-states are being compared, applauded and supported. Biopolitical nationalism not only justifies China's dynamic zero policy with its heavy-handed restriction of internal and international mobilities, but contributes to the stigmatization of foreign bodies as a source of infection and as the racialized other against whom the Chinese ego is elevated.

In 2020, Black Africans in Guangzhou were reported to be a major target for the local state's Covid-19 containment campaigns (Burke et al., 2020). However, anti-foreign sentiment was soon extended to White foreigners as well due to the fear of imported cases and the stigmatization of foreign bodies as virus carriers. White migrants reported being denied access to hotels, restaurants, gyms, shops and other facilities. Some even encountered physical and verbal abuse from local Chinese (Kuo & Davidson, 2020). China's proposal for a new green card scheme for foreigners during the pandemic incited a new surge of popular nationalism and xenophobia among Chinese netizens (Speelman, 2023). Video clips and images of foreigners violating Covid control regulations were circulated via Chinese social media, which aggravated the stigmatization of foreigners as "foreign trash" (Ang & Martin, 2023). Camenisch (2022a) proposes that such negative media representations of foreigners during the pandemic helped support the Chinese state's claim for legitimacy by

externalizing the virus. Draconian Covid control policies also forced undocumented foreigners (both White and non-White) to leave China since daily survival was no longer possible without valid documentations.

Biopolitical nationalism in China was also escalated by the Sino-U.S. trade war, when hostility between the two governments intensified geopolitical tensions. Jason, a 31-year-old Chinese American teacher based in Xi'an told me, “The Chinese attitudes towards foreigners have been changing. Before there was this openness and curiosity; now there is less curiosity and their attitude is becoming more confrontational. It was like, ‘Wow, why does the U.S. have so many shootings? What are the political differences between China and the U.S.?’ I find some of the questions offensive.” Nathan, a 34-year-old Belgian marketing representative in a Chinese tech company in Shenzhen, also noted the changing attitude of Chinese towards foreigners. He remarked, “Chinese are beginning to show this arrogance towards foreigners nowadays. Their self-esteem has increased a lot. In the last 2 years there was a change of mentality. They don’t bother to ask for our opinions. They think they are better. They have the wisdom. They have a strong economy.” Nathan attributes this Chinese arrogance to three factors. First, the trade war between China and the United States not only impacts relations between the two countries, but the lived experiences of all Western foreigners in China. Second, since China did a much better job in controlling the virus than many Western countries during the early stage of the pandemic, it has generated strong feelings of superiority and pride among Chinese citizens. Finally, political turmoil and anti-Asian violence in the U.S. has prompted more overseas Chinese to return to China to work. China can say no to foreigners because of this transnational inflow of talent with bilingual and bicultural expertise.

This paper understands White identities as contested, fragmented, and pluralized due to the intersection of race, nationality, educational background, gender, marital status, social economic standing, legal status, and language skills. I identify three major themes in my participants’ narratives: the vulnerable foreigner, the cultural outsider, and victims of Chinese racism. The distinction between these themes are analytical since they are often tangled together in daily life.

4.3 The Vulnerable Foreigner

The most prominent theme among my White participants’ narratives was their feelings of vulnerability during Covid time. This can be attributed to several factors. First is the rise of nationalism and xenophobia, which led to discrimination and stigmatization of foreigners in daily life settings. Second is the politicization of the pandemic due to geopolitical tensions between China and the United States. Some participants were afraid of commenting on China’s Covid control policy for fear of being labelled as foreign spies or instigators. Thirdly, some participants reported having problems using Chinese apps and accessing the health code system. Last but not least, Covid-19 has negatively impacted their work and business opportunities

and has placed great constraints on their internal and international mobility. This section tries to contextualize White European migrant's Covid-related experiences in China. While Covid may have provided the language for White foreigners to discuss their feelings of vulnerability and frustration in time of fragile transnationalism at the global scale (Nehring & Hu, 2022), this paper highlights the disruptions and continuities in the racialization of White migrants before and during the pandemic, which may be obscured by the highly emotional stories in the initial stage of Covid-19 (Kefala & Lan, 2022; Sier, 2022).

Otto, a 46-year-old German professor in science and engineering at a Chinese university who speaks limited Chinese, has a Chinese wife and has worked in China for 7 years. Otto holds a type A working visa, which is the most privileged type. His university provided him with good research money and a generous stipend to purchase a big apartment. However, Otto was very unhappy with the administrative troubles he encountered as a foreigner during Covid time. He complained, "For every single administrative issue you need to use an app, but none of those apps worked for me. When I had problem getting my health code, I couldn't even take a bus. Those low-level people in uniforms are sub-humans. They are plainly following rules like a machine. Somebody forgot to program intelligence into the machine." As an overseas Chinese, I also had some unpleasant experiences with street level Covid-control staff, yet I was quite shocked by Otto's blatant racist comments against them. Otto was obviously frustrated with the Chinese administrative system and the obstinacy and inflexibility of some Chinese Covid-control staff, but he could not fight back since aggressive behavior by foreigners in public places became heavily stigmatized during the pandemic. Otto might risk being arrested if he openly challenged the Covid-control workers. In contrast to Niels' performance of the "friendly foreigner" in Chinese public spaces, Otto's outburst in a confidential interview setting constitutes a backstage performance of the angry yet vulnerable foreigner, who resorts to dehumanizing language as a strategy to deride those Covid-control workers whom he could not challenge openly.

Otto's story needs to be contextualized by his pre-Covid racial learning experiences. As early as 2000, when he visited China for the first time as a college student, Otto witnessed how his German travel guide performed the foreign bully stereotype to get the service he wanted in a hotel in Beijing. The travel guide also warned Otto that he should be very careful and try to avoid using the trick at the wrong time and on the wrong people. Otto learned his lesson well. He recalled a few incidents when he had conflicts with some Chinese service staff. The first happened in a bank, when the female clerk requested a confirmation letter from the German embassy since Otto's name in his new passport, which bore his title Dr., did not match the old one in the bank's information system. Otto tried in vain to explain. Then he threatened to close his account and complain to the manager. He told me, "When I became aggressive and unpleasant, suddenly things worked out. She was just one of those tiny people who want to show that she is in a position of power." The second incident occurred in an airport, when a young female employee failed to find his flight on her computer. Otto recalled, "She had this arrogant face and I felt like punching her right in the face. I started arguing, with a volume of internal announcement. Half

the terminal heard it. Then her ego melted and she treated me more politely.” Otto’s performance of the aggressive foreigner stereotype highlights the intersection of race, gender, and class in such interracial encounters, when his White male superiority was challenged or not honored by young female Chinese staff. The misogynist and demeaning language used by Otto betrayed his internalization of Whiteness as a standpoint and a worldview, which automatically places these women at the lower end of the racialized and gendered hierarchy in the global service industry.

The contrast between Otto’s pre-Covid and Covid-related experiences highlights the shift from the public to the private domain in some White migrants’ engagement with Chinese gazes. However, what remains consistent is the colonial/Orientalist connotations in Otto’s narrative. Instead of critically reflecting on the decline of privilege associated with White skin and Western looks, Otto resorted to universalistic ideas such as fairness and justice to defend himself. He said, “I am a polite person and I pay a lot of attention to fairness. I can be quite aggressive if the situation requires it.” Camenisch (2022b) found that some of her Swiss interviewees tended to normalize the foreigner bonus in China and took their ascribed White supremacy for granted. In Otto’s case, such feelings of security seemed to give way to feelings of White fragility in pandemic times. According to DiAngelo (2011), White fragility is marked by White expectations for racial comfort while at the same time lowering the ability to tolerate racial stress. In the Chinese context, White fragility is often mingled with the various disadvantages of being a foreigner, such as the language barrier and a lack of knowledge of the Chinese administrative system. Jason, the Chinese American teacher in Xi’an, mentioned a video on *Douyin* (the Chinese version of TikTok), in which a White American man wearing a face mask was yelling words such as “fuck” and “shit” to some Chinese PCR test staff. Jason knew the man and he confessed that he would never have imagined the guy to behave like that. Jason opined, “I think he was trying to get attention. If I need anything here, I don’t have to try very hard. I just speak Chinese. But for them, with the language barrier, and all the technical difficulties of getting registered in the Chinese system, it can be quite frustrating.”

4.4 The Cultural Outsider

Aino is a 34-year-old Finnish woman who used to work as a model in Hong Kong, where she met her Korean American husband, a wealthy banker. After the death of her husband, she returned to Finland with her two children. Then she met a wealthy Chinese man online and decided to move to China. She had lived in China for 3.5 years at the time of the interview. Her boyfriend managed to get her a work visa as an in-house lawyer for a Chinese company since she holds a bachelor’s degree in international law. Aino has been living a very extravagant life in China. Her two children attend expensive international schools which only admit students with foreign passports. She lives in one of the most expensive areas in the city, where most of the embassy staff and business elites live. She has two horses, three dogs and one

cat. Aino seemed to live in a bubble, well provided by her Chinese boyfriend, who paid for her daily needs, and for her regular consultation with a psychologist in Hong Kong for 2 years during Covid-19. Aino felt precarious during the interview because she had just broken up with her boyfriend, whose English is not good and with whom she felt she could not have a deep conversation. She was also concerned with the unpredictability of China's Covid policy.

Aino told me that she heard stories about anti-foreign discrimination during the early stage of the pandemic. For example, a Finnish woman who had lived for 10 years in China and married a Chinese man was denied service by her Chinese hairdresser. A White British teacher was beaten up in an elevator for no reason. Although shocked by the stories she heard, Aino never experienced anything negative herself. Instead, she had been receiving preferential treatment on various occasions. Aino attributed this to cultural differences between China and Finland. She said, "In Finnish culture, we are all equal, but Chinese love special treatment. My ex even used his connections to arrange us to take the PCR test without queuing up like others. The Finnish side of me felt very uncomfortable with such VIP treatment. I could walk through the gate of my residence compound without showing my health code, because the security guards all know me. I felt uncomfortable about it. Chinese love VIP treatment, but Finnish people can't take it. Culturally, I am still quite European." It is interesting to note that Aino interpreted the preferential treatment she received in China as something imposed on her by Chinese culture, not something she actively embraced. Aino's contrast between the egalitarian Finnish culture and the hierarchical Chinese culture reflects the invisibility of Whiteness as a standpoint from which she views the Chinese Other. Such cultural explanations not only prevent critical reflections on White privilege, but absolve her of guilty feelings and thus reproduce the discourse of White innocence (Wekker, 2016).

In contrast to Otto's desire to be included in the Chinese system, Aino voluntarily placed herself outside the Chinese cultural and political system. She offered, "We foreigners know that China is not a place we should express our opinions, but the pandemic forces us to take a position." She mentioned discussions in the Finnish WeChat group during the Shanghai lockdown, when people saw their Chinese neighbors going out to protest. She said, "The Finnish people were telling each other: we should not join the demonstration because we don't want to be labelled as foreign instigators. It can be used against us. In reality local demonstrations were not instigated by foreigners, but there are always fake news in the media. It's always foreign governments who are involved in the planning of protest events in China." Aino's testimony revealed the feelings of insecurity of the Finnish community in Shanghai. They chose to be onlookers and keep distance from the pandemic politics in China. Such performance of neutrality or nonchalance constituted a strategy of self othering, which caters to and shields them from the political gaze of the Chinese state. Similar as Otto's case, complaints or critiques of the Chinese state were restricted to the personal domain.

The relational nature of Aino's identity politics was also reflected by her differentiation from Americans and pandemic politics in the United States. When she shared with some Chinese friends how badly some foreigners were treated during

the initial stage of Covid-19, she was disappointed with their reaction. She said, “They would reply that overseas Chinese were attacked more frequently in the U.S.. So their counter argument is like: it is worse in America. Here people always assume you are an American. I don’t like Americans. I don’t care what happened in America. I care about what’s happening in China because I live here.” The exchanges between Aino and her Chinese friends show how pandemic politics in China is intertwined with geo-political tensions at the international level. Aino’s disassociation from American identity reflects her alertness to rising nationalism and anti-American sentiment in China. She insisted on interpreting anti-foreign sentiment in China as a local phenomenon and was reluctant to relate it to anti-Chinese racism in the United States. In this vein, the racial dimension of global pandemic politics was played down or ignored in favor of emphasizing distinctions based on nationality. Aino’s claim of her dislike of Americans also shifted the discussion from the structural to the personal level. It not only shielded her from anti-American sentiment in China, but disassociated her from White supremacy as a transnational power structure. In the end, Aino managed to construct a fluid identity, which strategically positioned herself outside pandemic politics at the local and global scales, yet maintained her critical perspective towards all parties involved.

Although discussions of race and Whiteness in Aino’s narrative were often coded in the language of nationality, culture, and foreigner status, they became more salient when the conversation turned to Blacks in China. When asked if there is racism in China, Aino replied, “There is racism in every country, but for me it’s mainly positive. I got better treatment because I am white and beautiful. If I was a Black African, things would be quite different.” Aino’s reply echoes several White participants’ comments on racism against Black Africans in Guangzhou during the initial stage of the pandemic. In such narratives, race and racism are represented as only associated with Blacks and White identity remains invisible, unmarked, and deracialized. As noted by Frankenberg, “when white people...look at racism, we tend to view it as an issue that people of color face and have to struggle with, but not as an issue that generally involves or implicates us” (1993:6). Aino mentioned that once she took her children to the Stone Chamber Catholic church in Guangzhou because she wanted them to have some religious experiences. She said, “I was surprised to find that most of the congregation is Black. It was like a totally different world. It seems the Africans here are very religious people.” Aino’s shock at encountering Blackness in a Chinese Catholic church reflects the secluded yet privileged life she has had in China, which offers little chance of encountering Black migrants, who seem to occupy a different structural position from White migrants in the foreign community. Although she complimented Africans as religious people, one can still feel the White gaze in her narrative. Aino’s case shows that while some White migrants try to position themselves as the foreign Other in Chinese society, they hesitate to identify with Black Africans as the racially marked foreign Other.

4.5 Victims of Chinese Racism?

A third theme that emerges from some participants' narratives is racism against foreigners in China. This is the most controversial theme because participants often draw on what Hill (2008) calls "folk theory of race and racism," which understands race as biologically based and racism as entirely based on individual beliefs, intentions, and actions. The Chinese case adds complexity to this folk theory of race and racism because some participants make no distinction between racism in China and racism in Western countries. They seem to treat the definition of racism as self-evident and thus switch easily from discussions of anti-Black racism to racism against (White) foreigners in China. White complaints of Chinese racism mainly focuses on three topics: physical and verbal assault, administrative exclusion, and universal racism. While there is no consensus on the definition of racism in China, participants were often quick to identify Chinese racism against Blacks. The unmarked nature of White hegemony not only enabled my participants to speak on behalf of all foreigner groups in China, but has helped reproduce dominant racial discourses in Western countries such as White virtue and White innocence (Hill, 2008; Wekker, 2016).

Adrian, a 27-year-old English teacher from the U.K., held a bachelor's degree in journalism and was working in a middle school in South China. Adrian admitted that he was treated well in the school and even enjoyed preferential treatment over his Chinese colleagues, but he noticed a change in Covid time, when people started avoiding him in public places. Adrian related to me two incidents. The first one happened outside a night club, when he was with two other foreigners and two Chinese women. Some Chinese guys yelled at the women, "why do you hang out with foreigners?" The two sides got into an argument. One of the Chinese threw a metal chair at Adrian. He ended up having a fractured pinky finger. Adrian threatened to call the police, but the Chinese claimed they had relatives in the police. "This is China. You could die here," they said. The night club scene reflects the complex intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and pandemic politics. While Adrian portrayed himself and his friends as innocent foreigners being attacked by some racist Chinese, it remained unclear to me how the verbal exchanges escalated into physical violence and whether the people involved were intoxicated or not. Another incident happened in 2021 on an airplane, when some Chinese passengers refused to sit next to Adrian and his friends. He recalled, "A staff from the airline asked us: when did you come to China? I said if I carried virus, I wouldn't be able to board the plane. Eventually they moved us to another area, where there were two rows of seats separating us from other passengers." Adrian was very upset with such negative experiences. He felt unsafe, unwelcomed, and a victim of Chinese racism.

Adrian's story reflects the racialization and stigmatization of (White) foreigners as virus carriers during Covid-19. However, his accusation of Chinese racism needs to be contextualized by the complex interaction between the Chinese gazes and the White gaze. Fetcher (2005) observes that some expatriates in Indonesia are less concerned with the contextual nuances of their othering experiences and tend to

ascribe them to “malevolent or derogatory intentions” (97). In a similar vein, Adrian’s interpretation of Chinese racism seemed to be restricted to negative individual mindsets, attitudes, and behaviors. In his attempt to offer a cultural explanation of Chinese racism, Adrian fell back on Orientalism. He said, “There is a lack of education of globalness in China. China has been holding up this isolationist approach, this Middle Kingdom mentality, for too long. ‘We were invaded in the past. We were the victims of misgivings of foreigners.’ In an age of globalization, it’s impossible to keep yourself isolated from the world.” Adrian’s comments resonate with the colonial White gaze due to its essentialization and de-historicization of Chinese culture. In his eyes, China’s lockdown policy was not a reflection of the superiority of the Chinese system, but a manifestation of the century-old Middle Kingdom mentality. There is also the collapse of time frames in his narrative, through which China’s colonial history was overwritten by a Western-centric discourse of globalization. Fetcher (2005) observes that expatriates in Indonesia responded to being racially othered by resorting to the same strategies of racial stereotyping that they were subjected to themselves. In the China case, interactions between the White gaze and the Chinese gazes are not based on equal terms. The White gaze continues to exert its hegemonic power in a transnational context because it is backed up by a history of colonialism, White supremacy, and the global circulation of Western racial ideologies.

At the end of the interview, Adrian related to me a recent BBC documentary concerning a racist Chinese. He said, “A Chinese guy in Malawi was making racist videos about African children holding signs saying ‘I am a black monkey. My IQ is low.’ He was arrested in Kenya by the Chinese state because Malawi threatened to cut diplomatic relations with China. The BBC did an undercover investigation about this.” Adrian’s story has an interesting twist: it constructs Chinese as the perpetrators of racism and White people as the anti-racist heroes. Racism is again interpreted as negative individual behaviors and what remains unexamined is the global circulation of White racial knowledge: how do racist stereotypes that originated from the colonial era get reproduced by Chinese migrants in Africa? By projecting racism onto some Chinese individuals in Africa, Adrian seems to embrace Hill’s (2008) definition of the White virtue: White people who identify racism are good people and cannot be racists themselves. In this story, White people are constructed as the arbitrators, onlookers, and sympathizers who kept their distance from both the victims and perpetrators of racism. Ironically, this representation of White identity as universal, neutral, and external to any racialized system actually helps undermine Adrian’s earlier claim of being the victim of Chinese racism. There is a tension in his narrative between the universality of the foreigner (i.e. White) experience and the specificity of the racialized experiences of Black people. Overemphasis on being the victims of Chinese racism not only runs the risk of acknowledging White people as a racialized group, but threatens to erode the distinction between the White self and the Black other, which has been crucial for White identity construction in the Western world (c.f. Fetcher, 2005).

The dilemma between naming racism against foreigners in China and hesitation to identify with Black people as the racialized other is also reflected in Johan’s

narrative. Johan, a 35-year-old Belgian food and beverage manager in a luxury Chinese hotel, is married to a Chinese wife and had lived in China for 14 years. During the interview Johan kept emphasizing his Belgian survival philosophy. He said, "I am a very low-key person. I don't like to show off. It's a Belgian thing. We are a small country. We allow ourselves to be overruled by others. We have a power to adapt until a moment we can't take it anymore, then we resist." When asked whether there is discrimination against foreigners in China, Johan replied, "Yes, all the time. Racism is a problem back home, mainly against black people. I am against racism." After identifying Black people as the default victims of racism back home, Johan switched back to his experience in China. He remarked, "In China I cannot use some apps with my foreign passport because they require Chinese ID only. If this is not racism, what is racism? My son will go to school in 2 years, but he can't get a Chinese ID because he has an English name. Why are English names not accepted in the Chinese system? If this is not racism, what is racism?" Johan used several rhetorical questions as if the meaning of racism were self-evident, yet it remains unclear to me whether there is a connection between anti-Black racism back home and anti-foreigner racism in China. Like Adrian, Johan seems to view anti-Black racism from a distance through his embrace of White virtue. His accusation of Chinese racism is not based on shared experiences with Black people as the racial other, but on his feelings of insecurity and vulnerability as the foreign other.

A third way of interpreting Chinese racism among my White participants was universalism. Henry is a 56-year-old British entrepreneur who had lived in China for 10 years. When Covid broke out, he was in London for Christmas holidays. He ended up waiting for two and a half years before getting back to China again. Henry told me there was discrimination against foreigners in general and Black Africans in particular during Covid-19. He observed, "In 2021 racism and xenophobia were increasing in China and the government was not doing anything about it. In the U.K. there was racism too, but the government tried to deal with it." I asked Henry if there is a difference between racism in China and racism in the U.K. He replied, "Racism is essentially the same. It's the fear of outsiders within the group polluting and weakening the group. Britain has gone through the stage, but it's much frowned upon now." I mentioned the colonial legacy in the U.K., Henry reacted, "Yes, the U.K. has a colonial history, but some British people within Britain have never been overseas. Their racism stems from ignorance. They don't know colonialism. People worried about their jobs being taken, their culture being threatened. It's the same in China, when black people move to a certain community, Chinese people worried about blacks taking their jobs, stealing their women, spreading disease." Henry's narrative resonates with that of Adrian in several ways, i.e. denial of colonial history, attribution of racism to individual ignorance, identification of Black people as the default victims of racism, and praise of the U.K. state for doing a better job in combatting racism. Like Adrian and Johan, Henry made no clear distinctions between racism against Black foreigners and racism against White foreigners. White identity remains invisible and unracialized in his narrative.

4.6 White Fragility in an Era of Chinese Nationalism

So far I have been presenting White European narratives about their experiences during Covid-19 and how they speak on behalf of Black migrants and other foreigner groups. In this section, I want to present interview data with two African Americans to further contextualize the White narratives, and also to recover the agency of Black migrants as legitimate members in the foreign community.¹ Tiffany, a 27-year-old African American from Detroit who was working as an English teacher in a primary school in South China. She came to China in the middle of the pandemic, yet reported that pandemic life was easier in China and she was less stressed than back home. Back in Detroit, five of her relatives died for lack of treatment in time. She said, “Things were harder back home. The government was not paying for people to take a test.” After I shared with her some of my White participants’ negative experiences, she replied, “It’s a bigger shock for white folks because they’ve never been in a position like that. They’ve never been excluded based on their race or the way they look. They just don’t know how to handle it. Blacks are used to it. We are used to somebody moving away from us in public places.” Tiffany’s comment on White panic over discrimination in China resonates with DiAngelo’s (2011) concept of White fragility. White people have been shielded so long from racialized experiences that they are incapable of handling it. Tiffany’s move to China was a strategy to flee from structural racism back home, yet she was also mentally prepared to experience racism in China.

According to DiAngelo (2011), White fragility not only betrays White vulnerability, but “finds its support in and is a function of white privilege” (58). In addition to panic, some White participants mobilize the othering power of the White gaze to contest the disciplinary power of the Chinese gazes, i.e. the colonial/Orientalist narratives of Otto, Adrian, and Aino. In both Adrian and Henry’s narratives, Black experiences were used as evidence to accuse Chinese of being the new racists. Yet White fragility in China does not bring them closer to Black people. Marcus, a 27-year-old African American from Atlanta, was working as an English teacher in a primary school in Beijing and had been living in China since 2016. Marcus told me he had read a lot about anti-Black racism on the Internet before moving to China. So in the beginning he tried to avoid the Black community and socialize mainly with White expats. He reflected, “The white expats admitted me to their circle, but they did not share resources with me. They also said racist things around me and to me. For example, you are one of the good ones, why can’t other black people be like you? They talk down on Africans. I am not an African per se, but I feel somehow connected to Africa. Such racist rhetoric against Africans made me uncomfortable.” Marcus chose to leave the White expat’s circle and got involved in the Black diaspora community in China, where people were ready to share resources with him and offer emotional support. Marcus’ story shows the marginal position of Black people

¹ Most Black Africans left China during the early stage of Covid-19 and I was not able to recruit any African participants.

in the (White) foreign community. They can be strategically included in White discussions of racism in China, yet they can also be excluded from resource distribution and group identity formation.

In my study on Black Africans in Guangzhou (Lan, 2016), I have argued that anti-Black racism in China must be situated within the larger context of racial triangulation between China, Africa, and the West. In a similar vein, an examination of White racial formation in China needs to be interpreted within the framework of racial triangulation between Chineseness, Blackness, and Whiteness. I identify three sets of relations within this process of racial triangulation: White vs. Black; Chinese vs. White; Chinese vs. Black. The Black/White binary remains prominent in migrants' home country. It persists in the Chinese context as Black people continue to be identified as the racial other and the default victim of racism. However, the Black/White binary is also challenged due to the rising power of the Chinese gazes. For some of my White participants, Chineseness is competing with Whiteness to become the new norm. This has brought contradictory feelings: lamentation over the decline of White privilege and an odd sense of relief since Chinese promise to replace White people as the new racists. In regard to the Chinese/White relation, Whiteness becomes deracialized and replaced by foreignness. Narratives of the vulnerable foreigner and the cultural outsider enable some participants to claim a marginal space and disassociate themselves from White hegemony as a global power structure (c.f. Leonard, 2019). Individual negative experiences during Covid-19 have also provided some participants with the language to criticize Chinese racism. In terms of Chinese/Black relations, there is the convergence of the White gaze and the Chinese gazes, under which Black people remain the default racial other. Instead of identifying with Black migrants as the racial other, White migrants tend to present themselves as the arbitrators and onlookers of Chinese racism against Black migrants.

The Covid-19 pandemic is often constructed as a turning point in Western migrants' lived experiences in China (Kefala & Lan, 2022; Sier, 2022). This is coupled by sensational media reports of the exodus of expats from China during Covid time (Mantesso, 2022). However, my research among Western migrants who had stable jobs, businesses, and/or family connections in China shows that most of them chose to stay in China at the expense of temporarily losing access to transnational mobility opportunities. As the Western world started relaxing their Covid control policy and China remained persistent in its zero-Covid campaign, negative feelings continued to build up among some White participants, which manifested in individual narratives such as the vulnerable foreigner, the cultural outsider, and victims of Chinese racism. Yet participants' narratives often contain multiple temporalities (Farrer, 2010) which reflect both continuities and changes. Nevertheless, Covid-19 has triggered a new type of White fragility in the midst of rising nationalism and xenophobia among Chinese. This research finds that White identity remains invisible in China and is overshadowed by a self-claimed foreigner identity. White migrants feel a dilemma when discussing racism in China. While they feel the racialized nature of the Chinese gazes, they hesitate to acknowledge "White people" as a racialized group identity. Most White migrants find it hard to reconcile the

specificity of the Black experiences with the universality of White identity. Instead of developing new racial knowledge, they end up reproducing familiar racial ideologies back home, such as the folk theory of race and racism, White innocence, White virtue and White fragility.

Due to the small number of participants from Eastern and Southern European countries (6 out of 26), the data in this chapter can be biased since it focuses on migrants from Northern and Western European countries. While themes such as the vulnerable foreigner and the cultural outsider resonate to a certain extent with some of the experiences of Eastern and Southern European migrants, none of them identified as victims of Chinese racism. Compared to White migrants from Northern and Western Europe, migrants from Southern and Eastern Europe tend not to feel the same entitlement to Whiteness. The Russian and Lithuanian female participants reported legal precariousness due to regular police checks for visas and passports. The former attributed this to her job in the entertainment industry and the latter mentioned the deteriorating diplomatic relations between China and Lithuania. The Bulgarian couple felt well-treated in China due to friendly relations between China and their home country. One of my Italian participants suggested that Chinese were more kind to foreigners than Europeans. He related to me the discrimination experienced by his Chinese wife in Europe. The Bulgarian participant who taught in a university in South China offered a critique of the race-mute culture in the United States. He felt the political environment in the United States was too repressive for open discussions on race and racism. In contrast, he had more freedom teaching topics on race and racism in China. This limited data suggests that migrants from Eastern and Southern Europe embody a different type of Whiteness, which is less hegemonic and more accommodating towards Chinese gazes. Future research needs to be done on how Eastern and Southern European migrants are racialized differently from Northern and Western European migrants in China and how this contributes to the pluralization of the meanings of Whiteness.

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Chapter 5

“EuroAmerican Teachers Are Our Hardware:” Shifting Racial Hierarchies in Chinese Private English Schools After 2020



Raviv Litman

5.1 Introduction

When researching the field of Whiteness and English teaching between 2020–2022, I heard that agencies were starting to hire more non-White foreign teachers. “White teachers” refers here specifically to how the staff at private English schools interpreted White looks when they were hiring English teachers. One agent who hires foreign teachers for private schools explained the biggest change that occurred in their line of work around 2020–2021 was how “*since the training centers are closing down there are more options.*” The market for foreign teachers in China shifted in the period of this study. This shift occurred as the result of government restrictions on private education which made most existing private schools, especially training centers, illegal (MOE, 2021). The remaining private schools, which included in particular international schools, summer camps, and university English programs, started to source more of their foreign teachers from within China. Hiring agents in smaller Chinese cities who had less buying power within this system began developing a practice of making all foreign teachers, regardless of their prescribed racial categories, appear more acceptable to their clients.

Jingzhou (pseudonym) is a smaller city in China, which is also referred to as a “third-tier” city. The practice of sorting cities into tiers in China is connected to the historic process of foreign investors entering post-reform China since the 1990s and demanding standardized knowledge of Chinese consumers (Sun, 2020). These now-ubiquitous categories of Chinese cities are the outcome of a foreign investment plan by Proctor and Gamble (P&G), an American corporation that makes personal care products. In 1997, P&G contracted South China Market Research Ltd. (SCMR) to develop a market report on Chinese cities (Sun, 2020). SCMR’s report looked

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at 10 factors related to economic development, such as the number of telephone lines, in order to categorize cities from tiers 1 through 4. SCMR recommended P&G sell cheaper products to lower-tier cities.

The case I am presenting in this chapter focuses on Jingzhou because the city's lower-tier status in China also meant that local agents responsible for recruiting foreign English teachers faced far more financial constraints than in comparable cases in first-tier cities like Beijing and Shanghai. Jingzhou's recruitment agencies became less selective in their hiring processes between 2020–2022 and were adopting new strategies to hire more foreign teachers. While the agents in this case were motivated by cost saving measures, their practices became self-perpetuating after Eastern European teachers started leaving Jingzhou.

The global Covid-19 pandemic was a factor that made it challenging for Jingzhou's private English schools to hire new foreign teachers due to closed borders and travel restrictions from early 2020 to late 2022. Additionally, a series of education policies, collectively referred to as “Double Reduction” (*Shuang Jian 双减*) were implemented by the Chinese government in July 2021, played an even more significant and continuing role in reshaping the landscape of private education in China. These policies had imposed restrictions on which types of private schools could legally operate in China, resulting in a substantial reduction of a reported 84% of all private education programs (MOE, 2021). Any remaining programs could only legally teach non-academic subjects (*fei xue ke lei* 非学科类) such as arts and sports. The term Double Reduction refers to the dual reduction of private education and homework loads on students undergoing compulsory education. Adult education was not impacted. Double Reduction was officially promoted by the Ministry of Education to “protect families from falling prey to anxiety mongering private businesses” (MOE, 2021); in other words, to reduce negative impacts of private education.

Amid these policy changes, the private education programs analyzed in this chapter had to undergo significant restructuring in order to remain operational. These changes include private schools promoting more non-academic subjects that were not banned. The other change that occurred, which is the basis of this study, is how local agencies in less developed cities who hired foreign English teachers were hiring more non-White foreign English teachers than before. This change reflects these agents' attempts to compensate for a loss in their revenue by subverting an existing racial hierarchy in their field of work.

The first factor agencies generally considered when hiring English teachers was whether they are Chinese or foreign, and furthermore what types of foreigners they could hire. As Chan (2021, p. 238) explains when discussing the case of a first-tier Chinese city (Shenzhen), “in the middle-lower sector of the [English language teaching] industry, foreignness, rather than merit, is the overriding factor in the employment of foreign [English language teacher]s.” Chan is implicitly referring here to White foreign English teachers when she described foreignness. She further states that foreignness is most valued by the middle-lower employers when it is associated with White looks. In third-tier cities like Jingzhou, the majority of private

English programs are also middle-lower English teaching sector, but in this case they do not follow the same patterns as in first-tier cities.

What “foreignness” means here and when it is associated with White teachers in practice was subject to modification in third-tier cities following the Double Reduction policy. The contribution of this chapter lies in demonstrating one emerging context in which agents in their capacities as brokers made racial hierarchies of English teachers less relevant in China’s third-tier cities. It further shows why these adaptations remained geographically limited because White teachers could leave a context where racial hierarchies were becoming less relevant.

5.2 Cosmopolitan Whiteness in English teaching

What does it mean for an English teacher to be White? The answer depends on context. Whiteness can mean a location in a power structure (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 1), and employers preferentially hiring White teachers is a practice that itself affirms what Whiteness is and how it is powerful in the context of English teaching (Ramjattan, 2019). The boundaries of who is White change in relation to shifting regional power structures over time (Roediger, 2007), according to how new ideas about race are produced and practiced. Simply put, Whiteness cannot be universally defined because it is contextually made and remade. Whiteness therefore can only be analyzed as an ongoing process related to who is considered White and what that means in practice.

In practice, English education institutions around the world have to varying degrees promoted English as best taught by White teachers from the UK, US, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand because they are assumed to be native English speakers (Motha, 2014; Jenks, 2017; Ruecker & Ives, 2015; Ramjattan, 2019). Preferences for White teachers, rooted in a British colonial idea of Whiteness as a unique property of people of European heritage, began as a practice in colonial histories of English education and continues to be relevant as contemporary English education industries draw on this colonial legacy to legitimize their curriculums (Motha, 2014; Ruecker & Ives, 2015). The practice of elevating the status of White teachers is equally enacted through the social construction of non-White English teachers as accented, non-native English speakers regardless of their actual English fluency and speech. The idea that White teachers are native English speakers and non-White teachers cannot be native English speakers is also called the Native Speaker Myth (Kubota, 2022).

Scholarship on Whiteness as a power structure in East Asia has shown how in that context it has been largely promoted through the imagery of a “cosmopolitan” status associated with global commercial enterprises (Saraswati, 2010). Whiteness in East Asia is based on the “flexible” cultural capitals that circulate through international industries (Lan, 2011; Lundström, 2014). Whiteness therefore became a source of privilege with conditional applicability for European and American migrants to East Asia who work in the fields of English education (Lan, 2011;

Leonard, 2019) and international business (Kefala & Lan, 2022; Kefala, 2023) or other industries associated with European and North American White looks (Ma, 2022).

Scholars in China have observed a widespread practice of preferentially hiring White teachers over Black teachers (Stanley, 2013; Leonard, 2019; Henry, 2020; Chan, 2021), and interviews in this study further suggested a practice of preferential hiring of Western European and North American White teachers over Eastern European White teachers. These findings point to the existence of a multilayered racial hierarchy between White and non-White English teachers as well as distinctions based on nationality between White English teachers in China. This is a racial hierarchy based on the Native Speaker Myth.

Studies related to Whiteness and English teaching in China specifically have also examined the perspective of White teachers and the public role of White teachers in the classroom (Leonard, 2019; Henry, 2020; Lan, 2022; Liu & Dervin, 2022). Henry (2020), as well as Liu and Dervin (2022), studied the ways White teachers were becoming othered in China because their embodied linguistic and racial capital is seen as distinctly foreign. Leonard (2019) and Lan (2022) sought to further explain how Whiteness as a global power structure is uniquely reconfigured in China based on the evolving roles of foreign teachers in private English classrooms and how White foreigners experienced living in Chinese society.

Ideas of Whiteness in these studies are thus being filtered through the experiences of White people to address a number of research questions about their White privilege and how it is morphing. Leonard's study (2019, pp. 169–170) looks at the oscillations White teachers described between the feeling that they are treated as metaphorical “Devils” or “Superstars” and thus shows contradictions between China's historical ambivalence towards foreigners and globalized White privileges enjoyed by White English teachers. These foreign teachers reported that they are treated like foreign devils and/or celebrities, but they may be less aware of how their status is changing. Lan (2022, p. 127) interprets these feelings of privilege and precarity expressed by White teachers as a way that they are coping with going from being part of an unmarked White majority in EuroAmerican countries to becoming privileged racial minorities in China. This research on Whiteness within the context of English teaching in China has been filtered through the individual experiences of White teachers. While these studies have contributed to a growing discussion on the comparatively middling status of White English teachers in China (Camenisch, 2022), they do not explain how Whiteness is being structurally reconfigured within English teaching institutions in China.

I identify three blind spots on studies about race and English teaching in China. First, existing literature focused on the work of White teachers in the classroom and their interactions with Chinese citizens. In other words, ideas of Whiteness were filtered through the experiences of people the authors already identified as White. In other cases, scholars have interpreted Chinese agents' practices from pedagogical (Stanley, 2013) and legal (Chan, 2021) perspectives, but have not discussed how their work is related to adjusting racial hierarchies. Agents are widely recognized in migration and brokerage studies to shape labor categories (Xiang & Lindquist, 2014).

The work of agents to reshape ideas of race therefore also needs to be recognized. Second, most existing studies on race and English teaching in China focus on the elite private schools concentrated in wealthy coastal cities in China like Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, and Guangzhou. Scholars have recently raised questions about how tiered distinctions between cities in China may modify the status of foreign English teachers (Leonard, 2019; Henry, 2020; Lan, 2022), but in-depth research into these differences remains sparse. This study highlights how the social condition of a third-tier city led to alterations in local racial hierarchies. Thirdly, most literature focuses on White English teachers from North America and Western Europe because of how their status is elevated in this industry. However, racial hierarchies impact the work of all English teachers (Ramjattan, 2019), including (but not limited to) the Eastern European teachers highlighted in this case study whose status as White was unstable.

Previous research about Whiteness in East Asia show how Whiteness became a cultural capital in globalizing industries, most prominently in English teaching industries. However, there has been limited investigation into how Whiteness is intertwined with Native Speaker Myths of English teaching as an ongoing and fluctuating process in China (Leonard, 2019, p. 152). Existing studies primarily focused on studying White teachers living in China’s larger cities. These studies have overlooked the role of agents in remaking racial hierarchies and how racial hierarchies may differ in smaller cities, where a dynamic category like “White” is applied to a different group of teachers altogether. This article compliments the existing literature by looking at agents in smaller cities who, after 2020, adjusted racial hierarchies that elevated the status of Eastern European teachers in their community. By shifting the focus in these three ways (to agents, less developed cities, and the negotiated Whiteness of teachers from Eastern Europe), this chapter seeks to expand the scope of studies on racial hierarchies in China’s English teaching industry.

5.3 Methodology

This is a qualitative study based on participant ethnographic methods. The cases discussed in this chapter draw from research on nine private English programs (including two international private schools, three education companies, two training centers, and two summer camps) who employ foreign English teachers and participated in this study. The three cases explored in this chapter, which relate to a summer camp, reflect general patterns I found while studying private English programs following the Double Reduction policies of 2021. The cases are representative of the larger dataset of 80 interviews with agencies, school administrations, and English teachers. Each case was selected to reflect a common professional perspective about Whiteness in private English programs. The data combines notes and interviews collected between 2020–2022; research materials were coded using ATLAS.ti software.

The case studies relate to a summer camp that employed an agency to find foreign teachers. I interviewed three agents, six private school administrators and six English teachers who were involved with this commercial enterprise. Interviews with the Chinese agents and school administrators were conducted in Mandarin. The six foreign teachers are from countries the Chinese agents described as Eastern European. I interviewed two Serbian, one Ukrainian, and two Russian teachers in English; the Armenian teacher switched between Mandarin and English (and is the subject of the third case study).

In the interest of transparency and reflexivity, my own position seems relevant: I am White, Canadian, and English speaking. My eighteenth and nineteenth century ancestors were Yiddish speaking Russian Jews. They became accepted as White after immigrating to North America and local racial hierarchies transformed in the early twentieth century (Roediger, 2007). My four grandparents all became accepted as White Canadian citizens when they spoke English instead of Yiddish and assimilated into mainstream White Canadian culture. This background has shaped my own understanding of how racial hierarchies can change and relate to language learning.

5.4 Private English Education in China

Between 2020 and 2022 private English education was reduced to a shadow of its former size in China because the Covid-19 pandemic and Double Reduction policies closed down most existing private schools. This industry crisis was a sudden and historic shift that came after more than 30 years of non-stop growth in Chinese private education. At its peak in the 2010s, possibly one third of the Chinese population was learning English, mostly at private schools, a multi-billion-dollar industry (Bolton & Graddol, 2012). While English education was promoted by the Chinese government in the 1990s and taught in public schools, the later popularity was largely consumer driven from the 2000s until 2021 and a large commercial sector grew to meet demand. This background section looks at the last 30 years of growth in private English education in China and what conditions set the stage for a reversal in 2021.

The opening up period began in 1978 but it was only following the 1993 “Outline of Chinese Education Reform and Development” policy that private schools proliferated in China (Hannum et al., 2008). Along with the expansion of private education, the popularity of English in China as a field of study accelerated in 2001 when China joined the World Trade Organization and again leading up to the Beijing Summer Olympics in 2008 (Gao, 2022). At first, this new popularity of English language was driven by state led initiatives intended to prepare the Chinese workforce to meet the linguistic demands of global markets, but the private education industry outpaced public schools in a shift to neoliberal education policies in China during the reform period (Gao, 2022). Neoliberal ideologies supporting the training of global talent and Chinese state ideologies supporting industrial and technical

development temporarily aligned between the 1990s and 2010s within the promotion of English education.

Many Chinese individuals also had more opportunities for private English lessons as they became wealthier. The 1990s saw rapid “wealth creation” in China and by the 2000s a number of elite Chinese students began to study abroad in Western Europe, North America, and Australia (Xiang & Shen, 2009). English education in China and overseas educations in English both became cultural capitals that helped wealthier families define what it meant to fit into first-tier Chinese cities. Being included as part of the emerging “middle-class” at this time involved not only material wealth such as owning a car and an urban apartment, but also providing one’s children with an international English education (Zhang, 2008; Li, 2010). English learning became a feature of elite social mobility in China.

This trend accelerated in the 2010s because, according to parents in this study, they found that public schools had little or no capacity to teach English for communicative purposes. This ultimately led many private English programs to promote their English education programs by emphasizing how their programs were less like Chinese public schools and more like the types of international English educations that had become most popular among elite communities. One notable strategy through which private schools promoted their English programs was to hire White foreign teachers and prominently feature them in their promotional materials (Henry, 2020). The global circulation of a Native Speaker Myth also made it easier for many Chinese parents to believe that White teachers featured by private schools are the purist native English speakers, a belief reflected in private school hiring practices (Henry, 2020).

Even before the pandemic began in 2020, there were already attempts within the private English industry to promote alternative options for lower income families to learn English with foreign teachers, specifically by finding replacements to White foreign teachers. Gao (2022) identifies this movement as a part of the second wave of private English education in China that started in the 2010s. A new wave of primarily online companies began focusing on including poorer Chinese families by hiring primarily Filipino teachers.

All around the same time, private English programs in China, Korea, and Japan began hiring more English teachers within Asia, especially from the Philippines (Guevarra, 2018; Panaligan & Curran, 2022; Litman, 2022; Kobayashi, 2023). This online second wave was a transnational shift that involved many different private companies looking for new strategies to cut costs while maintaining a staff of quality English teachers, and one notable strategy was to hire Filipino teachers fluent in English but pay a much lower wage (Litman, 2022). The new wave of Asian English teachers come largely from the middle-class in their home countries who have been educated in English (Tupas, 2019). The racial hierarchy of this industry prevented Asian English teachers from competing with White teachers for similar wages.

The second wave of online companies promoted Filipino teachers in the 2010s as a viable alternative to White teachers, but because of the prominence of Native Speaker Myths, they were only partially successful. A hiring agent complained of

the difficulties of promoting schools which have foreign teachers with an “*Asian face*” (*yazhou lian* 亚洲脸) and offered her clients a discount. Notably, second wave English programs reported more success in second and third-tier cities in China. I selected a third-tier city as a field site because as an online English education program teacher in China between 2018–2020, I witnessed Filipino teachers becoming more accepted in third-tier cities and I wanted to investigate.

The growth of private education in China ended in 2021 when the Chinese Ministry of Education ceased its support for private education. The Ministry of Education passed the Double Reduction policy of 2021 to lessen the pressure of private education on young children. This approach banned the vast majority of existing private education programs in a reversal of the policies in place since 1993. Given the significance of private capital in the development of English education in China, Double Reduction led to many significant innovations in the English education industry. The remaining programs sought a number of new strategies to avoid bankruptcy while not violating new regulations. Those strategies could verge on the absurd, such as in the case of New Oriental, a major education company that switched from teaching academic topics to using English to sell online agricultural products like beef jerky. The cases explored below in the data section show how in this context of change, agents in a smaller, third-tier city started subverting conventional racial hierarchies based in a globalized Native Speaker Myth in order to save their businesses by hiring a more diverse group of foreign teachers. This resulted in a series of contradictions between the goals of private schools, their agents, and their foreign teachers.

5.5 Contradictions in Racial Hierarchies Between Schools, Agents, and Teachers

Three interrelated cases demonstrate how racial hierarchies were transitioning in Jingzhou. The first, a 2022 summer camp which promoted a traditional English education, relates to an agent’s strategy to undermine a Native Speaker Myth that White teachers are all native English speakers. The second case involves an agent who hires foreign teachers but was limited by that same Native Speaker Myth and sought to undermine it. In an event where the agent was promoting an Eastern European teacher to a local kindergarten in 2022, he also tried to convince them to hire non-White teachers. The third case concerns an Eastern European teacher whose life altered course because of new racial hierarchies driven by local agencies in Jingzhou. She learned that her privileged status as a White teacher was becoming unstable, but would be more secure in China’s higher-tier cities. These three cases together show how elite private institutions relied on White teachers, how agents in lower-tier cities were challenging racial hierarchies, and how the result was that White foreign teachers could not maintain their privileged status locally and often migrated.

5.5.1 *Framing EuroAmerican Modernity*

Summer camps became widely popular in China in the years 2018–2023, with over 50,000 camps promoting extracurricular programs that appealed to parents who shared “a widespread belief that such experiences are valued by overseas schools and universities” (Ni, 2023). Jingzhou’s summer camp (where I worked in July 2022) promoted English education experiences to ensure local children would be valued in overseas education systems. The camp sought to convince parents that their programs would yield desirable results in this regard. To do this, the camp emphasized how their program was a EuroAmerican education, meaning it borrowed elements of British or American institutions.

The Chinese term *oumei* (欧美) translated here as EuroAmerica, was often used by staff of this summer camp when describing why they wanted White teachers. This word EuroAmerica is both related to how immigrants to China from Europe and North America are identified, and also to cultural products, such as music, books, and movies, originating from Europe and North America. An agent in this study said “*English is a EuroAmerican language*” to explain why English teaching is connected to these types of people and cultural products of EuroAmerica, and also why they specifically hired White teachers for this English summer camp.

This summer camp was located about 20 km outside of the city of Jingzhou, in a repurposed apple orchard. The administrative head of the summer camp and one its principal investors, Sam (pseudonym), is a Chinese man in his early 40 s. Sam had organized short-term student exchange programs going from Beijing to Oxford up until 2020, when the pandemic restrictions required him to return to Jingzhou, the city where he grew up. He explained his new summer camp program was designed for families who plan to travel overseas and replicated the style of his past exchanges to the UK.

The 2-week camp ended with a personal address by Sam to an assembly of over 200 campers and staff, and closed with an English tea ceremony. Two hours before the English tea ceremony, caterers set up tables with three-story plastic sandwich, cake, and crumpet towers. Campers and teachers dressed up in formal suits and dresses. Sam had designed this all to appear like a graduation event in England; his speech was personal and motivational, accompanied by PPT slides of White, English characters, and UK symbols in order to show a “quintessential” image of EuroAmerica (Fig. 5.1). From the crumpet towers to the English slideshow, the experience was designed to elicit a sense of EuroAmerican education.

Sam explained to me after this event how this summer camp formed part of his plan to modernize education in Jingzhou in reference to his experiences in Oxford. He shared a post from WeChat, China’s main social media platform, where he further promoted the camp’s potential to build a more developed education system by drawing on English language and UK culture:

Chinese education has been making people more and more like robots, while developed countries are making robots more and more like people. Our current education practices are like the pedagogical systems of England from 70 years ago. Although we are improving and changing, how long will it take? Can our children catch up? Welcome to the camp of the future.



Fig. 5.1 A PPT slide Sam used in his presentation to connect English language, British culture, and a painting of EuroAmerican women

This promotional message from Sam targets his clients, parents who worry that Chinese public education is not preparing their kids for the future. Sam provides a solution in the form of a EuroAmerican education, which he further connected to White people as a topic related to modernity. Sam's question of whether "our" (Chinese) children can "catch up" to British children relates to what Henry (2021) described as the constant deferral of English modernity often found in Chinese private education. English modernity is identified here by Sam as a process that is located in developed counties, or more specifically in England, and could be obtainable by students through their enrollment in Sam's private education program, which he calls "*the camp of the future*." Sam's rhetorical question, "how long will it take," cannot be answered if English continues to define modernity, because China catching up with England in education remains elusive and is constantly deferred. I and a co-teacher from Serbia worked for Sam and assisted him in providing his clients with this image of EuroAmerican education by posing for photos with students and their parents, and promoting the event on social media (Fig. 5.2). Sam made the connection explicit when he asked his agent to hire only White teachers in order to show that his summer camp is EuroAmerican and future-orientated.

Sam's camp was selling EuroAmerican education in Jingzhou through the circulation of images like this one. However, in the winter of 2022, the camp could not find a new source of White teachers who could satisfy Sam's objectives. The pandemic had reduced the number of foreign teachers coming into China, and the Double Reduction policy meant that fewer foreign teachers remained in China's lower-tier cities. Most of the foreign teachers from North America or Western Europe already worked in first-tier cities, which was why Sam compromised by hiring primarily Eastern European teachers. Now, Sam could not find Eastern European teachers either. Adherence to racial hierarchy was resulting in programs like Sam's summer camp hiring fewer teachers overall.



Fig. 5.2 A photo shoot with students and their foreign teachers. Author on the right

A week after the summer camp ended, Sam’s agent who hires their foreign teachers, Rogers (pseudonym), a 27-year-old man also from Jingzhou, stopped sending foreign teachers to Sam’s summer camp. Rogers could find English teachers from Asian counties like Pakistan or the Philippines in the years 2020–2022, but fewer from Eastern Europe and virtually none from North America or Western Europe. Sam simply could not imagine a “camp of the future” working without a EuroAmerican teacher. As a result, the summer camp put its English program on hiatus, and focused on their sports programs instead.

5.5.2 *Destabilizing Racialized Levels*

As the following case of Rogers shows, Rogers started to convince other local private English programs to hire more non-White teachers. At first, Rogers suggested a more ambiguous approach to categorizing foreign teachers as a temporary solution to an immediate problem, but after a while this also led to structural movement in the status of foreign teachers in Jingzhou. Contradictions soon emerged between Sam and Rogers’ business models in terms of who could be hired to work as foreign teachers. Rogers already started to hire far more non-White foreign English teachers after the double reduction policies in 2021. As one of Rogers foreign teachers attested, agents like Rogers conceptually “changed foreigners” and their social statuses when they started making all of them appear more interchangeable to schools. I found many similar elements to Roger’s practice when interviewing other hiring agents working in lower-tier cities of China in 2021 and 2022.

Rogers considers himself an expert on how to get the foreign teachers available to him into jobs at Jingzhou's private schools. Rogers also has professional and personal connections to the Jingzhou Ministry of Education. Those connections help him to get work visas for foreign teachers and to provide a popular service for local private schools by hiring foreign teachers from overseas or from other cities in China. But it was difficult for him to meet their expectations because Rogers' biggest clients wanted him to procure EuroAmerican English teachers and after 2021 he could not find teachers they considered EuroAmerican. Rogers navigated this dilemma by suggesting alternative ways of selecting foreign teachers. This strategy had the practical benefit of sustaining Rogers' business, which became apparent in the following meeting between Rogers and a private kindergarten.

On one particularly hot summer day in June 2022, Rogers was driving me in his black SUV to a meeting at a bilingual English/Chinese kindergarten where he intended to close a deal with them on a foreign teacher, but he didn't yet know which one. I had been working with Rogers' agency for a year. He was describing the nature of his work as we drove, which mostly involved brokering his foreign teachers to local schools and drawing up a contract between the schools and teachers. Rogers' job also involved mediating between local officials, foreign teachers, and private schools in Jingzhou to ensure the continuous employment of foreign teachers. This meeting between Rogers and a local private school aimed to select their first foreign teacher.

Rogers explained on the drive how this part of his job was to find the most compatible foreign English teachers for a particular English program. His company takes the equivalent of 1 month of the yearly salary of these foreign teachers from their schools as payment for referrals. The fact that he is paid on commission means he feels incentivized to find higher paid candidates because he will receive a larger bonus. Rogers wanted to convince schools his foreign teachers are worth paying more for, so he would embellish their qualifications whenever he could. As with Sam's summer camp, Rogers and the kindergarten administrators would both describe a EuroAmerican education as their ideal type. Rogers gave them a sales pitch meant to convince them his foreign teachers were compatible with their ideal type of English program, but he also wanted to convince them to be flexible, and to be open to an alternative.

The kindergarten was still under construction when we arrived. Heading to the reception office we passed through a hallway exhibiting American children's books, including a number of titles such as *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*. These displays included a picture and a short description underneath in Chinese for prospective clients. In the meeting I learned how they promoted an American education, which clarified my role as a White teacher to help project a EuroAmerican education. Rogers and I sat down in the main office across from a middle-aged woman, the kindergarten's principal administrator, and a young man. Only after the meeting did I learn that they represented shareholders' interests. Like Rogers, both the man and the woman possessed specialized, mediating roles when designing this kindergarten. At the beginning of the meeting, the woman confirmed that the two of them who

called this meeting were interested in promoting a bilingual curriculum primarily using the American English program, and wanted a White foreigner to teach this curriculum.

Rogers launched into his sales pitch. “*At the end of the day, you need to think about the whole package of the teacher,*” he advised them. “*Foreign teachers are so essential. They are the hardware (Yingjian 硬件).*” The two administrators nodded. Foreign instructors were “hardware” that must be compatible with the school’s “software;” the software, said Rogers, was the American curriculum. Ideally, they wanted to hire a foreign teacher who looks and sounds American to their clients. This description of hardware and software reveals that a EuroAmerican themed English education in Jingzhou involves not only hiring a foreign teacher, but also how the school administration connects the type of foreign teacher with the type of curriculum they teach. When talking about his foreign teachers, Rogers started to inquire with these two administrative staff about what kind of foreign teacher they expected him to provide.

Rogers and the kindergarten administrators started to make connections between the high social status of the school, the EuroAmerican type of English they wanted to teach, and how they expected their first foreign teacher to look. Rogers joked that the school was far too modern for most people in Jingzhou to appreciate because of their tasteful color scheme. “*People here might not get it,*” he said, disparaging their city as uncultured while complimenting the school. The woman beamed at this and said, “*I lived in Beijing for one year. They really respect English. The parents there must have a foreign teacher.*” This conversation referred to the physical design of this school, how it reflected the choices of the woman who designed it, and how it relates to selecting a foreign teacher.

After the meeting Rogers explained to me that he knew going into the meeting that the new kindergarten was trying to market themselves as a high-end school in an equally high-end neighborhood of Jingzhou. Because of the neighborhood’s rising real estate value, Rogers knew the kindergarten staff would expect his offers to correspond to the social “*level (cengci 层次)*” of their students’ parents. I asked Rogers to describe this Chinese word for level (*cengci 层次*) because I didn’t understand. He explained that having a high *cengci* brought to mind the kinds of parents with higher educations who live in an expensive neighborhood. This idea Rogers had about their *cengci* is similar to what Li (2010) described as what defines “middle-class” status in Kunming, a second-tier city in China. In Jingzhou, a third-tier city, having a foreign teacher indicates a high level of local society.

These terms for level also describe upward mobility associated with having a foreign teacher English education in China. The physical infrastructure developed on the land around the school helped Rogers determine how much the school would benefit from hiring White foreign teachers. The social conditions for wealthy neighborhoods, private schools, and foreign teachers aligned in this meeting. To Rogers, the school produced a EuroAmerican software that demanded a EuroAmerican foreign teacher as a compatible hardware. Next, Rogers made that connection explicit, before deconstructing it.

Rogers turned all of our attention to a teacher from Belarus, and he showed a short introduction video of this teacher on his phone, after which he said, “*that Belarusian one is very good, pronunciation okay, they [Belarusians] are all beautiful men and woman.*” After seeing this option and hearing Rogers describe Belarusian teachers as “okay” in English pronunciation but beautiful in looks, both of the school administrators agreed the Belarusian teacher would be their first choice. The man who represented the investors specified to Rogers, “*I think a Black teacher doesn’t feel very good,*” and confirmed it was specifically the Belarusian teacher’s White looks that he wanted and would reject a candidate with dark skin.

Rogers agreed to get them the Belarusian teacher. Then, after the deal was already struck and the meeting was ending, Rogers suddenly brought up the importance of timing when selecting foreign teachers. He told the two administrators to consider hiring a White teacher as their first teacher, so that their clients would become comfortable at their kindergarten. Then he recommended they consider hiring non-White foreign teachers from Asia or Africa in order to lower their future costs. Rogers later explained this conflicting advice to hire White teachers but later to switch to hiring more non-White teachers: to probe the limits of their resolve to only hire White foreign teachers. This reflected an innovation in Rogers’ way of mediating between private schools and foreign teachers since 2021, when he began hiring a greater number of Asian teachers. Rodgers didn’t attribute significance to race in these decisions beyond self-interest. If he could convince the kindergarten to hire non-White teachers, he could expect to do more business with them in the long run.

As I followed Rogers’ social media account where he posts advertisements for his English teachers between 2021–2022, I saw him feature more English teachers from Asia and Africa over time, and when doing so, he used words like “professional” and “standard accent” to describe all his teachers in similar terms, unlike the words “EuroAmerican” and “beautiful,” which he had used to emphasize the White looks of his Eastern European teachers when we first started working together. As the majority of his teachers started coming from Asia and Africa, he found that he needed to find ways to make them marketable to his clients. Over about a year, words like “professional” and “standard accent” entered Rogers’ new marketing lexicon, reflecting an overall trend among agents to begin to favor professional vocabulary over racialized categories.

After their first meeting, Rogers and the kindergarten administrators agreed on the Belarusian teacher to be their first foreign teacher. However, 1 month later, Rogers failed to get the Belarusian teacher to agree. That teacher found a better offer in Shanghai, and left Jingzhou. Rogers then renegotiated with the kindergarten to find them a Pakistani English teacher instead. The kindergarten first made it clear to Rogers they didn’t want the Pakistani teacher, but they reluctantly accepted the Pakistani teacher after Rogers persisted and sent another introductory video showing the Pakistani teacher to be professional and able to speak fluent English. Rogers’ strategy had worked.

Rogers had recognized what the program wanted was a White teacher and then he presented an alternative that they did not want, but which met their needs as an

English program. Because schools in Jingzhou could not compete with wages in first-tier cities like Shanghai where the Belarusian teacher had gone, they nevertheless could attract less prestigious non-White English teachers. In this way, agents like Rogers began to shift racial hierarchies in their community and modify the status of foreign teachers.

5.5.3 Reestablishing Racial Hierarchy Through City-Tiers

Lucine (pseudonym), an English teacher from Armenia, was one of the foreign teachers Rogers regularly collaborated with on English teaching jobs up until 2021. She had firsthand experience with Rogers’ way of doing business and the strategies used by a number of other agents like him. Lucine talked about how the agents in general were revising their methods in a way that also recalibrated her status as a White teacher. Lucine ultimately left Jingzhou in 2022 after living there for over a decade in part because of how her historically higher status as a EuroAmerican teacher had become less distinguished. Her explanation further exposes how Whiteness was becoming less relevant in Jingzhou’s English programs, a trend that reflected its third-tier city status. This change, which started as a temporary measure for agents to promote more teachers, became a new norm with long-term effects after more of Jingzhou’s private English programs discovered the advantages of entrenching this approach.

Lucine first came to Jingzhou in 2011 as a student to complete a doctoral degree in linguistics. She stayed after meeting her Chinese husband and then launched major private English programs as an administrator, managing English programs at a salary far above regular English teachers in Jingzhou. Lucine understandably did not want to be seen as just another English teacher because she had become a professional teacher and program director with an above average salary. Many foreign teachers she knew had little or no professional training. However, Lucine had also been able to find coveted professional jobs like program director and university lecturer because they were created by institutions that placed EuroAmerican teachers in leadership roles. In 2022, as she came to be seen as just another English teacher in Jingzhou, she no longer felt respected as a professional. She identified how that shift was being reproduced by a trend among agents who portrayed foreign teachers to their clients as interchangeable.

Over multiple interviews Lucine described how life has been changing for foreign teachers in Jingzhou through the 2010s. She explained that when she first arrived in 2011, her employers only cared about hiring White teachers. As a result, English language skills weren’t prioritized and non-native White English teachers like her were hired immediately: in that context, she had stood out as being exceptionally qualified. Despite it benefitting her personally, she did not condone this discriminatory practice as it had proven harmful to an African American friend who had been denied work regardless of his similarly high qualifications. Preferences for White teachers in Jingzhou allowed Lucine to compete with a smaller pool of talent

and to stand out as more professional between 2011–2021. But then, Lucine described how by now “*it doesn’t matter you are Black or White, they pay attention [to] your appearance; nice looking is already enough, and English skills already enough.*”

Following this development, Lucine started looking to move away from Jingzhou. A few months after our last interview in 2022, she relocated to a wealthier coastal region of China where she would again be a high-level professional. While preparing to leave, Lucine gave me an example in a mix of Chinese and English of how Jingzhou had modified recently, leading to her decision to leave in 2022. Lucine’s friend from Armenia was asked by his Chinese agent to pretend he was American, exactly the type of emergent strategy that compromised her own social status.

Why can’t he tell people he’s Armenian? Because [by] not being Armenian he earns more money. They [agents] change people, they change foreigners that are here... Why I don’t want to be a foreign teacher [SIC]? I had students, I had an income, but I wanted to keep *wo de shuiping gao* [我的水平高 *my level high*].

Lucine described here how in addition to convincing private schools to accept non-EuroAmerican teachers, agents were also (mis-)representing all of their foreign teachers as American, British, Canadian, or Australian regardless of their actual origins. Agents did this in order to convince more schools to hire their clients by reducing the clear differences in social level which institutions have assigned to EuroAmerican and non-EuroAmerican foreign teachers.

This strategy of agents telling foreign teacher to lie about what country they come from in order to convince schools to hire them is not unique to Jingzhou and has been previously described by Stanley (2013) and Chan (2021) in their studies of bigger cities like Shanghai and Shenzhen, respectively. In those studies, the agencies’ fabrications about a foreign teacher’s country of origin has been exposed as unscrupulous as well as exploitative, not least of foreign English teachers, who risk punishment if their nationality is discovered. But the previous focus on harm and the unethical dimension has passed over the ways this practice also has begun to destabilize racial hierarchies. I argue that when viewed as an approach used by agents in lower-tier cities, this misrepresentation of foreign teachers can also be interpreted as part of a successful method to gradually convince more schools to hire non-White teachers. While one outcome has been an increased legal and social vulnerability for all foreign English teachers in Jingzhou, another has been a perceived ambiguity among them, where White teachers now find themselves with less of a structural advantage. The Native Speaker Myth was challenged in Jingzhou because the local market for foreign teachers became oversaturated with agents’ claims about EuroAmerican nationalities to the point that schools started to focus more on cost and availability. Lucine drew connections between how agents were lying about nationality and how she losing status as a professional.

Lucine switched to Chinese in our conversation specifically to use the term *shuiping*, or “level” to describe the exact kind of status she had lost, and she further related the meaning of this term in the interview to a particular aspect of her past lifestyle. Lucine described having been a part of a local community of highly

educated Chinese families who were all high level like she was, by nature of their more cosmopolitan status. After 2020, she felt she did not belong in Jingzhou because her work no longer aligned with the type of highly educated Chinese communities where she felt at home. Many of her friends from this community also left Jingzhou to find work in first-tier cities. The social status shared between elite English teachers and upper-class Chinese communities is something Chan (2021) found to be part of a common practice Shenzhen, another first-tier city.

Lucine mentioned that not only was she planning to move from Jingzhou to a higher-tier city, but so were many of her high-status Chinese friends. This reinforces Lan's (2022) finding that White foreign teachers experienced a sudden loss of structural privilege as a form of precarity, but it also points how social mobility can allow some White teachers to find privilege in new places by moving up in the tier system. Lucine's experience demonstrates that although a local abrogation of Native Speaker Myths opened space for more foreign teachers in Jingzhou's English teaching industry and benefitted local agents, this occupation also became less appealing to high-level clients and professionals. Professionally recognized White teachers like Lucine, the aforementioned Belarusian instructor, and many similar foreign educators, can find higher paid positions in more developed Chinese cities. This shows that the racial hierarchies among English teachers are unlikely to alter on a national scale in China even as they do locally in lower-tier Chinese cities, because those inequalities persist between cities and define social mobility from lower- to higher-tier cities.

These three cases about the summer camp, the agent, and the foreign teacher each shed light on the status quo of EuroAmerican programs, how agents in Jingzhou disrupted that status quo to maintain their market position, and how this development was experienced as a loss of status among Eastern European teachers in lower-tier cities. Although the new practices by agents like Rogers in third-tier cities have to some extent subverted racial hierarchies, their motivation was primarily about maintaining their own position in an evolving market. Notably, elite institutions in first-tier cities continue to promote EuroAmerican style education as they have for years, and racialized Native Speaker Myths persist nationally. Cities like Jingzhou are sites for shifting ideas about race in China because the practical needs to find more English teachers at a lower price can lead to new hiring practices which can become self-reinforcing if they benefit institutional brokers.

5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have highlighted shifting and contradictory racial hierarchies developing in China's private English teaching industry after 2020. First, Jingzhou's private English programs recreate a EuroAmerican education by hiring White teachers, but agents began to present all their foreign teachers as interchangeable, and finally, White Eastern European teachers experienced this transformation as a localized loss

of social status but could move to higher-tier cities to regain their status. These events together help to illustrate the contradictions arising around where racial hierarchies were adjusting in Chinese institutions and why most of these modifications have been limited to China's lower-tier cities.

Agents in Jingzhou undermined racial hierarchies when it benefited them professionally. The strategies of agents explored in this chapter included convincing schools to hire non-White teachers and claiming their foreign teachers all have similar qualifications. Both strategies contradict the Native Speaker Myths fostered in elite English programs which reproduced an exclusive category of EuroAmerican teachers and promoted the idea that White teachers are more qualified by connecting EuroAmerican symbols to ideas of modernity. By exploring the subversive backstage role of agents to question this mythology, this chapter has departed from existing studies investigating only the experiences of privilege and precarity among White teachers working in first-tier cities, and has highlighted new contradictions emerging in this field.

As a third-tier city in China, Jingzhou presents a peripheral context in the field of English education. That status made it a place where local agents were more willing to make compromises when hiring foreign teachers in order to capitalize on new opportunities to hire Asian teachers. This innovation was less likely to happen in first-tier cities because of their sustained associations between Whiteness and modernity. One of the most significant findings of this research has been that racial hierarchies of foreign teachers were more unstable in the peripheral cases where new crises have also created new opportunities. This reflects the interplay of local, national, and international practices in the evolving dynamics of racial power structures (Frankenberg, 1993; 242). This study indicates where research into Whiteness in China can move beyond studying the experiences of White teachers by further looking more at the institutionalized process of brokering foreign teachers' labor.

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Chapter 6

Locating the Complexity of Whiteness in the Migration Context of Japan: White Europeans as ‘Good Migrants’



Miloš Debnár

Shortly after the Russian military forces invaded Ukraine, Japan’s Prime Minister Fumio Kishida announced that Japan will accept Ukrainian evacuees fleeing war. This came as a surprise to many, since Japan is well known for its strict refugee policy for which it has been internationally criticized for decades. According to the official data by the Immigration Services Agency of Japan, Japan has accepted 2204 Ukrainian *evacuees* in slightly more than 1 year since their acceptance was officially announced by the Japanese Prime Minister (ISA, 2023).¹ The sheer number of evacuees is in stark contrast with numbers of those granted the status of refugee over the past four decades (841 in total since 1982), those allowed to stay in Japan based on humanitarian reasons (2709 since 1991) and individuals and families resettled from third countries (194 individuals since 2010) (JLNR, 2021).² Besides the unprecedented numbers, the response to the situation was extremely swift and unprecedented in the extent of rights and services provided by the Japanese government (Hashimoto, 2024, p.157–164). There is no program that would be similar in its extent or content that has been implemented by Japanese government in response to any other conflict in recent years.

This, however, does not appear to signal a turnaround in the attitude towards refugees in Japan. On the contrary, Japan’s parliament passed a bill that effectively further undermines protection of the asylum seekers in 2023 and reports suggest that the positive response for Ukrainian evacuees does not apply to ‘other’ refugees

¹Acceptance of the Ukrainian evacuees has been officially announced on March second, 2022 and the latest data are from April fifth, 2023.

²Japan also allowed more than 10,000 refugees from Indo-China after the Vietnam war.

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(Lies, 2023). It rather raises concerns that race is involved in allowing displaced groups to Japan, something that has been suggested in Japan (Lies, 2023) as well as, for example, in Europe (e.g., Düvell & Lapshyna, 2022, p. 210). While the acceptance of the Ukrainian evacuees is not unconditional and without issues, they are treated exceptionally and represented highly positively as foreign residents of Japan worth of their stay, unproblematic, and contributing to the society—media reports cover cases of Ukrainian evacuees who, for example, possess IT skills, work in banks, or become entrepreneurs.

The highly preferential treatment of evacuees from Ukraine³ raises question in relation to recent studies (including my own work) on Whiteness in the migration context to Japan, that have focused mainly on the limits of the White privilege among migrants in Japan. These studies that emerged in recent years (e.g., Debnár, 2016; Hof, 2021; Miladinović, 2020; Myslinska, 2014) contributed to locating the complexity and contextuality of Whiteness “as a polysemic or heteroglossic construct, with local, regional, and national manifestations” (Lan et al., 2022, p. 163), demonstrated the ways in which White privilege is being not only reproduced but contested through migration as well, and attempted to deconstruct the image of highly privileged migrants. Building on critical approaches to Whiteness, these studies do acknowledge the staying power of the Whiteness, however, by attempting to address the Whiteness of migrants in a particular context of Japan with its complicated relationship to the West, and further focusing on the intersections with class or gender, their primary arguments consequently revolve around contestations of the Whiteness as a privileging identity. This, in turn, leaves the discussion of the ways in which Whiteness in the migration context is constructed as a privileged identity less developed.

This chapter aims to contribute to the understanding of the complex role that Whiteness plays in the context of migration and further analyze how Whiteness positively differentiates those racialized as White from other migrants and minorities (Garner, 2007) by conceptualizing the case of White European migrants in Japan as ‘good migrants’. Particularly, I draw on recent conceptualizations of good migrants as a form of self-identification that conflates Whiteness with skills and goodness in critical expatriate studies (Cranston, 2017) and as a constructed category of preferred migrants that allows for a “conditional inclusion” (Hackl, 2022). This allows to elaborate on the role of Whiteness in the context of migration as apparently contradictory, or as a racialized identity that both privileges and alienates (Debnár, 2023), and at the same time further develop an analysis that would allow us to understand the essential role of Whiteness as positively differentiating racial identity (Garner, 2007) in the context of migration.

This chapter builds on a long-term qualitative fieldwork on European migrants in Japan and particularly analyzes recent data that were collected right before, after and throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. Several chapters in this volume analyze the

³This is not meant to suggest that the support that Ukrainians receive in Japan is exaggerated or that it should be lowered—quite the contrary, such support and assistance should be accessible to other displaced individuals as well.

experience of White migrants during the pandemic in China (Litman, Lan), Japan and Singapore (Hof). This chapter analyzes the ways in which the interviewees negotiated their position during the pandemic and how they, through different narratives, position themselves in relation to the majority and other minorities. Such discursive positioning is further explored in accounts of integration of a larger group of Europeans with an experience of migration to Japan.

6.1 White Migrants in Japan and the ‘Good Migrant’

In his critical response to an introductory article on the third-wave of Whiteness studies by Twine and Gallagher (2008), Steve Garner pointed out that critical Whiteness studies (in the context of White-majority societies) “still leans toward a focus on the working classes and men” (2017, p. 1591). In contrast, studying Whiteness in the context of migration initially uncritically assumed a link between Whiteness and expatriation (meaning, *inter alia*, high socio-economic status) and only later did this link start to be critically questioned and deconstructed. The diversity of White migrants in East Asia has increasingly been acknowledged by shifting towards more critical and diverse understanding of existing migration categories such as expatriates or high-skilled migrants and by focusing on less socio-economically privileged or “middling” migrants in recent two decades. This shift was accompanied by focusing, among others, on the “plethora of internal localized social hierarchies in formation between those notionally categorized as White” (*ibid*) shaped by intersections of Whiteness with class and gender, localized constructions of Whiteness and historical legacies.

The Whiteness started to be understood as a “double-edged sword” (P-C. Lan, 2011) which privileges those racialized as White in certain contexts yet limits them due to the perceived ‘otherness’ in others. While many recent studies tend to acknowledge both aspects (see Introduction), the main argument tends to be emphasizing either the reproduction of the White privilege or its limits. In the case of the studies on Japan, studies that discussed Whiteness in cultural representations (e.g., Russell, 2017) or education (e.g., Appleby, 2014; Koshino, 2019) emphasized the reproduction of global hegemony of Whiteness and suggested that it positively affects White migrants in Japan as well. On the other hand, studies focusing particularly on the growing minority of White, middle-class migrants emphasize the limitations of the White privilege. For example, Hof argued that Whiteness in everyday life interactions or labor market in Japan and Singapore has more “passive” role and it represents rather “a token, a trophy, in contrast to capital” that could be readily activated (Hof, 2021, p. 2123). I have argued elsewhere that the complicated character of the perception of Whiteness in Japan eventually renders Whiteness as “a color or a form of racialized identification that, despite its positive connotations and privileges, also is associated with disprivileges and alienation” (Debnár, 2023, p. 373). Limits to the inclusion of White migrants and their social or labor market incorporation in Japan have been emphasized in several other studies (Debnár,

2016; Hof, 2021, 2022; Hof & Tseng, 2020; Liu-Farrer, 2020; Miladinović, 2020). Finally, some studies further questioned the position of White migrants as a privileged minority by suggesting similarities in various socio-economic positions that the White migrants share with other (mainly Asian) migrants (Debnár, 2022; Hof, 2019; Hof & Tseng, 2020; see also Hof in this volume).

Such approaches to Whiteness in the migration to Japan represent an important endeavor that through relativization of the White privilege contributes to de-establishing the apparent ‘global hegemony’ of Whiteness and attempt to “dislodge it from its centrality and authority, not to reinstate it” (Dyer, 1997/2017, p.10). Nevertheless, there is also a risk of over-emphasizing the limits of White privilege which in turn might result into downplaying the role of Whiteness as racialized border that positively differentiate White migrants from other migrants and minorities (Garner, 2007). As Garner argued, while identifying “the plethora of internal localized social hierarchies in formation between those notionally categorized as White” represents an important aspect of studying Whiteness, it “only make sense because of” another racialized border which is “separating “Whites” from people not racialized as White” (Garner, 2017, p. 1591). Thus, the question of how to reconcile the apparent contradictions of exclusion and positive discrimination, privilege, and alienation or—paraphrasing Lundström (2014)—that of the Whiteness and migration needs to be scrutinized further. There is a need for a more elaborate discussion of the position that White migrants occupy in East Asian societies that would sufficiently acknowledge their limited inclusion and privileged position at the same time without inadvertently overemphasizing one dimension and understate the other. This chapter attempts to fill this lacuna by utilizing the concept of good migrants that has been recently proposed in critical expatriate studies and more general migration and citizenship studies.

6.1.1 *Good Migrants and Conditional Inclusion*

In guest editorial to a recent special issue on conditional citizenship and inclusion of different migrant groups, Andreas Hackl highlights the notions of “good immigrants”⁴ and their “conditional inclusion” (Hackl, 2022). The article explores several questions related to these two concepts and starts with the analysis of how the goodness is socially constructed or “under what conditions are migrants and immigrant-origin minorities recognized as “good” and worthy of residence, positive recognition, or citizenship” (2022, p. 990). Whereas this conceptualization of good migrants focuses on the citizenship and does not consider the role of race, earlier

⁴Hackl draws on two popular collections of essays about “good migrants” in the US and the UK (Shukla, 2016; Shukla & Suleyman, 2019) which are seen as “a response to the narrative that immigrants are “bad” by default” (Shukla & Suleyman, 2019, p.1). This chapter discuss the notion of “good migrants” and discussion of “bad migrants” in the context of Japan would require more detailed analysis that is beyond the scope of this chapter (for a general discussion see Hackl, 2022).

study on self-identified British ‘expatriates’ in Singapore by Sophie Cranston demonstrate how are their narratives “conflating an understanding of ‘goodness’ with race and skill” (Cranston, 2017, p. 4). Consequently, the concept of a good migrant—both as a constructed category of preferred migrants and racialized self-identification—can be adopted from the perspective of Whiteness studies in the context of migration to explore the construction of positive differentiation of Whites, or the second racialized border that differentiate them from other migrants and majority society (Garner, 2017, p. 1591).

Furthermore, Hackl argues that migrants who are socially constructed as representing desirable or good ones, are included in the receiving societies conditionally rather than framing them as excluded. Such conceptualization of migrants’ position that focuses on inclusion with limits rather than operating along the dichotomy of inclusion-exclusion can be a useful way of accounting for the Whiteness working as a double-edged sword, that both privileges and alienates. Hackl argues that conditional inclusion “fulfills a dual function”; first as “a means of controlling and rank-ordering different kinds of immigrants and other minorities” and at the same time “it offers minorities limited opportunities for making active citizenship claims and developing strategic responses to the ever-present possibility of exclusion” (2022, p. 990). The first role is closely related to the understanding of racial hierarchies in the receiving societies and the second function of conditional inclusion leads to an inquiry into “how do individuals and minorities negotiate and respond to the various criteria for inclusion and citizenship imposed on them?” (2022, p. 991).

This chapter adopts the concepts of good migrant and conditional inclusion to scrutinize the role of Whiteness in the positioning of migrants in Japan. It does so by focusing on the questions raised by Hackl as well as focusing on self-identification practices identified by Cranston. Before the empirical part, the following section critically reviews previous studies that suggest the ways in which good or preferred migrants have been socially constructed in the case of Japan and how it is related to Whiteness.

6.1.2 White Migrants as Preferred Migrants

The ‘desirability’ of different migrant groups has been institutionalized by many countries including Japan and the existing studies on migration policies or perceptions of migrants in the case of Japan suggest that race, ethnicity, or nationality can play some role in positively selecting and perceiving certain migrant groups as more or less ‘desirable’ or ‘preferred’. While there is a lack of explicit discussion on the role of Whiteness and race in general on selection of migrants, several recent studies on attitudes towards migration or White migrants suggest that migrants from Western, White-majority countries are the preferred type of migrant in Japan.

First, as is the case in many other countries, there is a general preference for high skilled migrants over less skilled migrants among the public in Japan (Fraser & Cheng, 2022) as well as in the official stance towards migration by the government.

Although there have been many side- and back-doors created in immigration control policies in the past 30 years that allow foreign workers to enter and work in Japan as less skilled workers, the Japanese government continues to declare that Japan is not officially accepting low skilled migrants. Iwata and Nemoto (2018) argued that such a long-lasting official stance towards migration in Japan created a “bifurcated visa structure” that prefers skilled migrants and opens side- or back-doors for low skilled migrants and this visa structure reinforces perceptions of racial hierarchies that render migrants from Western countries as “deemed and superior foreigners”. Moreover, as I have also argued elsewhere, certain visa categories can be interpreted as demonstrating an implicit preference for White migrants seen as unproblematic, that can be illustrated, for example, on bilateral agreements on working holiday visas that are heavily biased towards White-majority countries (Debnár, 2022).

Indeed, skills in the context of migration are a socially constructed category (Liu-Farrer et al., 2020) and the understanding or framing of the skills within the Japanese visa policy have undergone a profound transformation (Oishi, 2014, 2020). In other words, who is considered to be a (highly) skilled (and thus preferred) foreign worker represents a dynamic construct and category of skills does not necessarily coalesce with the racialized categorizations of populations. Nevertheless, it needs to be acknowledged that perceptions on possessions of valuable skills do play a role in distinguishing White migrants from those racialized as non-White through contrasting constructs such as ‘expatriate’ and ‘migrant’ (Cranston, 2017; Kunz, 2020).

Thus, while some studies show that the preference for the high skilled migrants in Japan applies also to migrants from other countries including those which have been perceived problematically, such as Korea and China (Kobayashi et al., 2015), a recent study by Fraser and Cheng argues that “Japanese apply inconsistent skill requirements that are conditioned by prospective immigrants’ ethnic or racial identity” (2022, p. 2700). More particularly, their analysis of an experiment on attitudes towards different groups of migrants demonstrates that there is a preference for White migrants and higher skills requirements are applied to those migrants coming from countries that are perceived negatively (ibid:2701). Similarly, Igarashi and Mugiyama’s experimental study demonstrates that migrants from the USA tend to be less discriminated against in the hiring process (Igarashi & Mugiyama, 2023) and other studies show that the Japanese public tends to favor immigration from Europe or North America—i.e., White-majority countries—over other regions (Igarashi, 2015; Kage et al., 2022). Earlier studies on White migrants in Japan also argue that individuals who are perceived as White in Japan are often perceived as possessing particular skills that positively distinguish them from other migrants and the Japanese (Debnár, 2016, 2022, 2023; Hof, 2021, 2022).

While many of these studies do not discuss the role of race, it can be argued that they suggest that the preferences for certain migrants are racialized, and they do not simply reflect objective criteria, such as skills. This is, however, not to argue that race “trumps” all other relevant identities (see Wimmer, 2015) and that it is the main—or even the only—principle behind unequal perceptions and treatment of

different migrant groups. Many of the above-mentioned studies provide more nuances on how the perceptions on Whiteness intersect with other categories such as skills (Debnár, 2022; Fraser & Cheng, 2022; Hof, 2021; Kobayashi et al., 2015) or identities such as gender (Appleby, 2014; Debnár, 2016, 2023; Hof, 2017). Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that White migrants are often constructed as preferred or good migrants in various ways and—as suggests also the unprecedented reaction to humanitarian crisis in Ukraine by the Japanese government—distinguished from those perceived as problematic (Cranston, 2017, p. 8).

6.2 Data and Method

This chapter analyzes interview data with 44 Europeans who were living in Japan in the time of interview (24) or had an experience of living in Japan for prolonged period of time⁵ (20). The interviews were collected mostly between 2019 and 2022 for a larger comparative project focusing on the choices of staying and leaving. Nevertheless, the semi-structured interviews included extensive discussions on the perception of one's place in Japan, reflections on the experience of living, working, or studying in Japan or relations to the majority society and other minorities. Since most of the interviews were collected during the various stages of Covid-19 pandemic,⁶ the interviews covered reflections on the pandemic and the ways the foreigners were legally treated during the pandemic in Japan. The analysis is further informed by insights from previous formal interviews and other ethnographic data on European migrants that has been collected by the author for more than a decade.⁷

Interviewees represented nationals from 17 EU countries, UK, Ukraine, and North Macedonia, were mostly in their thirties (42%) and forties (38%) with 27 men and 17 women. Only two interviewees did not have tertiary education and held a variety of occupations in Japan: from degree-seeking students and researchers, English (or other language) teachers, workers in tourism or international trade, to small entrepreneurs, engineers or full-time university faculty. In general, they can be understood as representing mainly “middling migrants” (Conradson & Latham, 2005) rather than being associated with high or low socio-economic status.

The interviewees in this paper are presented as White, European, middle-class migrants and particularly the intersections with nationality are not further analyzed. As argued elsewhere, whereas the nationality often makes a difference in the way Whiteness of migrants is perceived or acknowledged in different contexts including, for example, China (see Barabantseva in this volume), previous studies

⁵The time spent in Japan varied between 2 (2 cases) and 16 years (1 case) with an average of 6.1 years.

⁶Only 6 interviewees were interviewed before the re-entry ban for foreign nationals was introduced in Japan on April, third 2020 out of which 3 were interviewed in the early stage of the pandemic in March 2020.

⁷This brings the total of European subjects formally interviewed to 97.

demonstrated that it does not necessarily play a significant role in the racialization of Europeans in the case of Japan (Debnár, 2023; Drnovšek Zorko & Debnár, 2021; Hof, 2019, p. 2130).

6.3 White Migrants as Migrants—But Still the Good Ones

Hackl (2022, p. 989) reminds us that ‘good migrants’ are “permitted outsiders” whose inclusion in the receiving societies is “conditional”. Whereas the abovementioned instances of preferential treatment demonstrate how those perceived as coming from White-majority countries are often constructed as ‘good migrants’, the response of the Japanese government to the Covid-19 pandemic emphasized the conditional character of their inclusion and the vulnerability of the status of non-citizens.

Japan was one of the first countries after China, where the pandemic of Covid-19 broke out and in response to its spread it eventually closed its borders to foreign nationals on April third, 2020. Contrary to most countries, however, it did not consider the rights of foreign residents of Japan and even its permanent and other foreign residents were not allowed to re-enter country for about 5 months.⁸ Thus, those residents of Japan without Japanese citizenship who found themselves outside of Japan in early April 2020 were not allowed to return to their homes and jobs in Japan for at least several months,⁹ while their colleagues, friends or family members with Japanese citizenship could return. Even after lifting the re-entry ban in October 2020, the treatment for Japanese nationals and all other foreigners (again, including those already having legal resident status in Japan) continued to be unequal in different ways (Kim & Carlos, 2023; Rehm, 2023; Vogt & Qin, 2022).

The pandemic can be understood as an ‘unsettling event’ (Kilkey & Ryan, 2021) that disrupted mobility on a global scale (Jakobson et al., 2023). As Kilkey and Ryan argued, unsettling events are structural transformations that “provoke re-evaluation of migration projects” (2021, p. 234). Indeed, how migrants respond to such events varies and has different dimensions (Jakobson et al., 2023; Kilkey & Ryan, 2021) and the following section focuses particularly on the subjective and relational dimensions, or “what meanings migrants give to their circumstances and how they evaluate them” and how this reflects “discursive positionings relative to other groups” (Kilkey & Ryan, 2021, p. 234). Thus, rather than analyzing the effect of the pandemic on migrants’ lives, such analysis aims better understanding of the self-perceptions of the White migrants in this study and how they juxtapose their position within Japanese society with the majority and other minorities.

⁸For a more detailed overview, see for example Burgess, 2021 and Rehm, 2023.

⁹In late May 2020, Ministry of Justice said that it will consider special circumstances and allow certain residents back to Japan based on humanitarian grounds but did not reveal a clearer definition or examples until June 12th.

6.3.1 *Anxiety—Marginalization and Loss of Agency?*

Unsettling events often trigger anxiety for migrants (Jakobson et al., 2023) and indeed, there were several interviewees who reported that as a response to the Covid-19 measures they started to feel anxiety. While there were no interviewees (or their family members) who have been directly affected by these measures by, for example, not being able to return to Japan, several expressed negative sentiments. Interviewees reported particularly feelings of anxiety about their future and loss of control over their lives in Japan (“I felt that I have no deciding power”, Sofija, freelancer, North Macedonia) or feelings of being “marginalized instantly” (Linda, researcher/PhD fellow, Romania) when the measures were introduced. While both Sofija and Linda shared more precarious positions, uncertain future prospects and open possibilities in terms of the country of their future residence, feelings of anxiety could be seen among well settled and more secure individuals as well.

Vivienne, a French woman in her forties, met her Japanese husband while studying in the UK and came with him to Japan initially on a working holiday visa in 2004. After facing some initial hiccups, she managed to secure her first French language teaching job, received further education to be able to teach at the university level, and now teaches as a part-time lecturer at several universities. As a native speaker with the required credentials and social capital she accumulated over the years, such positions are relatively accessible. She also obtained permanent residency, started a family, learnt the language, and with her husband working for one of the top Japanese companies, she enjoyed a sense of safety and expressed high satisfaction with her life in Japan. Yet, the arrival of the pandemic and consequent introduction of the (re-)entry restrictions led her to realize the conditional character of her inclusion in the Japanese society as she clarifies in the following quote.

I got angry, because before, I didn't feel like I was the insect in-- I mean, the cockroach. ... before that, I thought I was more like – I didn't care. ... You see what I'm scared of now. You don't know what they can do.

Vivienne, France, part-time lecturer, forties, 16 years in Japan

From the perspective of their positioning within the wider context of the receiving society and vis-à-vis other minorities, narratives such as Vivienne's demonstrate how the pandemic became a trigger for some of them to realize their limited inclusion and reproduction of othering in the Japanese society (see also Hof's chapter in this volume). Despite efforts of many Western countries to ease the re-entry ban for foreign residents through diplomatic channels, business representatives, or petitions, the Japanese government continued to treat all foreign residents in the discriminatory way throughout the pandemic.¹⁰ As argued in recent studies (Burgess, 2021; Rehm, 2023; Vogt & Qin, 2022), such discriminatory treatment of the non-citizens further reproduced the established and institutionalized collective identity of a foreigner (Kashiwazaki, 2013) and emphasized that in the context of Japan “the

¹⁰ Indeed, there were exceptions on restrictions made at different points for particular countries where the virus was deemed to be under control.

‘foreignness’ of all immigrants overwrites all other identities” (Liu-Farrer, 2020, p. 149).

At the same time, the accounts on feelings of anxiety and marginalization suggest a form of differentiation from other migrant minorities as well. One thread that is connecting these narratives is the sense of resentment, the perception that they should not be treated like a “cockroach”, that they should have the control over their lives in Japan (i.e., to be able to decide whether to stay longer or when to leave) or that they should not be marginalized. Moreover, this sense of resentment was largely ignored (“I didn’t care”) or not realized prior to the pandemic. Thus, Vivienne emphasized that she “didn’t feel like” the way she described before, Linda realized that “Well, is this how Japan treats its foreigners?” and Sofija that “it became more difficult to decide anything”.

This can be interpreted as a way in which the interviewees distinguish themselves from a perception of migrants as marginalized and lacking agency and the pandemic re-entry rules, media coverage or interactions in everyday life led them to realizing their status as such. Steve Garner observed that “White people experience a number of mundane transactions (...) as unproblematic, not realizing that this is the case because of their Whiteness, while other, bearing the burden of suspicion, encounter extra checks, questions, surveillance, policing” (Garner, 2007, pp. 41–42). Although such observation is based on research within the White-majority societies, the blindness to hardships and discrimination that many other minorities have to cope with in everyday lives is palpable in the cases discussed above.

Indeed, the more privileged status of these White migrants in terms of occupations, class or legal status, or intersections with other identities create “a complex set of experiences” in their lives as migrants (Lundström, 2014, p. 18) in Japan. Nevertheless, it is plausible to argue that the Whiteness of the interviewees in these cases contributed to experiencing their everyday lives in pre-pandemic Japan “as unproblematic” and the pandemic lead to realization of their migrant identity that can be perceived as problematic (e.g., being treated like a “cockroach”), unwanted or as a possible threat for some of them. Their dismay suggests this problematic migrant identity imposed on them during the pandemic was contradicting an underlying assumption that they represent good migrants, who are well integrated, unproblematic, and worthy or deemed as discussed later in the section on integration.

6.3.2 *Justification, Indifference, and Safety*

Another group of interviewees responded to the questions regarding the pandemic and the way it was dealt with by the Japanese government in an apparently opposite way to the previous group. Leonas works as a university faculty and researcher, and came to Japan initially as a PhD fellow after not finding satisfactory the PhD course he started in his home country of Lithuania in late 2010. Leonas was highly experienced in studying and doing research abroad—he studied in Germany, and did study stays in Singapore and Switzerland as well—and doing research in Japan at a

prestigious university went well for him. Successful research led to further job opportunities yet even his current position is still not permanent. Thus, while in general his current situation and career in Japan can be seen as a “kind of smooth ... there are multiple caveats to it”. Leonas was well aware of the highly competitive and insecure academia positions where his position is dependent on the research leader’s externally funded contract but played down concerns by acknowledging that “I cannot complain in my situation, I’m a privileged person [by having a full-time job]”. Like Vivienne, he also married a Japanese spouse, they are raising their children in Japan, he learnt to speak Japanese and can be regarded as considerably integrated after more than 10 years of living in Japan. Nevertheless, despite the similarities with cases such as Vivienne’s, his reaction to the pandemic-induced travel restrictions for foreign nationals was quite contrary and he attempted to justify the re-entry ban introduced by the Japanese government.

But all the countries did the same thing.... So that was scary, but otherwise, I think that Japan kind of managed ... At the end of the day, the island belongs to the Japanese. They are generating money here, and they’re paying also our salaries, right? So, by the end of the day whatever discriminatory measures they are imposing here, it’s their choice.

Leonas, Lithuania, university faculty/researcher, thirties, 11 years in Japan.

Leonas insinuated at several places during the interview his feelings of job insecurity, dependence on research funding and a feeling that his inclusion in professional circles in Japan is conditional.¹¹ In this way, his abovementioned response to the re-entry ban can be attributed partially to these feelings of dependency on the receiving society and anxiety, or in other words, as an attempt to not rock the boat. Nevertheless, cases of other interviewees who were occupying different positions yet held similar views to Leonas suggest a need to account for other factors to understand why some interviewees explicitly argued that the choice made by the government was unfortunate for some but eventually the right one.

For example, John, an in-house translator from UK in his thirties, argued that although the question of whom to let in and whom not was “a difficult one, but stopping all of them [the foreigners] is probably administratively easier”. John came to Japan as a student of Japanese for a one-year program in 2004 and decided later to leave his academic career shortly after he started a graduate program at prominent US university because his priority was to live in Japan. He found a stable job in Tokyo which he enjoys as he enjoys his settled life with his Japanese wife and children. Despite not expressing or suggesting any concerns similar to Leonas, he still shared a view that justified the exclusionary practices of the Japanese government as “unfortunate” and “unfair” in some cases, but practical.

Although there were relatively few interviewees¹² who explicitly justified the border closure and the discriminatory treatment of foreign residents, there were

¹¹ At one place he said that the highly influential and powerful Japanese academics in his field “don’t care about the foreigners. For them, it’s like I am air.”

¹² The third one was Peter—a Slovak initially coming to Japan on working holiday visas in early 2020 and working in retail for a small company—who argued that he was initially “taken aback” by the introduction of such measures that were “discriminating against foreigners” but “when I

several other interviewees who were either indifferent or more ambivalent in their attitudes towards the re-entry ban. As the following case illustrates, this ambivalence or indifference was often related to a narrative of feeling safer or doing better in Japan than they would in Europe.

Lyam is a French ski instructor and entrepreneur living in a smaller town on the northern island of Hokkaido which is famous for its snow and natural environment. Before moving to Hokkaido in early 2018, he spent 18 years in Thailand where he settled after several years with a transnational company as an expat that brought him to other countries as well. Lyam is one of the increasing numbers of winter sports enthusiasts from Europe, Australia, or North America whose main reason to move to Japan was snow. His narrative demonstrates the diversity of outcomes of the pandemic which could be in some cases even perceived positively, especially in the later stages.¹³

Lyam: I feel safer here than in Europe.

Miloš: It was a big shock for business, especially for you.

Lyam: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Of course, for business. It's been two seasons without much customers. So, for business, it's not good. But I can ski, enjoy the powder. No one is on the resort, it's bad for business, but I still enjoy the season. And I feel safe because I think it's a small town and people wear masks. Maybe finally the omicron is coming here and we're going to catch it, but so far, I didn't feel really – I feel well.

Lyam, France, entrepreneur/ski instructor, fourties, 3 years in Japan

Many other interviewees, such as John who compared the situation in Japan with that in the UK several times, shared a view that Japan did better in managing the pandemic than most other countries—a view that circulated during the pandemic extensively inside and outside of Japan in various media and on social networks. Besides the feeling of safety, Lyam placed emphasis on enjoyment what apparently represents an important factor that has been navigating his lifestyle torn between mobility and settlement,¹⁴ and spending pandemic in Japan—without hard lockdowns that we could see, for example, in many European countries—could provide him emotional compensation for the economic losses to his ski instructor business or, as discussed later, shaped his ambivalence towards the re-entry ban. The narrative of enjoying the snow, (relatively) empty ski resorts, or countryside, and a relatively looser measures and control within Japan during the pandemic was shared by other interviewees beyond the winter sports enthusiasts and even in the cases where

gave it some thought later, [I realized] that it was just a defense mechanism from the government here”.

¹³ Lyam was among the last interviewees that were interviewed in January 2022.

¹⁴ Lyam and his family intended to travel around the world in 2018 and staying in Hokkaido during the winter was planned to be only their first stop. Nevertheless, he, his wife (who is a Japanese but not a native of Hokkaido) and their children all liked the environment so much that they decided to stay. This resembles the reason he gave for deciding to stay in Thailand rather than being sent by his company elsewhere—he said that “I had traveled really a lot before in many, many places. Keep moving. So, I settled in Thailand. I liked it. So, I decided that I would stay and not continue traveling around”.

their livelihoods were severely affected by the pandemic. Such a narrative reflects the essence of the mobility of several individuals which can be conceptualized as lifestyle migration (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009).

Lyam's case also demonstrates how the previous two patterns associated with either harsh criticism or justification of the early re-entry ban for foreign nationals can overlap and such absolute positions are relativized. Lyam was interviewed in the late stage of the pandemic and although he was still concerned by the Covid-19 ("we're going to catch it"), the previous excerpt shows his surrender or acceptance of the status quo. Such an attitude could be seen in his recollection of the re-entry ban measures as well.

I could travel [last year] and I could come back to Japan. But I would have been very angry like other residents if I was stuck outside Japan with your [Japanese] wife, your kids or your business in Japan and you cannot re-enter the country as a resident. If you're working, you pay taxes. I think it was really stupid rule from the Japanese government.

...

It's not my country, so, I have to accept it. But, yeah, the feeling is bad.

Lyam disliked the "stupid rule" introduced by the government and at the same time, like virtually all of the interviewees, he was aware of his conditional inclusion ("I have to accept it"). Like, for example, Leonas, he expressed his obligation to follow the local laws and rules. Besides suggesting that he represents a good, law abiding migrant, his willingness to accept his legal and social position as a foreign national was conditioned by multiple factors that were common among other interviewees as well; middle-classness and relative economic safety and safety nets it provides, assessing the overall experience throughout the pandemic and juxtaposing it with his country or Europe, a lack of negative experience, and highly subjective view of the effect that the re-entry ban had on individuals ("I could travel"). Thus, as Kilkey and Ryan noted, the experience of unsettling events is a result of complex interaction between material, subjective and relational dimensions and they "can have contradictory effects, even for the same individual" (Kilkey & Ryan, 2021, p. 234). This is well reflected in narratives such as Lyam's, where the ambivalence in their attitudes can be traced to the complexity of their experiences.

What is of the main interest here, however, is the relational dimension and particularly how these narratives reflect their "structural and discursive positionings relative to other groups" (ibid). In the narratives of those interviewees who justified or were more or less ambivalent towards the discriminatory measures, we could see often references to "unlucky ones" who found themselves outside of Japan in early April 2020, and there could be seen an implicit differentiation with the unuttered 'other migrants' in their narratives as well. These 'other migrants' are based on their own representations shaped by discourse in home countries and discourse in Japan,¹⁵ generally associated with blue-collar workers coming from Asian countries, whose

¹⁵ Several interviewees referred to the image of migrants they acknowledged is shaped by the discourse in their countries of origin or Japan. They referred to these images as, for example, "migrant, it's Syrian people" (Vivienne, France) or "the image of immigration and refugees" (John, UK).

vulnerability was exacerbated by the pandemic (see e.g., Burgess, 2021; Slater, 2020; Suzuki, 2021). While these narratives do not cover extensively the various aspects of their experience during the pandemic or explore the degrees to which they suffered or endured economic hardships, by emphasizing the positives and downplaying the negative effects on their life and by justifying, overlooking or relativizing the “double-standard re-entry ban” (Arpad, introduced later) on foreign nationals through highly subjective perspectives, these interviewees disassociate themselves from those migrant groups who were seen as highly vulnerable and structurally disadvantaged during the pandemic, such as Indian restaurant workers, Vietnamese trainees or Chinese students (*ibid*).

Such narratives can be seen as suggesting self-identification as migrants who are self-reliant, law abiding, socially unproblematic and, as argued in the following part, well-integrated, through disassociation with the image of problematically perceived migrant groups or not integrated “expats”. Moreover, the highly subjective discursive strategies discussed above propel understandings of self as individuals rather than associating self with any particular group and the following section further demonstrates that they are often treated like *individual* foreign residents rather than a specific migrant *group*. The Whiteness studies scholars repeatedly argued that it is the invisibility of Whiteness that allows those racialized as White to be treated not as representatives of a group (e.g., migrants) but individuals (Dyer, 1997/2017; Garner, 2007; McIntosh, 1989). It can be argued that it is the invisibility and weightlessness of “knapsack of special provisions” provided by Whiteness (McIntosh, 1989) that allows them to narrate the experience during the pandemic in various, apparently contradictory ways that are, however, eventually interconnected by a subjective understanding of one’s place in Japan that conflates Whiteness with goodness (Cranston, 2017).

6.4 Integration

As Hof discusses in her chapter (this volume), majority society’s assumption on temporality of racialized others represents another aspect of the complexity of Whiteness in the context of migration to Japan that surfaced during the pandemic. The understanding of White (or any other) migrants in Japan as “guests” or as temporal sojourners who will eventually return has been an omnipresent topic in their everyday interactions (Debnár, 2016) and such topic represents an important part of narratives on one’s perceived position within Japanese society in pre-pandemic Japan as well. Moreover, this applies not only to those who are still living in Japan, but as the following quote illustrates, to those who opted to leave and are currently living outside of Japan.

Everybody [in Japan] is super nice, and everybody treats you with good respect and all this, but it just felt like they’re treating you in a different way. You’re here for being a foreigner. You’re assumed to always like, “He’s going to leave soon.” ... And you feel, at some point, it feels great in the beginning, but after a few months, after a few years, it just becomes like,

I mean, I just want to make connection past this, “Why are you here? Why do you speak Japanese? How do you find it here? Have you eaten this food? What do you think about work then? Do you go to karaoke?”

Ivan, Bulgaria, freelancer, thirties, lived in Japan for 6 years

Ivan studied and worked in Japan since 2010 and despite starting a subjectively interesting and promising career with a start-up company, he eventually decided to return to Bulgaria in 2016. His decision was not based on lack of work or career progress opportunities and family played a significant role, yet the quote is part of his long reply to my follow-up question whether there was “something particular that made you think that Japan is not the right place to actually stay in anymore”. Rather than assessing the degree of importance of feelings of alienation in decisions to leave, it is important to emphasize here that such narratives were often used to justify decisions to leave Japan, and it was done vis-à-vis the interviewer, who is himself a long-term resident of Japan perceived as White. In other words, racialized assumptions on one’s “natural” place of settlement represents a form of common sense in the Japanese society. For the interviewees, it represents a narrative that can be easily drawn on in justifying why not to settle in Japan or, as other interviewees not considering leaving Japan any time soon often emphasized, a narrative that needs to be addressed in explaining why to stay. The perceived temporality of those racialized as ‘others’ in Japan and assumptions on their eventual ‘return’ denote an invisible form of exclusion, or “a hidden battleground of inclusion” (Hackl, 2022, p. 990). Yet, as Ivan suggested as well, the interviewees realized sooner or later throughout their stays in Japan that this is a battle with a predetermined outcome—complete incorporation into the fabrics of Japanese society and recognition (“Let’s go past this and make a deeper connection”) are impossible and their inclusion is conditional.

Nevertheless, while in long-term feelings of being “treat[ed] in a different way” by the Japanese majority may lead to a lack of belonging to Japanese society (Liu-Farrer, 2020) or eventually become a factor to not settle in Japan further, it is important to reinstate that the experience of conditional inclusion does not entail negative forms of overt exclusion such as open segregation, blatant discrimination, ostracism, or stigmatization in the case of White migrants. Michael, an Irish product manager working remotely for an overseas company from Japan who has been living in a rural area of Japan for several years with his Japanese wife and family, aptly summarized the contradictory character of the position he feels one occupies in Japan as a White migrant.

So, I think you get both sides of the coin really, here. You get ... kind of what some people might say is positive racism. But I also just think it’s just blatant ignorance, [they are] just unexperienced of dealing with anything outside of the Japanese kind of community. So sometimes I just don’t even think it’s racism ... and they’re just unfamiliar. ... It’s just positive kind of avoidance. So, you get that side, and then you get this really interested and friendly [people], and [everybody] wants to chat with you. And so yeah, I have both sides of that. And yeah, certainly a lot of welcoming people as well.

Michael, Ireland, thirties, 5 years in Japan

Michael was interviewed in July 2021, but since he was working remotely even before the pandemic and is independent from the constraints of the local labor market, it did not bring him as significant change and challenges to his work and lifestyle as in other cases. He points out that there are “both sides of the coin” to being a foreigner in Japan yet suggests that in his case (as a White foreigner) the other—presumably negative—side of the coin is positive as well. What he and other interviewees are often struggling to explain is the apparent contradiction of being welcomed yet excluded in certain contexts. This, in turn, can be interpreted as a boundary making practice that attempts to differentiate themselves from the images of a problematic migrant and that of a Japanese resident at the same time. Such a tendency is also palpable in Michael’s explanation of my follow-up question on whether he feels “discriminated against”.

No. I’ve said this before, but sometimes I feel like I can get the reverse of that. It’s like more expectations put on you to integrate because you’re a foreigner or something. I’ve [experienced here that] the town leader is being pushed by the mayor to get me to come in town for a group meal and stuff like that, whereas that mayor wouldn’t even be having a group meal in this town if I wasn’t here. That kind of thing. Just really over-the-top integration as well, which is kind of pretty interesting. It’s like, “So this is really unique, and we want to get more foreigners coming into this rural part of Japan. And we want to know, why is [he] here, and how can we make this [place] more appealing? What are you interested in, and how can we make it easier for you?” So sometimes it’s just the total opposite of that, I found. Yeah. So, it can be good.

What he refers to here as “over-the-top integration” is related to how he is perceived as an esteemed foreigner and whereas he refers to “expectations put on you to integrate” he acknowledges the efforts made to “make this [place] more appealing” to him and “make it easier for” him to live there. It illustrates how he stands out in his Whiteness in a rural area of Japan as a prototype of a good immigrant, who can and should be integrated and who can contribute to the local society just by being there.

Michael stands out as a “foreigner” (*gaikokujin* in Japanese), an apparently general category for all foreign residents which, however, overlaps with Whiteness in the context of Japan (Debnár, 2022; Russell, 2017, p. 2). Some of the interviewees explicitly addressed the issue of being perceived differently (more positively) than foreign nationals from other, often Asian, countries (see, Debnár, 2023, pp. 367–369; also Hof, 2021, p. 2126). As suggested in previous studies, coming from a Western country and being White is often enough to be perceived as a preferred type of migrant (Igarashi, 2015; Igarashi & Mugiyama, 2023; Kage et al., 2022), and the link between the Whiteness and desirability is further strengthened by expectations on skills essential for economic growth (Debnár, 2016; Fraser & Cheng, 2022; Hof, 2021). Thus, when Michael refers to a positive local perception that “we want to get more foreigners coming into this rural part of Japan”, it also entails differentiation from a stereotypical representation of a problematically perceived immigrant (*imin* in Japanese) as, for example, the case of exploited Vietnamese or Chinese Technical Trainee Program workers in agriculture in rural Japan.

As Michael suggests, he is an independent (and thus unproblematic) organic farmer (his side job) who can bring new practices to what he referred to as “more

like monoculture kind of chemical fertilizer type growing” which highlights his possible role as a contributor to the society and conflates his Whiteness with skills and goodness (Cranston, 2017). His understanding that the local representatives are interested in “why is [he] here and how can we make this [place] more appealing” for people like him (read White), suggests that he might indeed be seen as an acceptable solution to the problem of ageing and depopulation in rural Japan as seen, for example, in an earlier campaign in rural Japan several years ago.¹⁶

What Michael called “over-the-top integration”, or a positive and welcoming effort to integrate that many of the interviewees encountered in Japan, provides White migrants with freedoms to negotiate their belonging or migration strategies in a way that is often not accessible to those perceived as non-White and non-Japanese. Although it does not entail unconditional acceptance or absence of racialization, being largely free from the negative connotations of a migrant or blatant (negative) discrimination is a part of the tools provided by the “invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions” (McIntosh, 1989) that allows for more choices to negotiate and allow for appreciating the positives of being a White foreigner in Japan that Michael and many others mentioned in their interviews. This also helps us to understand why some interviewees such as Ivan would cite the limits to their fuller integration to the Japanese society as one of the factors that led them to opt for leaving Japan, while others would see it as something that they experience in a very positive way (Debnár, 2023, p. 370) or dismiss the relevance of such limitations to their inclusion by asking simply “why should it bother me?” (Wolfgang, Austria, fifties, IT professional, 12 years in Japan).

It can be argued that the narratives of one’s integration were often used to emphasize that they are “worthy of residence, (and) positive recognition” as good migrants (Hackl, 2022, p. 991). Indeed, what Ivan suggests in the earlier quote and resonated in other narratives is a lack of positive recognition for their efforts to integrate such as, learning and speaking the language, understanding the culture, or appreciating the good things about Japan. Talking about one’s integration efforts was often used as a trope to differentiate oneself from other migrants as demonstrated in a quote from an interview with Arpad.

Expatriate no, it’s more like negative feeling attached to it. Yeah, unconsciously I don’t know expat, no. Expatriate, no. I mean if you insisted on the word itself what does it mean for me, I would prefer migrant but kind of integrated migrant. So not like somebody who has just migrated and doesn’t know what to do yet but somebody who has been here. I’m migrant but in the sense that I wasn’t born and raised in this country, and I decided to come to this country by myself... I’m a migrant. But ... in that sense I wouldn’t say migrant [but] that I’m already pretty much integrated. Socially that means [having Japanese] friends, family, job wise. Even to some degree culture in the sense there are many things I can accept and ... understand.

Arpad, Hungary, university professor, forties, first came to Japan in 1999

¹⁶In an effort to fight the ageing and depopulation, Otari village in Nagano prefecture issued in 2018 a calendar aimed at luring more young women to move and settle in the village by advertising young, single males from the village on each of the pages (months). The only non-Japanese male depicted was a White Australian.

Arpad came to Japan already in 1999, studied at a graduate school of a prestigious university in Japan and eventually found his way to a stable and well-paid employment as tenured faculty at university in Japan. However, it was not an easy sail for Arpad, and he experienced a lot of difficulties in personal life; similarly to Leonas or some of his Japanese colleagues from the graduate school Arpad struggled with securing a permanent position and often hardly scraped through financially. Eventually, he is one of those who were able to secure a stable and relatively prestigious job but his hard effort and determination shaped his narrative.

When asked whether he see himself as a migrant or an expat, Arpad strived to disassociate himself from what he thinks is perceived as negative others in Japan and implied his goodness. As a sociologist, he was clearly aware of the negative connotations of migrants and perception of expats as living in isolated spaces without trying to integrate. He struggled to categorize himself between these two poles and suggests that while migrant might be a better word than expat, there are crucial differences. On one hand, Arpad emphasized that he is not a problematic migrant lacking agency and driven mainly by economic factors, he is not a representative of an “ethnic minority” (as he emphasized also earlier in the interview) and on the other hand associated himself with the opposites to popular stereotypes on migrants as problem—being integrated socially (having Japanese friends and family), economically (having a stable job) and culturally. Accounts emphasizing one’s integration into Japanese society were common among other interviewees, including those who decided to leave Japan but often quickly reminded the interviewer that “I was perfectly integrated” (Lorenzo, Italy, forties, lived in Japan for 5 years) emphasizing their effort. The narratives of integration are used to emphasize their goodness and worth as migrants.

These accounts demonstrate how the interviewees present themselves as good migrants, who are trying hard to integrate, understand the cultural values or practices in the labor market, having useful jobs, or being appreciative of the Japanese culture. These accounts are apparently not coherent with the previous findings demonstrating the limits of White privilege and arguing that White migrants in Japan are limited to certain niches and spaces in the labor market or social interactions (Debnár, 2016; Miladinović, 2020; Willis, 2008) or that Whiteness (and foreignness) is impeding integration in workplaces (Hof, 2021; Hof & Tseng, 2020). However, this putative dissonance or contradiction can be reconciled if we acknowledge that even migrants who are constructed as good migrants are often included with limited entitlements and are marginalized (Hackl, 2022). As Hackl argued, “people’s marginality is not only the result of exclusion but is also due to their inclusion with pre-defined limited entitlements” (Hackl, 2022, p.990). Such understanding of marginality as not negating but rather being integral part of inclusion allows us to reconcile apparently contradictory categories suggested in the narratives introduced above and in previous studies on the role of Whiteness in the migration context of Japan, such as feelings of alienation and integration, or contextuality and contingency of the Whiteness as a privileging identity. At the same time, it allows us to acknowledge the limits of the privilege based on the Whiteness of these migrants without overlooking the role Whiteness play in everyday lives and functions as a

racialized border that differentiates them from those constructed as non-White migrants.

6.5 Conclusion

Perceptions of Whiteness represent a dynamic construct changing over time and its intersection with multiple other identities, particular social, national, and regional contexts bring about different ways in which Whiteness is evaluated (Hof, 2021; S. Lan et al., 2022). This chapter returns the focus in study of Whiteness in migration context in Asia to what Garner called the second racialized border that is “separating “Whites” from people not racialized as White” (Garner, 2017, p. 1591). It does so by attempting to reconcile the apparent contradictions of exclusion or marginalization and privilege by utilizing the concept of ‘good migrants’. The chapter argues that while Whiteness can lead to marginalization this should be understood as an essential part of being included in the receiving society as ‘others’ with limited entitlements (Hackl, 2022). Thus, while acknowledging the limits of the Whiteness as privileging identity, this chapter attempted to emphasize how preferences for White migrants among the wider public, or structural advantages brought by a particular visa regime led to construction of White migrants as good migrants—the desired, skilled, and unproblematic migrants as possible contributors to the society. The empirical section demonstrated how the self-perceptions of White European migrants’ position within Japanese society reflect the complexity of Whiteness as both privileging and alienating identity that, nonetheless, eventually represents White migrants as the good migrants, or in Hackl’s terms those “worthy of residence, [and] positive recognition” (2022, p. 991).

Despite the diversity of reactions to the pandemic and travel ban for foreign residents, the chapter argued that these narratives were underpinned by a subjective, often tacit, understanding of one’s place in Japan as a good migrant. Goodness is suggested in various ways, such as by emphasizing one’s efforts to learn the language, understand the culture and customs, integrate socially, and contribute economically by paying taxes or doing useful jobs. The self-presentation as contributors to the society is fueled by similar expectations on their role by wider Japanese society; as skilled workers, as one of the possible solutions to the ageing society, or as those appreciating the Japanese culture and spreading it abroad. The apparently neutral category of a foreigner is conflated with Whiteness, skills that are useful for the receiving society and goodness (Cranston, 2017). Cultural appreciation by *White* migrants reflects the racial hierarchies and the context of modern Japan where the acknowledgement from the (White) West became an essential part of the modern Japanese identity (Majima, 2014). It needs to be noted, however, that Whiteness is not a *sine qua non* of a good migrant and, indeed, possession of skills or other characteristics can render those not racialized as White as good migrants as well (see Hof in this volume). Nevertheless, while good migrants do not necessarily mean White migrants, Whiteness is more often than not conflated with goodness.

Conceptualizing the case of White migrants as ‘good migrants’ helps us to further understand the apparent paradoxes of Whiteness as being both visible and invisible (Dyer, 1997/2017; Garner, 2007), or as entailing the marginalization and positive inclusion, lack of overt discrimination and alienation. The integration of these migrants is indeed incomplete, and integration implicates marginalization as well. Nevertheless, this should be understood as an inseparable part of the ‘otherness’, an identity that is in Japan remarkably resilient and continuously reproduced rather than seriously contested (Liu-Farrer, 2020; Osanami-Törngren, 2022, p. 817), not necessarily only as a negative differentiation and exclusion that relativizes the privilege of being White in Japan, particularly in relation to other minorities.

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Chapter 7

‘White Innovation’: Conceptualizing Changing Racial Hierarchies Through Migrant Entrepreneurship in Singapore and Japan



Helena Hof

7.1 Introduction

This chapter explores changing power hierarchies and emerging contestations of White privilege based on the analysis of qualitative data collected among “skilled migrants” (by visa status or profession) in contemporary Singapore and Japan. Drawing from accounts of phenotypically ‘White’ and ‘non-White’ migrants (hereafter White/non-White) from various national and ethnic backgrounds and with a focus on professionals and startup founders in innovative, creative, or knowledge-intensive sectors, I argue that innovation and skills function as new proxies of power. They grant an ethnically diversifying range of skilled migrants access to status and elevated positions in advanced East Asian market economies such as Singapore and Japan, a status which, as I demonstrate, was formerly largely reserved for White people and associated with Westernness and Whiteness.

I conceptualize such elevated status as ‘White innovation’ and show how innovation and skills are entangled with race and transposed ideas of White competencies and accomplishments in high-tech fields. The analysis reveals that ‘White innovation’ can be embodied by non-White, non-Western passport holders in contemporary Asia, but the ideas of hegemonic Whiteness are deeply entrenched in the notion of the successful entrepreneur/startup founder. The comparison of Singapore and Japan underlines the protracted (embodied) White privilege at work in Japan, whereas status is granted to (most of) those deemed knowledgeable, skilled, or innovative in Singapore, which renders the group of those ‘desired’ more heterogeneous and considerably less ‘White’. The chapter draws from theorizations of a

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colonial but emancipating subjectivity (Singapore) and admiration of the West by simultaneous claims to one's own racial superiority (Japan). It argues that the properties of Whiteness are diversifying and transforming the meaning of Whiteness in the two Asian countries due to not only their distinct historical legacies but also the competing internal racial dynamics both countries are experiencing today. After a short overview of the two contexts within which Whiteness will be analyzed, the chapter discusses the functioning of Whiteness as a signifier of innovation and skills rather than through skin color or Western citizenship and thereby sets the path for the analysis that follows.

7.2 Whiteness During Social Transformations in Singapore and Japan

Whiteness as a distinct “representation or signification of identity” within the broader category of difference, race (Omi & Winant, 2015, p.111), is complex and multifaceted in Singapore and Japan. Singapore calls itself multiracial, multilingual, and multireligious and celebrates “unity in diversity” under the CMIO concept, which counts Chinese, Malay, Indian, and Other as the four officially designated races in Singapore (Reddy, 2016). The peculiar category of “Other” lacks a clear definition. It is not, however, associated with Whiteness. Rather, Whiteness, as in other former British colonies, used to imply high status and short-to-medium-term expatriate assignments in Singapore (Cranston, 2017). In Japan, too, Whiteness has been equaled with expatriation or traveling ‘guests’ and has enjoyed a similar high status; although, the country has never been colonized by White—as a proxy for Western—powers. Western hegemony in the nineteenth century and the imitation of US capitalism and consumption behavior during the US occupation until 1952 and after entailed a lasting notion of awe towards the West and to ‘White and Western (American men)’ as role models. This, however, has coexisted with Japan’s ambivalent positioning towards the West and continued self-orientalizing (Bonnett, 2002).

White people’s reception in contemporary Singapore and Japan needs to be examined in light of recent social transformations in the two countries. For decades, Singapore has relied on the import of foreign labor and has granted extensive rights to so-called *foreign talent*, that is, highly skilled foreign professionals, who used to come predominantly from Western countries and thus, were mostly White. However, foreign talents’ previously privileged treatment has changed due to the pressure put on the government after having allowed into the country large numbers of foreigners in the 2000s. Foreign talents increasingly face difficulties when renewing their visa or when trying to obtain permanent residence (hereafter PR) (Yang et al., 2017; Hof & Alloul, 2023).

In the twenty-first century, the category of foreign talent has diversified, and the number of ethnic Asians has grown at the expense of White foreign talents (Yeoh, 2018). ‘Co-ethnic’ migrants, that is, Chinese, Malaysian, and Indian migrants,

constitute the major ethnic groups of foreign talents in contemporary Singapore. Their presence points to the internal diversification of Singaporean society. These migrants come from an increasing range of regions within China, Malaysia, and India and sometimes speak different dialects than the majority of Singaporeans, who are of Chinese, Malaysian, and Indian descent. While the Singaporean government seems to have expected that the import of such 'co-ethnic' migrants would enable their quick integration, opposition, and xenophobic remarks against Chinese, Malaysian, and Indian migrants have become stronger (Tan, 2014; Kathiravelu, 2017; Ang, 2022).

At the same time, the group of 'White migrants' is also diversifying, and fewer enjoy the same benefits granted to their expatriate co-ethnics. The White experience in late 2010s Singapore was multidimensional, included upward and downward social mobility, fear of illegality in case of job loss, and a "passive", uncontrollable functioning of Whiteness as a privileged status in business but less so in private life (Hof, 2021; Moosavi, 2022).

This situation contrasts with Japan, whose demographic problem—rapid aging coupled with a low birth rate and a pressing need for labor—caused a gradual relaxation of Japan's immigration policies since the late twentieth century. This process has accelerated since, with a proliferation of new visa categories and a rapid increase in the foreign resident population, spurring debates about Japan finally becoming an immigrant country (Liu-Farrer, 2020). Regardless of such unfolding diversification of Japanese society "'race' [continues to] get[s] conflated with foreignness and citizenship, so that all those who look or act differently than the norm tend to face xenophobia" (Myslinska, 2014, p.6). White people often enjoyed benefits but were regarded as Others at the same time. As in many contexts, White people are lumped together under an imagined category of high-earning expatriates with no long-term objectives to stay in Japan unless married to a Japanese citizen (Debnár, 2016).

At the onset of the pandemic, Chinese citizens were the by far largest foreign national group in Japan, followed by South Koreans, Vietnamese, and Filipinos. While the notion of an inferior Asia has stuck, and Asian migrants have faced a less welcoming, sometimes discriminatory treatment, long-term Asian immigrants (especially those proficient in Japanese) have become more visible in contemporary Japanese society (Liu-Farrer, 2020). Only recently has scholarship started to unearth the heterogeneity of the White experience and its intersectional dimensions, which has led to a more differentiated picture of White (including long-term) migrants in Japan negotiating stereotypes, loss of privilege, and expectations to assimilate (Appleyby, 2014; Debnár, 2016; Hof, 2022; Zorko & Milos, 2021).

The major difference to Singapore is that the context of the reception of migrants (including the 'skilled') has diametrically changed in the two countries. While Singapore has transformed from the 'ideal' immigrant country to one increasingly difficult to enter and even more to stay, Japan has more actively welcomed labor migrants, with the number of long-term stayers rising. This chapter argues that Whiteness is becoming a more liminal identity in both countries, with some of the positive attributes of Whiteness becoming more strongly attached to notions of innovation and skills in Singapore and Japan's endeavor to innovate their economies, a process I call 'White innovation'.

7.3 Intersections of Whiteness and Skills in Asian Innovation

The *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* devoted an entire Special Issue to the “social construction of skill ... in cross-border labour mobilities” (Liu-Farrer et al., 2020). It does, however, fall short of tackling the intersections of race, ethnicity, and skills and acknowledges this as a significant omission. Critical migration research and scholarship on race and ethnicity have started to look into the racial element of the way skills are defined and used—or the way skills “do heavy work” in Junjia Ye’s words (2023)—which is inherent to contemporary migration governance. Ye points out how women migrant domestic workers’ skills are devalued in Singapore and categorized as ‘low-skilled’ by the government despite many of these migrant women’s high education and diverse practical, linguistic, and social skills. Likewise, Miloš Debnár (2023) confirms previous arguments by expatriation and Whiteness studies in relation to skills with the example of the unjustified elevated status of Whiteness in Japan, where the media selects White American men to represent highly skilled foreign IT engineers although the majority of foreign engineers are Asian.

Skills allow governments to racialize migrants in the language of economic value. Furthermore, migrant-receiving societies, as well as migrants themselves, have internalized associations of (high or low) skills with racialized bodies and thus implicitly partake in the perpetuation of racial hierarchies and social inequality (Fox et al., 2015). As such, Whiteness is not just about White skin. It is a symbolic marker of superiority and associated with positive attributes ranging from professional skills and accomplishments to wealth, mobility, cosmopolitanism, American or British English as well as (technological) innovation (Lundström, 2014; Cranston, 2017).

Phenotypically White people are a minority in East Asia. Lan (2022, p.3548) argued for the context of China that “White skin privilege [is] a type of circumscribed privilege which capitalises on cultural and racial stereotypes associated with White skin and Western looks.” At the same time, Whiteness has become “precarious” in Asian contexts, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic (Lan, 2022). As this chapter will show, this also holds true for Japan and—albeit differently due to its postcolonial legacy—for Singapore. Furthermore, White privilege, being less tightly coupled to White skin color but to the cultural and racial stereotypes formerly associated with White skin, has become detached and increasingly ‘re-tached’ to non-White bodies. I argue this for the specific case of presumably ‘Western’ technological know-how and progress, of which Silicon Valley (SV) and associated high-tech innovation and skills have become representatives since the late 1990s.

The tech boom and the dot.com bubble in SV in the 1990s have spurred the creation of startups in innovative fields, first in the US and later globally. The remaining chapter demonstrates that the successful startup founder or IT engineer in SV embodies a specific form of White capital. It accrues meaning in the process of ‘White innovation’, based on its leveraging of long-known positive attributes associated with Whiteness but added by a strong connection with technological progress

and the ability to contribute to innovation. It is well known that more than half of the founders in SV have an immigrant background, often from China or India (Saxenian, 2007). In line with this, I use the case of foreign entrepreneurship in Singapore's and Tokyo's emerging startup scenes to argue that it is not exclusively skin color nor nationality that confers White status and power in today's knowledge economies. Rather, those who can confidently navigate knowledge-intensive markets and contribute to the national economy's innovation, who speak the right language—for which, depending on context, English might not be sufficient, — who have the habitus of the respective professional class and industry (Bourdieu, 1984), and who can, ideally, draw on elite business and alumni networks, are increasingly recognized as 'White' regardless of their skin color or nationality.

The following analysis is sensitive to the three analytical levels of Whiteness in Asia as proposed by Lan (2022), p.163): "as lived experiences, as a structural and relational positionality, and as a racialized subjectivity." In so doing, the chapter contends that Whiteness in Asia is becoming ever more porous, granting 'White' status and power to a diversifying group of people who are neither phenotypically White nor the stereotypical Asian (i.e., Chinese and Indian) engineers. This happens in tandem with the social transformations and the diversification of the two receiving societies, in which a multiplicity of Asian ethnicities leads to a complex picture of 'White innovation'. Migrants partake in 'White innovation' if they are involved in highly innovative businesses and if they have either skills or professional networks that signify technological progress, such as those related to SV. The analysis shows likewise how phenotypically White migrants are less easily granted inclusion in the ranks of 'skilled migrant entrepreneurs'. Some are pushed into an ambiguous positionality which, for them, is difficult to align with their racialized subjectivity as previously high-status individuals in East Asia.

7.4 Methods and Data

This chapter uses qualitative data from two research projects based on in-depth (semi-structured and follow-up) interviews and ethnographic observations of 70 EU citizens in Tokyo and Singapore between 2014 and 2021 (Project A) and a new research project on migrant entrepreneurs in Singapore and Tokyo (Project B), for which I interviewed a total of 69 migrant entrepreneurs since 2020. 28 of the 69 interviewees were phenotypically 'White' whereas the majority of the sample (39) were Asian as well as four 'Black', four 'biracial' (White-Asian) as well as four Middle Eastern participants (Table 7.1).

Migrants' ages across both projects ranged from mid-20s to mid-50s at the time of the first interview, with a relatively even gender breakdown for the first study. However, men outweigh women in the study on entrepreneurs, which is typical for both entrepreneurship and the high-tech industry. Long-term field immersion in Japan and Singapore for Project A involved modes of participant observation such as regular presence at migrants' leisure activities and networking events and

Table 7.1 Migrant entrepreneurs in Tokyo and Singapore by race^a (Project B)

	‘White’	Asian	‘Black’	biracial (White-Asian)	Middle Eastern
Tokyo	15	23	4	2	2
Singapore	13	16	0	2	2
TOTAL	28	39	4	4	4

N = 69.

^aI am aware of the problems surrounding these terms and I do not intend to downplay nor reify the constructed nature of race. Lacking a better descriptive, I decided to distinguish interviewees on the (non-absolute) signifier of phenotype (race) here to draw attention to their phenotypical diversity, which precisely helps ‘de-racialize’ the analysis and reveal when phenotype matters but also consider when it might not.

repeated follow-ups with key interlocutors, all of which provided ethnographic insight into ‘White’ participants’ concerns and rationales.

Common to both projects, all but a handful of respondents held university degrees, working in such fields as IT and deep tech, sales and marketing, civil engineering, finance, tourism, consulting, languages and culture, architecture, real estate, and corporate law. Participants were identified through my academic, collegial and friendship networks, online job-hunting platforms, and hobby circles, followed by snowball sampling. I obtained oral or written informed consent from the interviewees and used pseudonyms to protect their identity. Interviews were conducted in English, Japanese, and German and were tape-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed along the principles of grounded theory.

7.5 Whiteness in (a) Crisis: The Context-Dependent Nuances of Colored Blaming During COVID-19

7.5.1 Singapore: White Status Flight Under Pragmatic Migration Governance

The COVID-19 pandemic brought an end to unprecedented mobility and an era of increased highly skilled migration around the globe. While scholars had noted a change in openness to foreigners’ reception in the 2010s—a decade of rising social tensions and concerns over overt competition with foreign talents (Yang et al., 2017)—it was the onset of the pandemic that brought migration to Singapore to a halt, and the long-grown opposition to foreign talents to erupt.

Pascal, a ‘White’ French man in his mid-thirties with an entrepreneurial history in Fin Tech, was the first to cite the case of White dismissal. I would hear alterations of his story repeatedly during my visit to Singapore in early 2022 when the country had just started to re-open after almost 2 years of border closures to tourists and few strictly managed exceptions to certain cross-border commuters as well as long-term residents and citizens. Pascal had been involved in Singapore’s multiethnic startup communities for years and had worked alongside Singaporean, other Asian, and

European colleagues, employers, and employees. He calls Singapore “sufficiently cosmopolitan” and emphasizes that the entrepreneurial space is particularly diverse. In terms of social acceptance, however, Pascal shares his rather gloomy perception of the change in foreigners’ reception during the pandemic.

Particularly because of COVID, a lot of foreigners have felt excluded. We were at the end of the value chain in terms of recognition of issues that we are having. Most of us were disconnected from our families ... At the beginning of the pandemic there were seven expats, they were drinking outside, and they were cut as if they had killed a family. Their names were on the media channels, their pictures, [too]. They did not hurt anyone, and I get that they broke the rule, and they got fined and were kicked out. The media attention toward it was just disgusting. Because last year there was a case where Singaporean Chinese or PRC Chinese got infected because they were going to KTVs, low-level prostitution establishments. They ... were 15 people inside a small room with two Vietnamese prostitutes who had COVID. ... They created a new wave. I don’t know if they got fined, but all their faces were blurred out and none of them got any issue. When you see that there is an imbalance in how foreigners are treated. People who have expat friends understood that bias, but Singaporeans did not see an issue there.

It is difficult to trace the exact details of the two incidents Pascal narrated. I tried to verify the story by closely reading related media reports. Pascal’s version lacks accuracy, for instance regarding the number of people involved but also that among those fined was also a Singaporean woman. Important for the discussion here is the way his story points towards the increased challenges foreigners faced due to the COVID restrictions, which other White and non-White migrants confirmed and which posed severe hardships on non-citizens. Above all, Pascal’s is an emotional reaction to what he interprets as unfair treatment of foreigners by the state. Blaming the legally powerless for outbreaks of diseases is a constant in history, and ethnic minorities in particular are often racialized as scapegoats (Robinson & Santos, 2014).

The case under discussion is striking since it is Whiteness that is singled out and becomes the new figure of the ‘scapegoat’ in Singapore. In line with other accounts of both the complicity with White privilege and the fading dominance of Whiteness in postcolonial contexts, Whiteness is not called out explicitly (Garner, 2007). Pascal does not use the term ‘White’ nor does he mention that all of the ‘expats’ of the former incident were White. Whiteness, as so often in history, tends to function as an invisible, colorless signifier (McIntosh, 1989). Other interviewees were more explicit in their versions of the same incident and called the subjects “White”, “Western” or “British”. Their emotional reading of what had happened and the heated debates it triggered can be interpreted as feelings of offense and attempts at defending themselves or others they considered *like* them. Their perceptions of an unjust blaming of ‘all Whites including them’ can be inferred from Pascal’s choice of strong words such as “disgusting”. Consciously or not, White interviewees tended to self-identify with the British expats and felt put on the spot, which suggests that they constructed an in-group of White people in Singapore and an out-group of (presumably non-White) Singaporeans (Wimmer, 2009).

White people’s surprise and repulsion of the way the British lawbreakers were portrayed by the media lays bare the disjuncture in the representation of White people in Singapore before and since COVID-19. The expat had become a contested

figure in Singapore in the 2000s already (Tan, 2014). The British colonial history entailed that the category of expatriates in Singapore had always at least partly pertained to Whites, although the increasing ethnic diversity of the category has been acknowledged since the 2000s (Yeoh & Lam, 2016). While the rising opposition to foreign talents of the 2010s focused mostly on co-ethnic migrants like PRC Chinese and Indians (Yang, 2018; Kathiravelu, 2017; Ang, 2022), the explicit visualization of the ‘culprit’ as ‘White’ (among other non-White culprits) is a new feature of the 2020s. It unearths a long-grown anger over the neo-colonial attitudes of some Western expats who have been criticized for their sense of entitlement and lack of respect for Singaporeans (Meier, 2016; Rice Media, 2020). Such blaming of Whiteness might be interpreted as another step in the process of Singapore emancipating itself from ‘foreign talents’ as symbols of progress from overseas, and from the lasting White dominance which was still a common feature in the expat bubble of early-twenty-first-century Singapore (Lundström, 2014; Moosavi, 2022).

While short-lived, the media attention on the above-described incident and its accusing language seems to have upset most of the White migrants. Singapore’s major newspaper, the Straits Times (2021), published two pictures of the yacht on which the offenders “intermingled” and listed their full names and age next to close-up pictures of each of them on the way to court. The pictures were accompanied by the following statement. “Pictures and videos of the gathering ... on social media ... showed a group of merrymakers dancing and intermingling without masks.” The choice of words is sensational: “merrymakers” who “dance and intermingle”. Pascal’s remark on the different, and allegedly unfair, treatment of foreign (read: White) and local offenders—apparent in his use of the word “bias”—sums up the feeling of unease he and others developed over the way events were reported.

The White interviewees were concerned, sometimes anxious, about becoming scapegoats for a renewed spread of the pandemic. Their insecurities were tight to the media coverage and the fact that they felt “easily recognizable” as foreigners if not as members of the (self-identified and ascribed) group of White expats whose work visas were revoked.

7.5.2 Continuity and Disrupters of (White) Othering During Japan’s Second Self-Isolation

The number of foreigners in Japan is comparatively small, and their relative invisibility in Japanese media and discourse somewhat explains the lack of public attention to their experiences or actions during the pandemic. Like Singapore, the Japanese government closed its borders early in 2020 and fully re-opened for tourists from most countries only in late 2022. Reports on verbal attacks of foreigners suggest that for some Japanese—not least for those without contact with foreigners and unaware of their struggles—the pandemic appeared to be an ‘intrusion’ from abroad (NHK, 2021). The strict sealing of the physical borders, therefore, reminded

both Japanese and foreign commentators of Japan's history of "limited engagement" with other countries from 1603 to 1868 (Hellyer, 2009).

As in other countries, management of the pandemic was accompanied by the fear of the foreign. This was accentuated by the fact that Chinese, as the largest number of foreign residents and tourists in Japan, were associated with the origin and the spread of the pandemic. As such, and in continuation of the long-existing discrimination against East Asians in Japan, blaming and othering were mostly directed against Chinese and South Koreans (Foster, 2021; Teng & Lin, 2021). That said, Japanese news media also repeatedly portrayed the US and European governments' allegedly poor management of the pandemic (TBS News Dig, 2021). These measures perceived as insufficient, Japanese media, and several politicians and city governments, fueled the image that Westerners in Japan were to blame for spreading the disease (Foster, 2021).

However, the pandemic might also have changed certain Japanese people's perception of foreign residents in a rather unexpected, and positive, way. Japan was hit by the Fukushima triple disaster in 2011, after which foreigners reportedly fled Japan, a narrative that served to feed the discourse on foreigners' lack of commitment and loyalty to the country. During COVID-19, again, many foreigners left, while others were not able to enter the country, which resulted in a brief drop in the number of foreign residents at the height of the pandemic. It became clear from my interviewees' accounts that Japanese citizens, with Fukushima still in mind, seemed to expect that their foreign colleagues and neighbors would leave.

The case of the contested profession of English teachers is interesting in this regard. English teachers in Japan are often native speakers from the US, Great Britain, or Australia, but sometimes also other 'Western' foreigners, whose presumably high proficiency in English enabled them to have the job. English teaching used to be relatively well-paid, but this has changed and led to a decrease in its status and financial returns. Scholarship has revealed the racialization of the job, with White people being equaled to native speakers and thus having access to 'easy money' whereas other Asian native speakers (Indians and Filipinos) would not receive the same salary and recognition, not least a job offer, because they did not meet the racialized ideal of the White (presumably male) English teacher (Appleby, 2014).

My interview with Lynn, a 27-year-old female English entrepreneur who, before venturing her startup in one of Japan's major cities, had been an English teacher in a medium-sized Japanese city for 6 years, unearthed another aspect of White foreigners' ambiguous incorporation in Japanese society. Lynn first shared a common account of an English teacher during that time.

There is a common stereotype with foreign teachers in Japan. They're here for a year or two, just on a vacation to earn money because they like anime... They often assume that we actually don't care about teaching, we're just here to have fun. ... For the first couple of years, I was treating it myself as a specific kind of holiday. 'I'm probably going to go back to England and get a job. I'm just enjoying my time here.' Maybe during those two years, I myself didn't put as much effort into my colleagues or Japanese friends.

However, after a few years in Japan, Lynn noticed problems with the treatment of children at the schools where she worked and at some point, started to develop ideas to mitigate these problems. Lynn called it a "trigger" when during COVID, teachers

had to work and teach from home, people found that Lynn was neither leaving the country nor staying because of a romantic relationship—another typical stereotype, she explained—but that she was working on a business idea to address social problems.

I think that was the first time that maybe I actually earned like a slight bit of respect because I wasn't doing what they thought was the normal path. 'Of course, she must be staying because she has a partner' but that wasn't the case. They thought, 'Oh, well, what is she doing then? If she's just teaching, maybe she's just wasting her life away.' I think they actually gained a lot more respect for me.

A few non-White interviewees equally reported on Japanese acquaintances' and colleagues' surprise and appreciation of the fact that they did not leave the country when borders closed and that Japanese friends worried about them being isolated, unable to see their families. Lynn's case should thus not be treated as a case of White experiences in a pandemic Japan but, discarding hasty adoptions of an ethnic lens (Wimmer & Schiller, 2003), as one of the diversity of the foreign perception and reception under COVID-19. As demonstrated, public discourse maintained the narrative of the pandemic being foreign, and thus foreigners in general as a risk to Japan during COVID. Japanese citizens who had foreign neighbors or colleagues, however, seem to hold more diverse, including sympathetic, views of foreign residents' presence during COVID-19.

Lynn's case hints at more than the blaming of 'the Other' for the spread of the pandemic and the potential un-making of the stereotype of disloyal foreigners. The occupation of the English teacher is specific for its close linkage to Whiteness, whether corporeal (skin color) or symbolic (Westernness, citizenship capital), and, at the same time, for its low status. If White English teachers like Lynn, who have been regarded as guests and never as members of society, and who might be assumed to be "wasting their lives", become acknowledged as socially active and engaged 'stayers', there might be space for a more diverse type of Whiteness in Japan, neither that of elite, short-term expatriate nor that of precarious and careless "merrymakers".

7.6 Whiteness Within the Innovation Process in East Asia

7.6.1 *The Qualities of Innovation in Japan: Between White, International, and Japanese*

It is Chris, a 48-year-old Korean American startup founder with 6 years of entrepreneurial experience in Japan and no Japanese language skills, whose account foregrounds lasting meanings of Whiteness in Japan. His Asian phenotype leads Japanese people to classify him as Asian, if not, more often, as Japanese. Every time it turns out he neither speaks Japanese nor any other East Asian language, the surprise is huge. People of East Asian phenotype are still assumed to be Japanese and

to speak Japanese, and any misfit of the assumed logic renders the person under discussion 'Other' (Liu-Farrer, 2020).

In the ongoing interview, Chris's account pins down the notion of Whiteness in business in contemporary Japan. Once people learn about his US citizenship, they put him into the box of 'accomplished' and 'skilled' which as I argue is a refashioning yet continuity of White hegemony.

In a business context, I would say that the Japanese people, more than any other place that I've been to, really do give more weight to your nationality rather than your ethnicity. For Japanese people, if you're American, you're American, doesn't matter what color you are, you're American. Even if I tell them, "Oh, no, my parents are Korean." They're like, "Nah, you're American."

Chris adds how his assumed 'Americanness' guarantees him people's full attention and interest in his business. 'American' is the signifier of progress and advancement, or in other words, of knowledge, innovation, and skills in the information age, in which Silicon Valley has come to symbolize progress and an aspired end goal in the hierarchy of innovation globally. Whiteness, at least in the context of innovation and skills, is less closely tied to skin color, although White skin, thus phenotype, is the most obvious and thus least questioned qualifier for inclusion in the category of Whiteness. As the unfolding discussion shows, corporeal Whiteness is also the recognized 'main' quality of Whiteness and thus unlikely to be discarded. The numerous instances of White people's sheer presence as a trigger of admiration or enthusiasm for anything business- or innovation-related support this claim (Debnár, 2016; Iwata & Nemoto, 2018).

Once the benefit of the situation—privileges accrued based on White phenotype, English language, or 'Western' national identification—is out of the equation the unpaired dominance of Whiteness in Japan's race for innovation is beginning to show cracks. The everyday encounters among different participants in Tokyo's high-tech and startup scene underline ongoing ethnic and cultural diversification and the fact that the severe lack of manpower has rendered the import of people, skills, and innovation from abroad widely more acceptable, if not desired. The everyday uncovers an emerging social field in which business creation or growth are the main objectives amidst encounters with racially, nationally, and occupationally diverse participants. Within this field, Whiteness—both in its corporeal as well as symbolic sense—loses its dominating force, albeit not its relevance. Stakeholders place most value on tangible outcomes in business and these are no longer directed by association with the status of Whiteness, as the following example demonstrates.

Cindy is a Chinese woman in her mid-thirties and co-founder of an IT company that provides data management cloud services and match-matching between companies and skilled dispatch workers in Tokyo. She narrates that potential Japanese clients are enthusiastic about contracting her company's services and that she does not sense any reluctance towards her because of her Chinese background. When describing her interaction with Japanese client firms, Cindy points out that

if you know [the firms'] needs very clearly, it doesn't matter from which country you come. This year, we got a very, very good customer. [...] They are very nice to us. Because we can solve their big problem [of personnel recruitment and data management].

Personnel recruitment in high-tech fields and the provision of cloud services are among the most pressing issues concerning the lack of manpower in contemporary Japan. Firms in Japan care about the quality of the service of a contracted company not about its owner's nationality or ethnicity. Innovation and its associated skills as 'qualities from abroad' have assumed part of the prestige previously pertaining to Whiteness in a broader (and often nebulous) sense, granting Asian entrepreneurs and professionals of various ethnicities respect in the innovation scene.

However, it is hard to dispel the notion of awe of Whiteness in innovation-driven Japan and to ignore the fact that Blackness largely seems to remain the racialized 'Other' (Russell, 2017). The few Black interviewees who were recognized as successful startup founders in Tokyo were African American and thus in possession of Western cultural capital derived from their alma mater, their professional networks in New York, or their links to the US startup scene. Lasting White hegemony manifests in the proximity that foreign entrepreneurs need to demonstrate to one or the other 'White' qualities, such as education or networks in a White US context, which combined signify what the process of 'White innovation' is about. Over the 2 years of online and offline immersion in the startup community in Tokyo, certain names and faces appeared to dominate the scene. Most of them are White, and a few others are Asian American from Silicon Valley as well as a few Asians from English-speaking financial centers in Asia.

There is a danger of falling back on the go-to explanatory category of Whiteness here. One important observation is that the mentioned dominant 'White faces' in Tokyo's startup scene are all fluent in Japanese. They have lived in Japan for one or two decades already. They have families in Japan—though not necessarily a Japanese spouse—and they are recognized not only for being high-profile members of the startup community but also, as I would cautiously suggest, as members of Japanese society. I heard the same names in numerous interviews, in which both Japanese stakeholders of the startup sector and foreign entrepreneurs spoke of them very favorably. For example, a Japanese immigration lawyer with specialization in the startup sector named Mike, one of the most well-connected figures, a White man who has lived in Japan for close to two decades and who has created his own news channel on the Japanese startup sector. "I always listen to [Mike's] talk because he is one of the success cases. He is the role model for me now. [Mike] or different international founders who built a business almost 10 years ago." The lawyer does not mention the other international founders by name. The one she talks about is visible, partly because he embodies visibility in a Japan known for fetishizing Whiteness (Russell, 2017) and partly because he can reach the Japanese audience. Indeed, Mike, who is married to a Japanese woman, speaks flawless Japanese which barely reveals his non-nativity.

Members of this select group of 'White' foreign founders are frequently featured in media reports and the activities of the biggest incubation centers and startup events within Tokyo. They have strong and diverse ties to Japanese business and have been invited to meetings of the local governments and ministerial working groups on the development of innovation and the startup ecosystem. They are American, Australian, and European, including from fringes of Europe that are seldom associated with Whiteness, and whose phenotypes place them in an ambiguous category of both Asian and European. These foreign entrepreneurs also include women. The respect they enjoy stems from their long-term immersion in and contribution to the growth of the startup community and related innovation in Japan. This became clear to me when Mike mentioned the president of a mid-sized Japanese data management firm who approached him regarding his plan to drive innovation. "He likes foreigners", was Mike's explanation of the reason for which the president was interested in him. The same Japanese firm has held a long-term relationship with a European firm known for its innovative software and has been strongly engaged in frequent business trips to Western 'outposts of innovation'. This resembles Japan's most famous modernizer, Fukuzawa Yukichi, whose trips to Europe during Meiji-Era Japan served as an inspiration for Japan's modernization and orientation of the West (Bonnett, 2002).

It is also here where we see the continuities of the Japanese valuation of Whiteness. Innovation and skills have broadened the category of Whiteness and have opened it to ethnically diverse foreigners including those from Asian countries but also South Americans and a few Black entrepreneurs with credentials from the US innovation scene. This has not caused White hegemony to cease. Rather, phenotypically non-Whites might be regarded as agents in the process of 'White innovation' if they meet one of the above-discerned qualities such as credentials from a world-known innovation center or the combination of multilingual skills, transnational networks, and technological expertise.

At the same time, the analysis highlights that despite the seemingly unchanged status of Whiteness in a post-COVID, innovation-focused Japan, gaining respect as a White person might require more than it used to. In contrast to the often-uneared White privilege of the late 20th and early 21st centuries (Debnár, 2023), White people who are admitted to the upper echelons of the innovation industry today have put enormous efforts into language study and long-term investment in the country. While this is expected of immigrants elsewhere and of non-White migrants in Japan in particular, it has barely been demonstrated for White people in Japan. As such, innovation from abroad continues to be highly valued in the Japanese startup and innovation industry of the 2020s and is refashioned as White innovation, a descriptor of the long-standing association of the West with progress and knowledge. That said, an ever-smaller number of White people fit the category of agents of White innovation. These have cultivated the cultural and linguistic skills required in the Japanese market, which is in line with Japan's expectation of foreigners (including the skilled) to assimilate (Morita, 2017; Hof & Tseng, 2021).

7.6.2 *Startup Hub Singapore: Emancipation from Whiteness?*

Singapore has put enormous efforts into innovation and has become one of Asia's leading startup hubs. The Singaporean government promotes innovation through a range of—mostly university-attached—incubation centers and various acceleration programs (ACE, 2022). A connection to one of the two public universities or affiliated research labs paved many interviewees' way into entrepreneurship. Mukkend, a 33-year-old engineering graduate from New Delhi, who came to Singapore in his early twenties for a master's program in robotics, joined a robotics research lab of his alma mater after graduation. He eventually co-founded a software company with another young colleague and four professors on the board who supported the business. After 10 years, Mukkend is still in Singapore and successfully operating his second company.

The Singaporean startup scene is global. The credo is meritocracy, which includes anyone with skills that enhance Singapore's competitiveness (Barr & Skrbiš, 2008). Many members of the startup ecosystem are foreigners from surrounding Asian countries, especially from regions that are strong in STEM subjects like India and China. Echoing others' accounts, a Japanese founder emphasized his appreciation of the fast pace of business in Singapore and the inclusiveness of the startup scene. "If I compare Singapore and Japan—Singapore is much easier for starting-up for foreigners. ... I am not sure if it's because Singapore is an English-speaking country. But I feel Singapore is very open, open to anyone."

That said, postcolonial Singapore's racial hierarchy rendered British—and other Westerners'—skills more readily recognized than others' (Meier, 2016; Ye, 2016). As the previous section demonstrated White migrants often reacted with fear and bitterness when they realized that the elevated status they had come to value started to crumble. In post-COVID Singapore, the government continues to emphasize the need of growing its startup ecosystem to boost innovation. Barely do foreign talents feature in this rhetoric. Successful founders presented as role models are mostly Singaporeans, sometimes ethnic-Asian foreigners. There is no awe surrounding White or Western entrepreneurs comparable to that in Japan. White founders who have contributed to the Singaporean marketplace enjoy respect, as do other foreigners, but state priority lies on growing local founders and talents as the ACE position paper 2022 on growing a startup ecosystem suggests (ACE, 2022).

ACE is Singapore's "Action Community for Entrepreneurship". Established in 2003 by the Singapore Ministry of Trade and Industry, it has kept its close linkage to the government even after its re-launch as a private sector-led, non-profit organization in 2014, with Singapore's Minister for Manpower and Second Minister for Trade and Industry acting as patron of the organization (ACE., 2022, p.49). I visited the ACE office in 2022, located in Singapore's innovation hub Block 71, where I conducted several interviews but barely saw a White person. Jason, a young Chinese-Singaporean ACE staff member showed me around and shared his perspective on foreigners in the Singapore startup ecosystem during two in-depth interviews. He explained that what he observed over the years was that the more

successful ventures were those co-founded by people from different national and cultural contexts. Most of the foreign founders he referred to came from Asian countries. Jason stressed that foreign founders “pretty much have a mindset of ‘there’s nothing much to lose.’ Everything is structured so they feel safer here.” He explicitly referred to Indian professionals and cited Ravi, an Indian founder whom I had interviewed as well and who had been repeatedly featured on social media as a successful case of Singapore’s flourishing entrepreneurial scene.

Asian foreigners’ ease with living in Singapore and their confidence in their ability to succeed professionally are multifaceted. Elle’s account, a Vietnamese entrepreneur with a background in finance and work experience in Sydney and London, draws attention to the changing business scene in Singapore, in which Chinese networks as well as local networks among Singaporean business people are increasingly important for advancing one’s business. This stands in contrast to the time of mostly Western and Japanese expatriates’ influx, who socialized in exclusive nationality-based or –‘racially-based’ (White or Japanese) clubs, which were crucial for business activities (Meier, 2016). While White interviewees emphasized how difficult it was to find Singaporean colleagues or clients, Elle suggested that her ‘Asian face’ and her embodied multiculturalism mattered when trying to establish trust and enlarge her business network in Singapore.

There are certain clubs here that I joined. It opens a lot of doors to me in terms of meeting locals here. Within the club that I’m a member of ... 70% ... are locals. But they’re really well-to-do professionals, lawyers, bankers [and] a lot of VCs (venture capitalists). So, I can tap into the network more easily. A lot of them have big influence in society. Especially for guys, national service is a big thing. They have the army brothers. ... They build very strong, deep relationships. So, when they go back, they’re always trying to look for that person to do business with... They help each other because they’ve gone through that very difficult phase together. ... So, I see that very strong bond, especially family ties. You see [that] a lot of the successful businesses who move here are Chinese. And they stick to their group, like a central network, you know, they tend to work with each other. So, you need to land yourself into one of those networks for you to be protected or given opportunities.

Elle managed “to land in a Chinese network” through networks from her previous corporate banking career and “maintained that friendship over the years.” She suggested that her lack of proficiency in Mandarin did not matter. “I tried to position it as an advantage for me in the sense that ‘oh, you know, I know the culture, like, I am an Asian as you can see.’” Elle could leverage her perceived cultural proximity to Singaporeans and Chinese business people and recognize how networking in social clubs paid off. Her clients, business partners, and staff are Asian, often Singaporean, and Elle has a friendly relationship with her employees that extends to joining family activities and invitations to their homes.

White migrants’ experiences differed significantly, especially for those with fewer roots in Singapore or neighboring Asian countries through a spouse or kin. Many of my Indian, Indonesian, Japanese, or Vietnamese interviewees remarked how difficult the COVID-19 restrictions had made life in Singapore as a foreigner, but no one felt insecure, not least less valued, because of the restrictions. This was different for Sofia, a woman of mixed national roots but a ‘White’ phenotype and

with a long travel history across several European countries. Having been in finance in Singapore for over 10 years, Sofia commented with a mixture of nostalgia and disappointment on the foregone days when Singapore, in her view, was still more welcoming.

It used to feel like home. This has changed, many people here left, MANY. It was a seriously cosmopolitan place before and there is nothing like this in Europe. Not if you look Indian or have the wrong accent or wear a burka. Not even in New York, [if] you speak with an accent. ... Here there was no such thing, it was really cosmopolitan, multicultural in practice and theory. Now there is a separation, the pandemic was an excuse to enforce more measures. Many left because they feel that 'if I am not wanted then it doesn't make sense.' Friends who left are from everywhere: Swedish, French, Swiss, Australian, and New Zealanders, even Spanish, despite the high taxes. Most of my friends left [because of] the surveillance, the paranoia.

Sofia, whose husband is from a Southern European country, had overwhelmingly 'White' friends who, alike her, all felt no longer welcome in Singapore. As their networks were made up of similar people—an in-group of self-identified Whiteness that they reckon no longer being of value to Singaporean society—they shared each other's concerns and observed how 'their community' shrunk.

7.7 Post-Covid Innovation in East Asia: Balancing 'White Innovation' With National Identity

This chapter examined Whiteness in the context of changing racial hierarchies and social transformations in Singapore and Japan, two advanced Asian market economies with a minority of White migrants. The data of this study partly stem from the 2010s, a decade that marked a decisive, yet contrastive, shift in migration to both countries. Singapore swapped its image as the ideal immigrant country and multicultural city-state with that of a restrictive migration regime where also the highly skilled struggle to obtain a more permanent legal status, not least, any legal status. Japan, on the other hand, long known for its restrictive migration policies and alleged homogeneity, started to actively welcome 'skilled' migrants and relaxed the requirements for work visas and permanent residency. The chapter argues that the COVID-19 pandemic as well as both countries' intake of foreign startup founders in the dire need for innovation accentuated some of the underlying developments that shape reconfigurations of (White) power in contemporary Singapore and Japan. It coins the concept of 'White innovation' to demonstrate how innovation and skills are entangled with race and transposed ideas of White competences and accomplishments in high-tech fields. 'White innovation' in socio-culturally and ethnically diversifying Singapore and Japan can be embodied by non-White, non-Western passport holders but ideas of hegemonic Whiteness are deeply entrenched in the notion of the successful startup founder.

The findings of 'White' and 'non-White' foreign entrepreneurs' subjective experiences of their reception in the two countries reveal both continuity and change. Singapore maintains its pragmatic migration governance which supports those with the professional skills to contribute to the national economy. However, the rapid ongoing ethnic diversification of Singapore's population, highlighted by the increased geopolitical and economic focus on a rising Asia, entails that proximity to power no longer means proximity to the West, and thus, to Whiteness. White migrants less often felt welcome, if not treated unjustly. I thus argue that White migrants' subjectivity in contemporary Singapore reveals their gradual coming to terms with being a minority group and labor migrants. They experience first-hand that they are placed third after citizens (1) and foreigners with permanent legal status (2), with limits to certain rights and the end of the same preferential treatment that White expatriates have long enjoyed (Lundström, 2014; Meier, 2016). These entrepreneurs' insecurity serves to strengthen their identity as White and as—"disposable", in the words of one interviewee—labor migrants.

In Japan, continuity refers to White people's lasting elevated status, which manifests in their visibility as successful cases of the Japanese innovation scene, among others. However, Whiteness, as a proxy for power, takes on additional meanings beyond its association with Westernness, English proficiency, American capitalism, and 'Silicon Valley technology'. Skills and innovation have assumed authority over other qualities of Whiteness, having broadened the category of 'White'. Whiteness has extended to encompass migrants from developing countries including East Asia or South America who are valued for their contribution to Japan's innovation. At the same time, the prototypical 'White expat' re-emerges as a less privileged and less fixed category, with English teaching as an example of a potential space opening up for the recognition of White people as long-term—and not necessarily highly skilled—members of society and the limits of White (and even male) foreignness without Japanese language proficiency.

Next to the chapter's contribution to conceptualizing shifting White power in the context of socio-cultural diversification the comparison of two distinct national narratives—multiracialism in Singapore and (long claimed and slow to cede) monoracialism in Japan—exposes different qualities of 'White innovation'. The postcolonial multiracial nation and neoliberal city-state (Singapore) dissociates itself from White status more profoundly, according to participation in 'White innovation' to a more diverse array of skilled people. This finding enhances our theoretical understanding of the way reconfigurations of Whiteness go hand in hand with a lasting White hegemony as exemplified by the case of Japan.

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Part III
Gender and Interracial Encounters

Chapter 8

Being a Black Woman in Japan: The Intersectionality of Race, Gender, and Nationality



Avril Haye-Matsui

8.1 Introduction

What it means to be a Black woman living in Japan is something I have pondered continuously over the last three decades of my English language teaching career in Japan. It is generally accepted that identity factors like race and gender are social constructs; as such, rather than being static, their definitions are flexible across space and time (Gilroy, 1987). Opinions about their definitions may also vary according to one's personal history and perspective. Therefore, to gain an understanding of what it means to be a Black woman living in Japan, one is required to consider the social context in which one lives and the field in which one works. For this chapter, that context is Japan, and the field is English language teaching.

Through my research and personal interactions, I have discovered that the experiences of people belonging to the African Diaspora who live in Japan can be at once similar and varied. The cultural backdrop of Japan brings different understandings of racial and gender identities. This research was triggered by my own experiences as a Black British woman living and working in Japan and the paucity of research on Black female ELT's (English language teacher) narratives in Asia. My purpose is to provide a space for the narratives of Black women working in Japanese English-language teaching contexts. "Our stories must be told!" (Mirza, 2017, p. 41) and they must be told by us to avoid being misconstrued. Also, given their important contribution to English language teaching in Japan, I believe it is essential to make Black women's stories a more significant part of the academic discourse on race, gender, and language teaching in Japan.

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This chapter looks at two important aspects of the Black female experience in Japan which have informed my research in recent years:

1. The primary ways in which race, gender, and nationality intersect to shape Black women's identities, both self-perceived and perceived by others, in Japan
2. The primary ways that race, gender, and nationality intersect to shape Black women's experiences in English language teaching in Japan

Thus, here, I have applied an intersectional approach, (Crenshaw, 1989) which I will describe in more detail below, to explore how race, gender, nationality, and native-speakerism inform how Black women conceptualize their identities in the context of broader Japanese society and how they frame and interpret their experiences at their places of work. This study is the first of its kind to examine how intersectionality plays out for Black women who live and work in Japan. It provides data and insight into an important but under-researched demographic of the Japanese English-language teaching industry.

It is important to point out that, although I hope others will be empowered by the participants' narratives and perhaps find elements of their own experiences expressed in their voices, it is not my intention to homogenize the Black female experience in Japan. I have attempted to convey the perceptions, experiences, and opinions of the participants in this study based on their subjective realities rather than trying to empirically describe 'the Black female experience in Japan,' which does not exist as a single, constant, easily definable state.

8.2 Background

With respect to broader Japanese society, most Japanese people do not have opportunities to interact with Black people in their daily lives. English language study, however, provides opportunities for interaction with foreigners. English is the main foreign language taught in both formal and informal educational institutions in Japan, and people from all over the world come to teach it. However, within the English language teaching industry, the racialized and gendered image of the ideal teacher gives preference to White men born in English-speaking, referred to as inner-circle, countries, such as the UK and US (Kachru, 1985; Gerald, 2020; Kubota & Fujimoto, 2013). Black women do not fit this idealized image. Nevertheless, more and more Black women are coming to teach in East Asian countries, as evidenced by the growth in the number of Black female members in professional English-language-teaching groups such as the Japan Association of Language Teaching (JALT) or KoreaTESOL (KOTESOL).

While there are several studies that examine the identity formation and narratives of foreign English language teachers in Asian English-language teaching contexts (e.g., Nagatomo, 2016; Simon-Maeda, 2004; Hashimoto, 2020; Kim & Lee, 2017), only a few look specifically at the experiences of Black teachers (Charles, 2019; Choe & Seo, 2021; Seo & Kubota, 2022). And even fewer look at the experiences

of Black female ELTs in Japan (Haye-Matsui, 2022, 2020; Yphantides, 2021). Therefore, Black women's contributions to English-language teaching in Asia, particularly with respect to the intersections of race, gender, and nationality, is an under-researched area.

8.2.1 *Intersectionality as a Lens*

To explore and bring meaning to the complex dynamics of factors such as race, gender, and nationality, intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins & Bilge, 2016) is a useful theoretical framework. Intersectionality examines how power systems such as racism, sexism, and others intersect to impact individuals' experiences and identities. This lens is ideal here because Black ELTs' experiences in Japan are affected by many factors simultaneously. This theory allows for a deep exploration of how those factors merge and shift over time.

The term intersectionality was popularized in Black feminist discourse when Crenshaw (1989) used it to describe Black women's plight in the American legal system. Since then, intersectionality has been used in many areas of social research, including education, but a consensus around its definition has not been reached. Here is a generally accepted definition by Collins & Bilge (2016):

Intersectionality is a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity of the world, in people, and in human experiences. The events and conditions of social and political life and the self can seldom be understood as shaped by one factor. Regarding social inequality, people's lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender, or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other. (p. 2)

Thus, intersectionality provides a framework that allows us to uncover the shape and form of overlapping factors affecting Black women's experiences in Japan by exploring how their experiences intertwine.

A few scholars in Japan have used intersectionality as an analytical lens (Kimura, 2020; Lawrence & Nagashima, 2020; Yphantides, 2021). Most notably, Yphantides' (2021) study looked at Black women in leadership roles in Japanese universities. Yphantides' (2021) participants, dealt with several issues, including racial bias, exclusion, gender stereotyping, and questions about their competency. They expressed that it was difficult to know which single factor was at the root of the challenges they faced, and Yphantides (2021) concluded that factors such as race and gender intersected to impact their experiences.

The intersectional approach has been applied to uncover the hierarchy of Blackness in Japan and, in turn, has added new information to the existing literature on the African Diaspora and ideas of Blackness. The narratives of the women in this study, show us how race and gender intersect with nationality to frame the participants' interpretations of how, they are perceived in Japan leading to a reconceptualization of their own racialized and gendered identities.

8.2.2 *Black People in Japan*

Black people make up a small number of the 2.3 million foreign residents (Ministry of Justice, 2022) in Japan. There are no official statistics, but anecdotal evidence suggests that the numbers of Black people and Black teachers are increasing. While there is a paucity of research specific to Black people in the English language teaching industry in Japan, there has been significant research done on the Black presence in Japan in general.

Russell (1991, 2009) examined the Black presence in Japan from a historical perspective extending beyond the sixteenth century. He showed how the Japanese understanding of racial hierarchies is, historically, garnered from the West and that this continues to be the case in modern times. Russell (1991) notes that Japan positions itself within a global racial hierarchy where they are not as high as White Westerners, who they admire, but not as low as Black people regardless of nationality. However, as Russell (2009) asserts, Japanese ideas of Black people have never been completely positive or negative, and there are many examples of positive cooperation between Black and Japanese people. A recent example is the thousands of Japanese people who came out in support of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020 (Buie, 2020).

Nevertheless, most Japanese people's only point of reference regarding Black people and Blackness is from media and popular culture (Haye-Matsui, 2005). Unfortunately, media portrayals tend to be stereotypical and/or negative and often focus on criminality, athleticism, and musicality (Prieler, 2010). Popular culture most often allows engagement with Blackness through music, particularly hip-hop and reggae (Thomas, 2015; Sterling, 2010). Unfortunately, Black women, when present in genres like hip-hop and reggae, are often portrayed as hypersexualized (Sterling, 2010; Haye-Matsui, 2022).

Despite the significant research discussed above, the voices of Black females living and working in Japan are largely unrepresented. Little is known about how the intersection of race, gender, and nationality impact Black women's experiences in Japan or how they may use their presence in Japanese educational institutions to offer real-life narratives that counteract negative perceptions of Black people. This study provides an important opportunity to investigate such issues.

8.2.3 *Race, Gender, and Native-Speakerism*

English is taught formally at all levels of the Japanese education system, including university, and, informally, at English-language schools where students may begin their English study from as young as two or three years old. Consequently, foreign English teachers can be found in all areas of the industry and may, like the participants in this study, work in English-language schools, preschools, elementary schools, high schools, or universities.

In these various teaching contexts, one way that nationality contributes to the shaping of foreign teachers' workplace experiences is the teachers' positioning as either native-English-speaking teachers (NESTs) or non-native-English-speaking teachers (NNESTs). This distinction affects English Language Teachers (ELTs) globally. NESTs are perceived to be teachers that come from inner-circle (Kachru, 1985) countries like the UK or US. NNESTs are deemed to be those teachers from expanding-circle countries, like China, where English is not the national language. Teachers from an outer circle country (Kachru, 1985), like Jamaica, where English has an official status due to colonialism often fall into the NNEST category despite English being their first and only language. Indeed, the women in this chapter found that they were positioned as either NESTs or NNESTs based on their nationality rather than on whether English was their mother-tongue.

Thus, we see that defining the term 'native speaker' is difficult because such definitions are linked to socio-political and historical factors, demonstrating that it is a social construct (Lowe, 2020; Seargeant, 2013) and, thus, highly contested (Houghton & Rivers, 2013; Lowe, 2020; Seargeant, 2013). NNESTs often face discrimination in the English-language teaching industry and, conversely, people defined as NESTs are privileged in the field (Canagarajah, 2013; Ramjattan, 2019). This distinction, and the discrimination it evokes, is termed native-speakerism (Holliday, 2006).

This discourse is also closely related to race because the ideal ELT is often associated with Whiteness and racialized hierarchies of power between NESTs and NNESTs (Jenks, 2017; Kubota & Fujimoto, 2013). It must be stated, however, that foreigners of all phenotypes experience racism in Japan; nevertheless, Caucasians do benefit from a certain amount of White privilege where "Whiteness is normalized, affirmed and perpetuated" (Koshino, 2019, p. 9). English-language teaching is one area where White privilege is maintained and reinforced by native-speakerism (Kim & Lee, 2017). Another aspect of the English-language teaching industry in Japan is the gender imbalance most often seen at the tertiary level. University positions are usually the most sought after, well-paid, and secure positions in the industry in Japan. However, this sector is where the gender imbalance is most evident. There is also a racial imbalance as university English teachers tend to be White (Kim & Lee, 2017). As in other countries, in Japan there is a gender gap regarding women in academia. Women make up around 24% of faculty members at universities (MEXT, 2016). According to Huang (2018), foreign faculty make up 5.4% and of that 18% are female. One reason for this imbalance, which affects both Japanese and foreign female academics, is the societal gendered expectation that views a women's place as in the home (Liddle & Nakakajima, 2000). Additionally, research shows that foreign males and females can have different experiences in the same institution and that their career trajectories differ significantly with more White males holding tenured positions and females, when hired, holding contractual positions (Nagatomo & Cook, 2019; Yphantides, 2020). Yphantides (2020) examined interactions between contracted foreign women and tenured foreign men to further understand the gender divide at Japanese universities. She argued that gender affects employment status,

with White males typically holding the few tenured positions available to foreign professors. These males frequently act as gatekeepers and refer other men in their social networks to job prospects (Nagatomo, 2016). Thus, we see that race, gender, nationality, and native-speakerism are all important aspects of the English language teaching industry in Japan. More important, perhaps, is an examination of how these factors intersect to inform the nuanced and complex self-identification of the participants described here.

8.3 Methodology

The data explored in this chapter derives from a qualitative longitudinal study of nine Black females from various countries in the African Diaspora undertaken between 2018 and 2020 (Haye-Matsui, 2022). Here, I would like to take the opportunity to focus on the data from a smaller sample of six participants; all of whom are represented under pseudonyms. Five participants were recruited from the Black Women in Japan group (BWIJ) and one from the Japan Association of language teacher; they were aged between 28 and 50 years old. Two participants came from the US and the others came from England, Jamaica, the Netherlands, and South Africa. They had worked in Japan for various lengths of time from two years to twenty-seven years, primarily in English conversation schools, high schools, or universities. They were all highly educated (see Table 8.1). I used semi-structured interviews to collect rich data that provided much detail about the participants' experiences. Additionally, as Cresswell (2013) notes, one goal of qualitative studies such as this is to "study a group or population, identify variables that cannot be easily measured or hear silenced voices" (p. 48). In this study, the group was made up of Black female ELTs in Japan and the variables that intersect to impact their experiences cannot be easily measured.

8.4 Findings and Discussion

8.4.1 *Contextualizing the Participants Within Japan*

Each participant found their way to Japan in different ways and for different reasons.

The American participants, Kate and Bella, had lived in Japan for 15 and 27 years, respectively, at the time of their interviews. Kate first came to Japan as an exchange student for a year during college days and lived with a Japanese family. Even now she has a close familial relationship with her host family. Kate also has a large network of Japanese and foreign friends and is very involved in her community. She works part-time as a university instructor but also has a business as a freelance translator and interpreter. Bella first came to Japan as a JET (Japan Exchange

Table 8.1 Participant details

Name (pseudonym)	Country of birth	Age	Years in Japan at first interview	Education	Current teaching position	Teaching history
Kerry	The Netherlands	Early 40 s	12	BA, middle-school teaching qualification, masters	Full-time contracted university English teacher	English conversation school/high school teacher
Lerato	South Africa	Mid 30 s	5	Diploma, BA, TEFL certificate	Dispatch company assistant language teacher (ALT)	Japan exchange and teaching program, ALT/English conversation school
Kate	USA	Early 40 s	16	BA, BS	Part-time university teacher	English conversation school/high school
Bella	USA	Early 50 s	27	BA, masters	Part-time university teacher	Japan exchange and teaching program ALT/English conversation school
Jessica	England	Mid-20 s	2	BA	Pre-school teacher	Children's English conversation school/teacher
Danielle	Jamaica	Late 20 s	2	BA	English conversation school teacher	Japan exchange and teaching program ALT

and Teaching) program participant. She works as a part-time university instructor. Bella has put down roots through marriage to a Japanese man and has one son.

Freedom from overt racism is one reason why both Kate and Bella felt that “being African American in Japan is a good thing” (Bella), which was not always the case in the US. Apart from feeling physically safe, they also said that they experienced a reprieve from constant discussions about their racial identities and that they were defined more by their nationality than their race. As Bella explained, “I am American here. And that is basically it.”

Like Kate and Bella, the South African participant, Lerato, said she felt safety and freedom from overt racism in Japan. As a Black woman in South Africa Lerato's employment opportunities were extremely limited, so she came to Japan as a JET participant. At the time of her interviews, had lived in Japan for a total of 5 years. During the research period she returned to South Africa but came back to Japan

because she found that she could not settle in South Africa due to the limitations placed on her as a Black female. Upon returning to Japan, she worked in a rural area as an ALT (assistant language teacher).

The European participants, however, had different experiences. Kerry, from the Netherlands, had lived in Japan for 12 years at the start of the research period. At the time of her final interview, she was working as a full-time contracted university English instructor. Kerry's interest in Japan was sparked in childhood through watching Japanese animation and, it became a goal to live and work in Japan. Kerry's undergraduate study was in the US. While there, she applied for a job at an English conversation school in Japan but was unsuccessful because she was not from an inner-circle, English-speaking country. This was Kerry's first experience of native-speakerism. However, after graduating, Kerry found her way to Japan by first working in China and then applying to a smaller language school in Northern Japan that was more open to hiring teachers of various nationalities. Since those early days in Japan, Kerry has worked hard in various English-language teaching contexts, and despite experiencing some discrimination around her nationality, race and gender Kerry enjoys teaching and living in Japan. She has also put down roots through marriage to a Japanese man. She currently works as a contracted full-time university teacher in a large city.

Jessica, from England, first visited Japan as a tourist and "fell in love" with the country. Once she graduated from university, she decided to move to Japan. Unfortunately at her first teaching job at a children's language school she was overworked, underpaid, and verbally harassed by her managers. After six months she was forced to leave that job. For financial reasons, she was unable to leave Japan. However, she was able to find alternative employment and has since been treated well. She now works as the head teacher in an international preschool. Though she enjoys her job, her early negative experience soured her view of Japanese people. Once she has saved enough money, she intends to leave Japan and return to England.

Jamaican participant Danielle's interest in Japan grew after she joined a Japanese language class in Jamaica and became curious to see for herself the places her Japanese teacher talked about. Lack of job opportunities in her homeland led her to apply to the JET program and she was placed in a junior high school in Southern Japan. The first 2 years were very good, she enjoyed friendly and collegial working relationships with her colleagues and superiors and became involved within the local community. However, in her third year her situation shifted. Personnel changes led to a change in the way she was treated and ultimately led to Danielle losing her position. This experience, she said, made her lose trust in Japanese people and like Jessica soured her views of Japanese people. She currently works at an English conversation school and is saving money to leave Japan.

The context in which the participants lived and worked in Japan, combined with the intersection of their race, gender, and nationalities leads to the acknowledgement that each participant's background strongly influenced their respective interpretations of race-related interactions in Japan. Please see Table 8.1 above for participant information.

8.4.2 *Perceptions of Racism in Japan*

Despite official rhetoric that little or no racism exists in Japan, there is much evidence that this is not the case (e.g., Hurst, 2017). Minority groups in Japan, like those in other countries, experience discrimination (Lie, 2001; Wiener, 2009), overt or otherwise. The women in this chapter found that their race, gender, and nationalities sometimes intersected negatively to make them targets for racial discrimination; however, their respective views on racism in Japan differed. These views were impacted by their experiences, or lack of experiences, of racism in their home countries and their interpretation of their experiences since coming to Japan.

Kate from the US, for example, felt that though some anti-Black racism existed, most of the time it was due to ignorance, rather than overt racist feelings. To illustrate this, Kate recalled conversations she had had with her host father during her time as an exchange student. First, he had assumed that Kate's family were recent immigrants to the US, which made Kate realize that he had no understanding of slavery or colonialism. He was baffled when she told him her family lineage in the US extended three hundred years. He also thought that Black people were good at singing because their throats were constructed differently to Japanese people's. She realized that his belief in this pseudoscientific explanation about Black singers had no racist intent because it "wasn't coming from a mean place, it was just 100% ignorance. He just really didn't know." Perhaps, like many Japanese people he had never had the opportunity to interact with Black people, and therefore, his opinions were likely formed based on media portrayals, which are often inaccurate and stereotypical (Russell, 2020).

Both Kerry, from the Netherlands, and Jessica, from England, felt that one of the primary issues connected to being Black Europeans in Japan was that they were often in the position of having to reassert their national identities. Jessica explains: "when [Japanese] think of England, they think of White people." They both cited several instances where Japanese people appeared not to hear or believe that they were Dutch and English nationals, respectively. Kerry said, "I am [considered] American or African here and that's it!" because her students would often assign her these nationalities even though she made it a point to often talk about her Dutch nationality. Kerry and Jessica sometimes felt that people thought they were claiming a European identity to gain work or acceptance.

Lerato, however, noted that one positive aspect of living in Japan as a Black woman was having more employment opportunities. Despite the end of Apartheid in 1994, employment opportunities for Black South Africans, and Black women in particular, remain severely limited (Oxfam Report, 2020). Lerato said:

I come here [South Africa] and its home, but it's so racist. I can't have my own space. You can't save [money] here [South Africa]; you get paid peanuts because you are Black. On the other hand, in Japan, you get paid because of your skills.

Indeed, she did not feel marginalized in the same way in Japan as she did in South Africa. She goes on:

In some ways, it's good to be here [Japan] compared to Johannesburg, where life was a constant struggle. I was always fighting back, and here I don't have to protect myself in the same way. I don't have to worry about my physical safety, and that's good.

Danielle was part of the racial majority in Jamaica, but, unlike Lerato, was not a member of a marginalized group. As such, she had never experienced overt racism. However, when things changed at her school, she found herself the target of racism for the first time when she was summarily dismissed from her position. This experience was shocking to her: "It taught me all these things about Japanese people and to this day, I really don't trust them."

Living in Japan for some participants meant being able to escape from overt racism, and others experienced racism for the first time. The participants from the US and South Africa, for example, stated that one way their race and gender intersected positively in Japan was that their Blackness and gender did not make them likely targets for verbal and physical race-related abuse. In Japan, they could experience a measure of safety that had not always been available to them in their home countries, where they had grown up as members of marginalized communities. Thus, we see that the participants' lived experiences of racism in Japan led them to reinterpret what it means to be a Black woman in Japan.

8.4.3 New Constructions of Blackness

The six participants felt that the ways in which they were perceived as Black women in Japan differed from those in their home countries. Living in Japan as a Black woman came with new realizations about how Black identity may be viewed differently in a novel cultural context. Indeed, perceptions of Blackness can be fluid with respect to gender and nationality, and this dynamic revealed new aspects of self-identity to the participants. While self-perceptions of Black identity changed in the participants, these changes differed depending on whether they were part of the racial majority or minority in their home countries (Haye-Matsui, 2015) and were filtered through the intersections of race, gender, and nationality.

The views on racism and Blackness of some of the participants changed over time because of minor incidences and microaggressions. Jessica from England said, "at the beginning I thought that if there was discrimination it's just because I'm a foreigner." She expressed relief that what she had experienced was not Black-specific racism but "just xenophobia" because she had witnessed all foreigners, regardless of phenotype, experiencing similar discrimination. Xenophobia, rather than Black-specific racism, appeared easier to cope with and understand for Jessica. However, as time passed, Jessica's perception changed. She began to experience more microaggressions than her White friends. For example, she said that sometimes in shops, clerks would be curt with her but polite to White customers.

However, it was mostly her treatment by strangers on public transportation that made her realize that anti-Black racism existed in Japan:

I've had an *ojiisan* [old man] punch me in the chest. I get pushed around so much on the train, by men especially, and the only reason I can think that it happens so often is that I'm Black. It doesn't seem to happen to my White friends as much.

The many accounts of similar harassment of Black women on public transportation in Japan from women in the Black women in Japan support and friendship group supports Jessica's reasoning; however, further anecdotal evidence suggests that Black men do not have the same issue in public spaces in Japan, therefore it is most likely the intersection of race and gender that makes Black women targets.

Conversely, I found in my prior research that some Japanese people consider Black people to be frightening (Haye-Matsui, 2005). Indeed, the women in this study said sometimes Japanese people would gasp in fear or change directions to avoid them and that this was upsetting. For example, Danielle from Jamaica said:

Being a Black female is hard. My predecessor was a Black male, and everyone [students and parents] said, 'Oh, he's so cool!' But me being a Black female, everyone is like 'she's so scary! *kowai!* [scary]' ... I can't understand how people would be afraid of me when they have never even met me or spoken to me before.

During her interviews, Danielle implied that being considered scary was dehumanizing and emotionally draining, making her unsure of herself and hesitant to interact with Japanese people. Unfortunately, being viewed as scary by Japanese people, can have real-world consequences. Ayana Wyse, founder of Black Creatives, which is a support group for Black artists living in Japan, described how she had once lost her job at a preschool, because some parents thought she "looked scary" (McNeill, 2023), demonstrating that being perceived as scary can have a detrimental effect on both mental health and job opportunities. Other scholars have also noted how feelings of fear are connected to Japanese perceptions of Black people. While this fear may take a different form in Japan compared to other countries, it is still symptomatic of a combination of local and global discourses of anti-Blackness (Capobianco, 2015; Sterling, 2010).

The Japanese understanding of racial hierarchies, informed by Western influences, places Western Caucasian people at the top (Prieler, 2010; Russell, 2009). Indeed, the women discussed here often felt that they were given a lower racial rank than their White acquaintances and considered to be what Ohri (2020) described as a "lesser other" (p. 227).

South African Lerato, for example, noted that at social events with other Japan Exchange and teaching (JET) participants, she did not receive as much positive attention from Japanese people as her White counterparts. She said she was often ignored. She wondered whether this was because White people were considered "legitimately foreign" whereas she was not.

Bella, from the US, however, felt differently. Though she acknowledged that Japanese people were more drawn to White than to Black people, she thought that overall Japanese reactions to Black people were more positive than the reactions of many White people to Black people in her country. She said:

With some White people there is a kind of glaze that comes over their eyes when you say the word 'Black'. At least when Japanese people hear the term 'Black' they don't act like it's a dirty word.

We can see that her experiences in Japan seemed benign compared to those in her home country, representing a shift in her own perception of Blackness.

Interestingly, while there is a hierarchy among foreigners in Japan with White people at the top (Prieler 2010), several participants also perceived a nationality-based hierarchy among Black people in Japan with Americans at the top and Africans at the bottom. Bella noted the privilege she and other Black Americans tended to have in Japan, especially when it came to being hired as English language teachers. While Black people of other nationalities may have difficulties, she said, "even if you are Black, and you are American, you are ok." Participants like Bella and Kate realized that they could benefit from the social capital attached to being American (Bourdieu, 1986).

Jamaican Danielle, on the other hand, felt that she was in some way disadvantaged in Japan by her nationality because either people knew nothing about Jamaica or judged her based on generic Black stereotypes. She described how her perception of herself as a Jamaican and Black person began to change:

In Jamaica, you're not Black, not White, you're Jamaican. When I came here, I was made very aware, like 'Dang, you are Black!' For the first time in twenty-odd years, I was made to feel like I did not belong, and I have had to fight to be seen and respected.

Danielle had never had to consider how her race affects others' perceptions of her. It was disconcerting at first and took her time to adjust. Her self-identity shifted as she began to look at herself through the eyes of others, as a racialized Black person in Japan, this is called double consciousness (Dubois, 1994). Other Jamaican women living in Japan have expressed experiencing the same identity shifts as Danielle after arriving in Japan (Haye-Matsui, 2018).

From the women's narratives, we see how race and gender intersect with nationality to frame their interpretations of how, within an acknowledged hierarchy of Blackness, they are perceived by Japanese people. As we have seen, both positive and negative experiences led the participants to reconceptualize their racialized and gendered identities, which, in turn, affected how they framed their experiences in the workplace and navigated dominant discourses such as harassment and native-speakerism (Holliday, 2006).

8.4.4 Native-Speakerism as a Catalyst for Harassment

It is important to bear in mind that teachers' sociocultural identities and their teaching practices are connected (Canagarajah, 2017). However, as Duff and Uchida (1997) found, it is not only a teacher's biography and past experience that shapes their practice, but also institutional factors, common discourses around ELT identities, and the ways in which colleagues and students view them as a teacher. This was

also true for the participants in this study. Their conceptualizations of their respective racial identities changed after living in Japan. And, for many of them, their desires to change negative views of Black people, and the ways their race, gender, and nationality intersected inevitably informed their teaching practices. Experiences of native-speakerism, which often leads to harassment in the workplace, also had an impact on both teaching practices and workplace experiences.

Native-speakerism is a prominent aspect of the English-language teaching industry worldwide (Holliday, 2006). Some participants, specifically Kate and Bella who are from the US and Jessica who is from England, did not experience native-speakerism to any significant extent. However, for the other participants, especially Lerato, Kerry, and Danielle, who are from South Africa, the Netherlands, and Jamaica, respectively, native-speakerism was often the catalyst for negative experiences, including harassment, in the workplace.

There was agreement between the participants' respective narratives that working in Japan as Black women in professional spaces sometimes meant becoming a target for harassment. Harassment has been recognized as a problem for women of all phenotypes working in Japan (Creaser, 2020; Nagatomo & Cook, 2019). However, all six women related one or more incidences of sexual or power harassment during their language teaching careers. This supports the findings of other scholars who assert that women of color are more likely to be victims of workplace harassment (Hasnain, 2018; Mirza, 2017).

Jamaican Danielle's experience illustrates this. When I first interviewed Danielle, she was working, as an Assistant language teacher (ALT) at a junior high school, she loved her job. Coming to Japan, she said, was "the best decision I ever made." 18 months later however, everything changed due to personnel changes at her school, specifically the appointment of a new vice principal. According to Danielle, the VP had very specific ideas about the type of ALT she wanted:

She [the vice principal] had these unrealistic expectations [...]. She clearly wanted an American ALT. Clearly! Because they had only had White, male, American ALTs until May, and she clearly wanted to continue that tradition.

Danielle said that the vice-principal went on a campaign to discredit the good reputation that Danielle had built up during her tenure by spreading rumors about her apparent poor performance in the classroom. After 3 months, Danielle was called into a meeting, told that no-one at the school liked her and that the contract she had signed 3 months earlier was being rescinded just 1 month before it was due to take effect. This left Danielle jobless and homeless.

In another example of power harassment, Kerry from the Netherlands was alienated within the university department where she worked. Like many foreign women in Japanese academia, she worked in a male dominated environment. Additionally, most of her colleagues were White males. In one incident, Kerry asserted herself in a meeting; she said she spoke politely but forcefully while her colleagues were rude and insulting. After the meeting her relationship with her boss, who was also the department head, shifted and he refused to communicate with her, even refusing to acknowledge her when he entered the office she shared with her colleagues.

The department head's treatment of Kerry did not go unnoticed by her colleagues, who she felt relegated her to a lower position, even though they were equals, resulting in a hostile work environment. Ultimately, she left the university and found a new position.

Lerato (South Africa), Danielle (Jamaica), and Kerry (the Netherlands), were positioned as non-native speakers, and their respective experiences demonstrate how discourses of power may intersect to impact Black women's working experiences in Japanese educational contexts. Gender and racial hierarchies, combined with native-speakerism influenced how the participants were treated. This often made them feel marginalized and alienated and had a significant negative effect on their emotional and mental health. The incidences of harassment endured by these women illustrate how power, a core characteristic of intersectionality, is enacted structurally, interpersonally, and culturally "across domains of power" (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 27) like the workplace. These examples also support the literature, which claims that there is often a strong connection between intersectional identities, including nationality (and, by extension, experiences of native-speakerism) and harassment (Wilson, 2017; Wright et al., 2007).

8.4.5 Challenges to Linguistic Competence

Closely related to native-speakerism is challenges to linguistic competence. Ramjattan (2019) asserted that "professional skill in TOEFL is embodied rather than learned" (p. 133). This assertion holds true for some of the participants discussed in this chapter who found that the intersection of their race, gender, and nationality led to questions about their linguistic competence. Kerry, from the Netherlands, is a highly qualified teacher and completely fluent English speaker. However, questions around her competency as an English-language teacher, she said, have dogged her for most of her career because she was always positioned as a NNEST. To illustrate, she related how when she was serving as a member of an English entrance exam committee at her university, a Japanese professor queried her explanation of a grammar point. When she tried to convince him that her explanation was indeed correct, she was told, "we have a White native speaker from England, so we're going to ask him. You don't need to give your opinion." Her race, nationality, and gender all appeared to cast doubt on her ability, and she was "linguistically deskilled" (Ramjattan, 2019, p. 133), showing how skill in the English-language teaching industry, rather than being quantitatively assessed, may be qualitatively assessed based on race, gender, and nationality.

Another example of this is Lerato, from South Africa. She worked as an ALT and also felt that her race, nationality, and sometimes gender meant that she was viewed as less competent because some Japanese teachers at the various schools she worked in did not believe that "somebody with brown skin can teach English as well as a White person." Her strategy to combat this attitude among her Japanese colleagues

was to let her work speak for itself: “Some teachers may not believe in me at first, but I go in and work my butt off.” While this may be admirable, it shows that there could be an extra hoop for Black female teachers to jump through to prove their worth. Being viewed as less competent because of the intersection of race, gender and nationality was a common part of the narratives of participants like Kerry from the Netherlands and Lerato from South Africa.

However, there was one crucial difference in how this is played out for the participants of different nationalities: during their interviews, the participants from England, Jessica, and the Americans, Bella and Kate, never mentioned having their competence questioned. Their nationalities appeared to act as a buffer for the racialization of teaching skills and pedagogy.

8.4.6 Student Relationships and Pedagogy

Despite the negative effects of native-speakerism, harassment, and doubt about competency, when it came to relationships with students and their classroom experiences the participants’ race, gender, and nationality appeared to intersect in largely positive ways.

The women felt that they were easily able to build rapport with students. Kerry (the Netherlands) observed, “being female helped a lot. People tend to think I am kinder and more open to things. It is more of, like, a mother figure.” Being perceived in this way, Kerry explained, drew students to her and helped to build rapport, especially with young learners.

Kate (the US) similarly felt that students were drawn to her because of her gender but that her racial difference may have played a bigger role. Students, she said, “liked me because I was different.” When Kate worked at a high school, even students she did not teach would regularly seek her out to discuss personal and academic issues. She explained that unlike other teachers she was most often sought out by students who felt like cultural or social outsiders, possibly because they were biracial, returnees, felt confusion over their identities, or perhaps due to issues concerning their home lives. Kate explained, “I was different in a different way than them, but I was different.”

It is common for foreign language teachers in Japan to be regarded as cultural ambassadors in their workplaces (Geluso, 2013), but the women in this chapter felt they had the added responsibility of representing their race and sometimes their gender. Awareness of this responsibility meant that they were very careful in their interactions and dealings with students. Fels (1994, as cited in Stephan, 2010) notes that students often enter the classroom with a certain amount of “cultural baggage” (p. 111), which contains preconceived ideas about people of different countries and cultures. Some of the women presented here thought that students may have gleaned certain stereotypical ideas about Black people from media sources, which tend to be negative and/or stereotypical. Kate explained:

I try to remain conscious of the fact that I know they are speaking to a woman of color for the first time, and I try to be conscious of how I carry myself. I know they are comparing me to all the music videos they see.

Kate does not want students to associate her with the highly sexualized images of Black women often seen in popular music videos. She aims to offer a counter-narrative, and in her interviews, it was clear that she is “aware of the tension between the collective image and individual reality” (Romney, 2010, p. 158).

Having the responsibility of representing one’s race can be a heavy burden. However, my participants accepted it as part of their roles in Japan. That does not mean that the women did not sometimes find it overwhelming; they were under constant pressure to act only in ways that could be perceived positively. However, they also felt a strong sense of purpose and responsibility to educate others and change negative perceptions of Black people.

Teachers’ sociocultural identities often intersect to inform their pedagogy (Canagarajah, 2017). Here too, the women’s race, culture, and sometimes gender informed their pedagogy significantly. Several participants created lessons that taught about Black cultures or increased students’ ideas about the cultural diversity of English speakers. The methods they used to do this depended on their teaching context and the age of their students. For example, Jessica taught her preschool students about skin color varieties. She found that her young students were curious about her skin color and would often ask “Why are you brown?” So, she created a lesson:

I showed them how you could have different colors in families, and I related it to flowers. I said to them, ‘We have so many different flowers in the world and that’s what makes it beautiful.’ Then I said to them, ‘Would you like it if we only had red roses everywhere?’ And they said ‘Boring’, and I said ‘Right! You want variety, right? People are just like flowers.’

It has been found that introducing diversity in early childhood education can help develop intercultural competence and foster attitudes of racial tolerance and acceptance (UNESCO, 2004). I believe that Jessica achieved this through her pedagogy.

Lerato taught her junior high school students about apartheid through role playing activities. She effectively created apartheid in her classroom so students could try to understand the exclusionary nature of institutionalized racism. Her lesson, she said, had a significant impact on the students:

The first time I did it with that class, they were like, ‘is this really what happened? How could people live like that?’ People were even in tears. They just couldn’t understand why.

By allowing students to experience apartheid to a certain extent, Lerato used a transformative and critical consciousness raising method that aims to empower students to believe that they too can create important social change (Von Esch et al., 2020).

At the tertiary education level, some teachers created modules on racism or diversity, or, like Kate, made sure that any images they used in class showed people of all races and ethnicities. Bella used a more overt method:

I told those students that America looks great, but when you go there, do not forget that they will treat you as a non-White person. I told them a story of a Japanese musician friend who went on tour with his band. I told them that they went to a hotel, and they were told that they were not allowed to stay there. They were called Japs... I told them that. I said, 'You know, they are racist against Black people, but they are also racist against anyone who is not White. So, you be careful when you go to America'.

The participants felt strongly that part of their roles as ELTs in Japan was to educate students on the diversity of English language speakers and the world. They used their agency to create pedagogy that reflected this goal, and this was mediated by their ability to build rapport and create good learning environments for their students. From their narratives we can see that this was an important and fulfilling part of their teaching experiences. The women in this chapter were popular and hard-working teachers who enjoyed being in the classroom and interacting with students.

8.5 Conclusion

The women described in this chapter often felt that their experiences directly resulted from perceptions around their gender, race, and nationality but often found it challenging to know which identity factor was more prominent. As Brown & Misra (2003) assert, "race is gendered" and gender is "racialized," and the way they intermingle can create specific experiences for certain groups. Using an intersectionality framework to explore this tangling and intermingling of factors has allowed us to identify and connect the factors that frame my participants' narratives.

Significantly, this research highlights how definitions of race are contextual and changeable depending on time and place. Similar to Moosavi's (2022) narrative where he described how, as a mixed-heritage Iranian and British Caucasian, he was viewed as a person of color in England but in Asia he was categorized as White, the women in this study found that their Black identities were perceived differently in Japan, sometimes providing more privilege to those from English-speaking Western countries, and sometimes limiting opportunities for those from countries perceived to be non-English-speaking. New meanings were ascribed to their respective Black identities, meanings which differed, in part, depending on their nationalities. For them, meanings ascribed to Blackness were multilayered and, in some cases, hierarchical. This led them to reconceptualize their racialized and gendered identities in Japan and provoked new and varied interpretations of race and racism.

In experiencing sometimes vastly different racial interactions between their home countries and Japan, meanings ascribed to race, racism, and Blackness changed for these participants, some in positive ways and some in negative ways. These differences in race-based interactions, and the filters through which the women experienced them in Japan, were impacted by the intersection of race, gender, and nationality. The study upon which this chapter is based is the first time that these issues, which so strongly impact Black women, have been examined in Japan,

and this research sheds new light on the contextual elements of the intersection of race, gender, and nationality for Black women in East Asian contexts.

The women's narratives also show how, within the English-language teaching context of Japan, beliefs surrounding race, gender, and nationality are impacted by the discourse of native-speakerism, which shaped how they were treated and perceived in their workplaces. The intersection of these factors resulted in privilege for those positioned as NESTs but for others positioned as NNESTs it sometimes resulted in marginalization and questions around competence.

Winer (2021) asserts that intersectional identities are not always disadvantageous; for example, the participants benefitted from the gendered perceptions of their students and were able to build rapport with them quickly. Regardless of the presence or absence of difficulties with colleagues and superiors, these women used their agency in the classroom to provide educational content related to cultural diversity. Through their presence and pedagogy, Black female ELTs like the women presented in this chapter are creating counter-narratives at the grassroots level among current and future generations of Japanese (Haye-Matsui, 2022) and will, I believe, continue to do so.

As an insider researcher, it is important to acknowledge how objectivity may have been affected by analyzing the data through the lens of a researcher who, like the participants in this study, is also a Black English language teacher living and working in Japan. My familiarity with the research context may have, to some extent, led to an unconscious imposition of my subjective interpretation of the findings. However, I want to reassure you, the reader, that I made a concerted effort to avoid this not only by employing reflexivity throughout the research process, but also by eliciting feedback from colleagues who are further removed from my research topic. Collins (2000) asserts that Black female scholars can be described as "situated knowers" who, because they share their participants' standpoint and background, are ideally placed to study the lives of other Black women. From my position as a Black ELT in Japan, sharing the participants' race and gender was advantageous in gaining their trust. What also became clear was that despite our shared race and gender, the ways in which race, gender, and nationality intersected for us varied widely, emphasizing that there is no singular *Black female experience* in Japan.

In closing, I would like to reiterate that I hope others will be empowered by the stories of the women described here and, perhaps, see themselves reflected in their journeys. I too have, had negative experiences similar to those of some of my participants. But I have also learned that part of what it means to be a Black woman in the English-language classrooms of Japan is to seize the opportunity to build strong bonds with students and offer them an alternative representation of foreign people living and working in Japan. My own experiences, both negative and positive, have reinforced my belief in the need to be my authentic self in and outside the classroom, to represent my race, my gender, and my country in ways that promote tolerance and respect towards racial difference and cultural diversity, and I am further inspired to do so by the narratives of the women presented in this chapter.

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Chapter 9

Navigating Whiteness in ELT: Fear, Anger, and Exhaustion Among Chinese Women Teachers



Shuling Wang

9.1 White Power as Time Bombs

He was a dingshi zhadan (定时炸弹).....in the middle, it might explode. Just imagine if he did not show up in the classroom, you say, wasn't it a time bomb? (Fan Huiping)

In this study, the metaphor of *dingshi zhadan*, or a “time bomb,” was invoked by two participants to describe White teachers, and several others drew parallels between these teachers and the danger represented by a ticking bomb. This analogy is noteworthy as it sheds light on the manifold challenges and dangers felt by Chinese teachers when collaborating with White colleagues. Fan Huiping’s statement is an illustrative example, with her portrayal of the White teacher underscoring characteristics of unpredictability, unreliability, and a lack of professionalism. A time bomb represents a unique form of destructive weapon, fostering a palpable sense of existential threat. The metaphor of time bombs, encapsulating the conception of White teachers as a threat, emphasizes participants’ emotional distress during cooperation.

The “time bomb” metaphor conveys participants’ feelings towards White teachers as threatening, dangerous, and problematic, communicating the underlying tensions and power imbalances participants encounter within the ELT sector. This chapter critically explores participants’ feelings and emotions, using the emotional map method to illustrate these feelings as experienced within the racialized, gendered teaching spaces of the ELT industry. This study does not regard emotions as merely individual but collective and political, and therefore aims to understand the conditions that produce these emotions and reflect “the structure of being” (Puar, 2007, p. 207) for Chinese women ELT teachers. The dominant emotions felt among the participants unveil interlocking power structures within the industry.

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This chapter employs the concept of White power¹ to elucidate the power White teachers have over their Chinese women counterparts. White power is felt in teaching spaces, and participants consider this power as shaped by broad historical, social, and institutional forces, resonating with the notion of “White ontological expansiveness” conceptualized by Shannon Sullivan. Sullivan (2006), a professor who specializes in the intersections of feminist philosophy and the critical philosophy of race, has delved deep into the multifaceted interplay between Whiteness, power, and space, and contends that White people have historically felt entitled to claim and define the spaces they inhabit, “whether geographical, psychical, linguistic, economic, or otherwise” (p.10). Building on this claim, Corces-Zimmerman et al. (2020) have explored how White people frequently claim ownership over English-language spaces, such that English-language norms, pedagogical approaches, and even classroom dynamics predominantly reflect Western, often White, perspectives. Within the ELT industry, White power is demonstrated through White teachers’ dominance of space with an inherent sense of authority and entitlement, marginalizing local educators. For Chinese women teachers, navigating the shared space often invokes negative responses such as fear, anger, and exhaustion, which constitute racialized and gendered emotional labor. Such labor significantly impacts Chinese women teachers’ health and well-being.

9.2 Background

English language education has undergone rapid expansion in China, as the nation relentlessly pursues its ambitions of globalization and internationalization. English has ascended as a symbol of modernity, progress, and success, fuelling the belief that proficiency in the language is a key facilitator of these objectives. However, mass public English education initiatives launched since the dawn of the new millennium have not sufficiently satisfied the populace’s fervor to master English (MoE, 2001). Simultaneously, beyond the confines of the public education system, English has been commodified to cater to the middle-class demographic. The privatization of English language services has evolved into a norm, with the massive proliferation of English-language international schools and training institutions within urban locales (Morgan, 2022; Cheng [程], 2020). These schools employ

¹ White power in this research is used to describe the dynamics of power and authority that White teachers hold over their Chinese counterparts, different from the broader political or racial dominance implied in the Western context. For example, in the United States, White power is a term often associated with White supremacy and racial dominance. It refers to the socio-political systems and ideologies that maintain and reinforce the superiority and dominance of the White race, often involving a commitment to defending a White-only world where non-Whites are subordinated, segregated, or eliminated (Futrell & Simi, 2004; Hinton, 2021). In contrast, in this study, the application and implications of White power are specific to the educational and professional environment of the ELT industry, while this specific professional dynamic still reflects broader issues of racial and cultural hegemony.

foreign teachers² to engender an immersive English environment and to impart “authentic” American or British educational experiences. The overarching objective is to nurture English language proficiency that approaches native-like fluency among the student population. Foreign teachers have thus become a sought-after commodity, embodying high value within the ELT industry.

The commodification of English goes hand in hand with the commodification of Whiteness, which refers to the process by which elements associated with Whiteness, including Western education and culture as well as White people perceived as valuable commodities (Henry, 2021; Lan, 2022; Stanley, 2013), are commercialized, priced, marketed, sought after, sold, and consumed. This process is driven by a perceived pursuit of the benefits associated with Whiteness. Whiteness as a commodity helps to understand the ways in which Whiteness operates as a tool of power and privilege. Henry (2021)’s ethnographic study in China’s ELT industry shows how Whiteness is marketed and advertized in a way for schools to create a sense of exclusivity and distinction for English language instruction that targets middle-class families willing to pay more for these perceived benefits. The business focuses more on creating and sustaining demand for their services than on providing quality education to students. Whiteness, including White bodies and their associated cultural norms and educational experiences, are packaged and marketed as a desirable commodity in the English language marketplace in order to attract and retain students. Customers, in this case students and parents, specifically demand White native English speakers for English language instruction (Lan, 2022; Sung, 2011), to an extent that White bodies are fetishized. X. Liu (2018) found that race plays a significant role in the consumption of English classes, as parents’ preference for White teachers resulted in the international kindergarten she examined only hiring White English-speaking teachers. Schools thus create and respond to this consumer desire by commodifying Whiteness in English language education and incorporating it into their marketing and advertizing strategies.

The commodification of Whiteness in English language education has produced significant impacts, leading to a huge, highly racialized shadow ELT industry. Studies reveal the prevailing discriminatory hiring practices of valuing teachers based on their race in their entry into the ELT industry. As White skin has become a marker of authority of English language, the ELT industry in China prioritizes White appearance over qualifications, resulting in a thriving underground market that facilitates easy employment opportunities specifically for White individuals (Leonard, 2019). White teachers are valued by how “White” they are perceived, and the privileging of somatic Whiteness in the market results in pay disparities based on race and different shades of Whiteness. Lan (2022) reported that White teachers in China are ranked hierarchically based on nationality, with native English-speaking countries at the top, followed by Northern and Western Europe, and Russians and

²In China, “foreign teachers” (外教, waijiao) typically implies White educators in the ELT market context. Foreign teachers who are not White require racial, ethnic, and/or national modifiers (e.g., Black, Filipino). In this study, “foreign teachers” used by participants referred to White teachers unless specified otherwise, e.g., “Black foreign teacher” or “Filipino foreign teacher”.

East Europeans at the bottom. Payment scales in the industry depend on these perceived levels of Whiteness. Consequently, although some qualified foreign teachers enter the profession, it is predominantly populated by a significant number of under-qualified foreign teachers who are primarily White (Pan, 2019).

Untangling the relationship between Whiteness and English reveals that race is a key factor in shaping the ELT industry. However, race does not operate alone but intersects with gender, nationality, and class, leading to a highly racialized and gendered ELT industry. While the majority of Chinese teachers working in the industry are women, the study by Chan (2021) illuminates that for foreign teachers, there is a conspicuous preference for White, male teachers from inner-circle English-speaking countries. The tendency to privilege individuals fitting these racial (White), gender (male), and national criteria (inner-circle English-speaking countries) is not just symbolic but has tangible material implications. As Henry (2021) emphasizes, White male teachers are positioned as “rock stars” or occupy managerial positions while Chinese women teachers in private English schools often find themselves in secondary roles. Chan’s (2021) findings further indicate that White male teachers often receive the highest remuneration within the ELT sector, an economic advantage that surpasses individuals who do not align with these pre-established criteria. These studies expose the racialized and gendered hierarchy in the industry and division of labor between Chinese and foreign teachers.

While I center race in examining China’s ELT industry, most studies have focused on examining the experiences of White teachers, particularly White male teachers. There is a risk in this research of reproducing Whiteness as the norm in the industry through accentuating how White people negotiate the privileges and demonization that they experience in the field (Chan, 2021; Lan, 2022). The current ELT scholarship thus exposes a significant gap: the experiences of Chinese women within the industry remain notably underrepresented. Existing literature underscores the commodification of Whiteness in the ELT market, the profit-driven business model in private schools and kindergartens, consumers’ desire for White male teachers, the racialized and gendered hierarchy and division of labor between Chinese and foreign teachers, which uphold White supremacist ideology. This scholarship shows how White bodies are commodified and fetishized, and become profitable and desirable. However, Chinese women teachers’ professional experiences distinctively contrast with the privileged status frequently accorded to their White counterparts. These experiences unfold against the backdrop of an intensely competitive Chinese job market and an oversaturated ELT industry, engendering a sense of professional precariousness and necessitating substantial efforts from these teachers to secure and maintain their positions. With an understanding of these dynamics, this study thus asks how Chinese women teachers construct Whiteness via their daily interactions with White teachers and seeks to uncover a different version of Whiteness in the eyes of Chinese women teachers, which is threatening, problematic and disruptive.

9.3 Methodology

This study adopted a Women of Color feminist qualitative inquiry design (Freeman, 2019) to investigate the lived intersectional experiences among 18 Chinese women English-language teachers who have worked closely with White teachers in the ELT industry. A purposive sampling approach was adopted to select information-rich participants. The selected Chinese teachers met the following criteria: (1) Self-identified as a Chinese woman teacher or teaching assistant of the English language; (2) worked with foreign teachers for over 1 year in a private-school context; (3) willing to share their experiences of navigating problems and countering discriminations when working with foreign teachers in the ELT industry.

Among the 18 Chinese female participants, the majority were young graduates ranging in age from 24 to 30 years old. These individuals primarily engaged in the instruction of young children aged 3–13 years, working within the contexts of pre-schools and elementary schools. Predominantly originating from urban areas, these participants possessed degrees in fields related to English and Education. Furthermore, over 50% had obtained master's degrees from prestigious higher education institutions in the United Kingdom and the United States. Despite the high level of education among this cohort of Chinese women, and the opportunity to serve as English teachers in training centers and bilingual international schools, the majority were relegated to the role of teaching assistants in collaboration with foreign teachers.

This study utilized a semi-structured interview method and adhered to a feminist interview approach in order to gather data on the experiences of female teachers. Each participant was interviewed twice, with each interview lasting between 1 and 2 h. Along with interviews, the study employed an innovative emotional mapping technique to explore participants' emotional landscapes. Emotional mappings were used to facilitate the recollection of experiences and to highlight aspects beyond verbal expression, such as feelings and affective behaviors (Gabb, 2009; Willis & Cromby, 2020). Participants were asked to create maps of locations where they frequently encountered foreign teachers, such as classrooms and teachers' offices, and then instructed to place stickers of varying colors on the maps, with each color representing a distinct emotion (McGrath et al., 2020). During the interviews, participants discussed their emotions and the specific circumstances that elicited various emotional responses in particular locations. These emotion maps offer an innovative approach, providing a visual representation of the participants' embodied experiences in their interactions with Whiteness, spanning temporal and spatial dimensions. The data collected were then analyzed through feminist grounded theory (Olesen, 2007). As no prior study has foregrounded the perspectives of Chinese female teachers with respect to their encounters with Whiteness in the ELT industry, this investigation sought to describe and interpret how they articulated their experiences, as conveyed through their own narratives.

9.4 Theoretical Framework: Affect and Emotional Labor

Feelings and emotions are an affective force that links the subjective with the social, and the emotional with the political (Nash, 2013). In her pivotal work “The Cultural Politics of Emotion,” Ahmed (2013) asserts that emotions extend beyond the realm of personal experiences, indicating felt relations of power between people. These dynamics are both historically contingent and socially embedded. Emotions, as characterized by Pavlidis and Fullagar (2013), can be understood as “felt” power relations that produce actions (Bogic, 2017; Nash, 2018; Puar, 2012). Consequently, emotions should not be seen solely as repressive elements but also as productive forces: the institutional structure gives rise to dominant emotions, while emotions, in turn, shape and alter power dynamics through individual acts (Smith, 2007). Therefore, this study explores how Whiteness is constructed by Chinese women teachers through their feelings in the industry.

Women of Color Feminisms highlight the crucial role that emotions play in responding to power structures shaped by racial and gender differences. Emotions permeate their everyday struggles; however, such emotional experiences are not confined to negative connotations. As Lorde (1984) points out, even emotions generally considered negative, such as anger, carry transformative potential. For Women of Color, these emotions serve as conduits for personal feelings to transition into forms of resistance, empowerment, and socio-political mobilization, thereby challenging prevailing power structures. Thus, emotions offer a critical lens through which intersectional experiences can be comprehended, concurrently serving as vehicles for the expression and resistance of marginalized populations.

Affective experiences and emotion labor are intertwined and self-reinforcing. As outlined by Arlie Russell Hochschild (2015), emotional labor pertains to the process of managing one’s emotional state to meet the emotional requirements of a particular occupation. This involves employees inducing or suppressing their emotions to maintain an external demeanour that elicits a specific response from others. Emotional labor tends to be more pervasive in professions centered around service, with a disproportionate burden falling on women and marginalized groups. Despite the psychological strain that this form of labor can impose on workers, it often goes unrecognized and uncompensated. The concept of emotional labor disrupts the conventional dichotomy that positions emotions and work in separate realms, illustrating that emotions are not merely individual experiences. Instead, they are deeply entrenched within socio-cultural and institutional structures. While Hochschild’s work primarily considers how the intersections of gender and class inform the feminization of emotional labor, subsequent scholarship has broadened this understanding to incorporate the dimension of race. Scholars such as Chong (2009) and Kalim (2022) have sought to articulate the racialized aspects of emotional labor. For instance, Kalim (2022) merges critical race theory with theories of emotional labor to scrutinize the racialized emotional labor endured by Black educators. In this research, I posit that the prevalent affective responses to the racialized and gendered regime of this industry underscore the ensuing emotional labor demanded of

Chinese women teachers in the workplace. Such labor has substantial implications for the teachers' well-being and health.

9.5 Fear, Anger, and Exhaustion

9.5.1 *Fear*

This section mainly reviews the experience of the study participant Ning Mu to explore the manifestations of Chinese women teachers' fear elicited by encounters with Whiteness, and in particular the dominant behaviors of foreign White instructors. Such behaviors are characterized by intimidation, verbal aggression, and abuse, resonating with the historical legacies of colonial invasions that continue to perpetuate racialized and gendered power disparities within the ELT industry.

Ning Mu,³ a graduate of a prestigious UK university, was a teaching assistant at an international school who collaborated with foreign teachers to educate primary school pupils. Her professional experiences with foreign English teachers were marked by a pervading sense of nervousness and anxiety, arising not only from feeling inadequate as a non-native speaker. This emotional climate has been visually represented by Ning Mu in an emotional map, featured in Fig. 9.1. The map outlines the layout of the classroom, including the front, where foreign teachers would lecture; the center, occupied by students; and the rear, Ning Mu's position, where she would stand and observe student engagement and behavior. Thus, the classroom layout signifies a spatial dynamic in which foreign teachers are placed in a position of authority while Ning Mu is given a more passive stance.

In describing the map, Ning Mu said,

Sometimes in class, she [the foreign teacher] would raise her voice and yell at students. I got scared. And she stared with angry round eyes. For me, I saw the image of a perpetrator of violence. When she couldn't find something in the classroom, her facial expressions and behaviors became very mad. So, I thought she was like a ticking time bomb. You know, she could blow up at any moment. That feeling, well, I couldn't stand it. (Ning Mu)

Ning Mu's interactions with her foreign colleague, a young White American English teacher, permeated with unease. She portrayed this colleague as having a volatile disposition, frequently resorting to "abusive language", and exhibiting aggressive behavior, especially when displeased. The teacher's exaggerated reactions to issues such as misplacing items in the classroom were believed by Ning Mu to be

³Ning Mu, who did not pursue a degree in English or education, initially returned to China to serve as an English teacher in the country's largest training center. She then transitioned to a teaching assistant at her current international school, and has worked in the school for 2 years. During our interviews, she expressed a lack of confidence in her oral English abilities and reported a strained relationship with the foreign teachers with whom she collaborated. Ning Mu envisions her current role as a stepping-stone towards a position in a bilingual international school where she can independently instruct students.

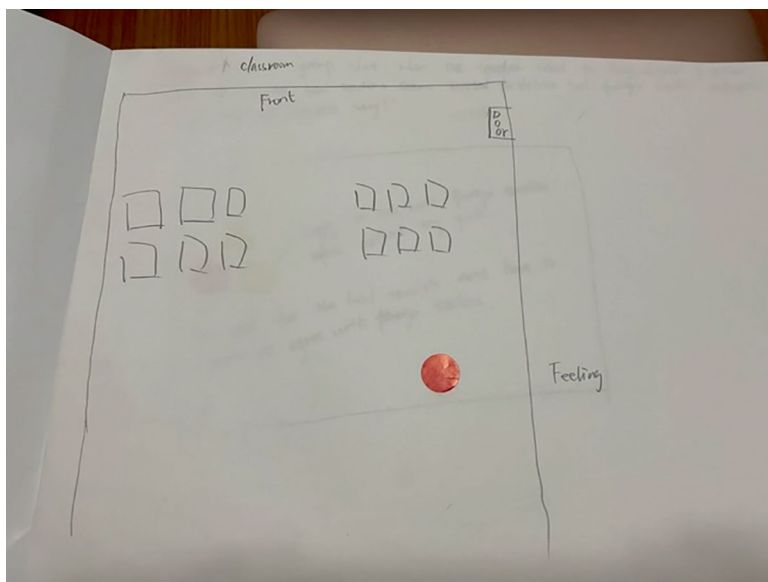


Fig. 9.1 Fear map by Ning Mu

excessively disproportionate to these minor inconveniences, which signalled the teacher's lack of emotional restraint. Critically, the volatile displays of the teacher in Ning Mu's narrative did not just impact students, but profoundly affected Ning Mu as well. Ning Mu's admission, "I got scared," amplified this sentiment, revealing how Ning Mu perceived this instructor to be not only an irate individual but as a potential "perpetrator of violence," which heightened Ning Mu's fear. In essence, Ning Mu's consistent exposure to such unpredictable aggressive behavior took a toll on her mental and emotional well-being, with her reactions going beyond mere discomfort to an active fear. This feeling of fear was echoed by three other participants who encountered similar experiences of aggression with foreign teachers, describing them as "intimidating," "overbearing," and "domineering."

The fear articulated by these participants underscores a significant undertone of psychological pressure, particularly in relation to interactions with certain White female educators. Confronted with potential challenges, such as diminished authority in the classroom arising from gender dynamics, language barriers, or cultural differences, White women educators sometimes resorted to leveraging their racial privilege as a means of asserting influence and dominance in the teaching environment. Such tendencies align with the "White ontological expansiveness" concept, whereby White individuals may feel entitled to claim and shape spaces. Accentuating their aggressive behavior, these educators seemed to assert a certain hierarchy within the classroom that reinforced their superiority and control, not only over their students but their Chinese colleagues as well. These White female teachers' behavior paralleled some of the dominating tendencies observed among their White male counterparts, who would become after being corrected by their Chinese

counterparts for teaching errors or inconsistencies. These foreign White male teachers would assert their dominance by channelling their anger towards those they perceived as subordinates. Such behavior exposed a silent endorsement of White supremacy and male dominance and reflected oppressive patterns that White female teachers might also adopt towards women of color, evidenced in the works of Armstrong (2021) and Bones and Mathew (2020). While such tendencies cannot be universally ascribed to all White educators, the instances nevertheless provide insights into White power at play.

Daily encounters with racism and sexism “are played out on the body, and are played out with the emotions” (Ahmed, 2004b, p.32). Participants’ fear is a visceral emotional response to the dominance of foreign teachers and the power disparity between themselves and their White colleagues. As Ning Mu’s statement (“I couldn’t stand it”) suggests, this fear was intense and overwhelming, touching on her vulnerability, marginalization, and disempowerment in encounters with Whiteness. When confronted with a “time bomb,” Ning Mu described herself as disempowered:

The environment the school provides, or in general in China, foreign teachers have privileges so naturally. Like in most situations, um, they feel superior, like just working together, it is hard to have an equal footing. It’s always like they do things as they wish, so the power dynamics are very different, and we are kind of just trying to do things to make them feel pleased.....Just naturally I don’t have the boldness to say no to her and I hate that part of myself. I really don’t like the way I handle our relationship, like why can’t I just put myself in the same equal position as her. (Ning Mu)

This account reveals Ning Mu’s fear, originating not from isolated events or individual foreign teachers but from an entrenched power structure shaped by societal and historical factors. She recognizes that in China, foreign, predominantly White teachers often enjoy privileges resulting from racial, linguistic, and cultural advantages, and that this asymmetric power dynamic hinders professional equality. Societal constructs privileging Whiteness, amplified by cultural norms deeply ingrained in China’s patriarchal society and institutional systems marked by racism and sexism, render Chinese women particularly vulnerable to fear in the face of aggression from White teachers. As acknowledged by six of the participants, Chinese patriarchal norms pressure harmony and deference towards authority figures (Bush & Haiyan, 2000), which can further muzzle the voices of female Chinese educators and lead to their feeling obligated to appease their White counterparts, even at the cost of their own well-being, as in Ning Mu’s case. Chinese participants’ feelings of fear may also be attributed to language barriers and cultural misunderstandings and be further understood in the context in which challenging the status quo carries potentially serious repercussions. In the ELT industry specifically, challenging established hierarchies can lead to retaliation from and escalating tensions with foreign teachers, career damage as well as the loss of employment, as several participants reported, given a perceived lack of institutional support.

Despite power imbalances and feelings of inferiority, Ning Mu demonstrated a high degree of introspection and aspired to position herself as equal to her White foreign colleagues. This consideration may be interpreted as a form of

“conscientization,” the process of cultivating a critical awareness and empowerment to challenge and transform oppressive social structures (Freire, 1970; Lloyd, 1972). By acknowledging her emotions and expressing concern over perpetuating existing power imbalances and gender and racial disparities, Ning Mu initiated a journey towards self-empowerment and the pursuit of more equitable working relationships.

Ning Mu’s questioning her own inability to understand her inherent fear of and perceived inferiority towards the foreign teacher presents an opportunity to investigate how racism, as a historical legacy of colonialism and imperialism, manifests in the present day. The felt power relations between foreign and Chinese teachers is not private but collective and shaped by past histories of contact. Ning Mu said she felt compelled to protect herself and her students by compromising her self-dignity to placate the fearsome White “perpetrator.” Her descriptions reverberate with the histories of wars and foreign invasions against China by European and American countries when Chinese people were compelled to subjugate themselves and pacify aggressors eager to launch resource-driven wars. One appeasement strategy was to treat violent invaders, particularly Caucasians, as *yang daren* (洋大人) or “foreign lords” (Ang & Martin, 2023). Ning Mu’s feelings of inherent fear and inferiority therefore are not historically baseless but reflect a response to White supremacy that is habitual and shaped by past traumatic encounters with foreigners.

In fact, the correlation between foreign teachers and invaders was subtly yet poignantly articulated by another participant:

I was not very lucky in my first year. She was the most overbearing female foreign teacher, extremely domineering (强势). Sometimes I thought what she did was too much. For example, once I went upstairs to help her laminate paper, and was late to the class. When I came into the classroom, she threw me out of the classroom and slammed the door. The students were so scared when watching that. She threw me out, and I felt very hurt in my heart. She not only did this to me, but always shouted at students. You know, I was also scared. Although I and other colleagues always joke that while this is Chinese land, once we enter the school and classroom we feel that foreign teachers are above us. (Yi Kou⁴)

Yi Kou’s account of her experience as a teaching assistant in an international school reflects her understanding of the power imbalances between Chinese educators and their foreign counterparts. Her descriptions of her co-worker, a middle-aged White female American, as “overbearing” and “domineering” not only emphasize the teacher’s possibly aggressive nature but also positioned her as a dominant, even abusive, figure. The incident described by Yi Kou, in which she was forcibly removed from the classroom, was not only disruptive to the class and emotionally damaging for Yi Kou, but also instilled fear in the students. When confronted with

⁴Yi Kou held a bachelor’s degree in English obtained in China. She worked as a teaching assistant at an international school for 2 years at the time I interviewed her. Growing up in rural China and joined the school with the goal to improve her English, gain an understanding of international education, and learn from Western teaching methods. However, after working with two foreign teachers whom she perceived as being abusive towards both students and herself, she reconsidered her glorified view of foreign teachers. After a two-year stint, she left her job and at the time of the interview, she was in the process of seeking employment in public schools.

this loss if classroom control and exposure to a temperamental outburst, Yi Kou's sense of disempowerment recalled broader political challenges touching upon Chinese national identity and sovereignty, evoking the discourse of "Chinese land".

Yi Kou's invocation of Chinese land might be seen as influenced by prevailing Chinese discourses around the country's "national humiliation," an appeal to state-promoted nationalism (Ang & Martin, 2023) to counteract their workplace's racial hierarchy. The use of Chinese land also references China's colonial legacy, reflecting these women's lived experiences of indignity and humiliation as a historical pattern of subjugation. The reference to "Chinese land" resonates with China's historical interactions with Western powers during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and collective memories of past foreign encroachments and dominations. These invasions helped to establish and reinforce the racial hierarchy that subordinates Chinese women teachers, manifested in the ELT industry that upholds Whiteness. The fear they experienced when confronting White power echoes the impressions left by White foreigners whose bodies they have read as perpetrators, invaders, time bombs, and a superior race. As Ahmed (2004b) claims, "the perception of others as the origin of danger is shaped by histories of racism" (p.13), the perception of foreign teachers as threatening is shaped by the semi-colonial history of racism, and its legacies on the hierarchies of race and gender in China are materialized and sustained in the contemporary English language teaching industry.

Ning Mu was not the only participant to grapple with fear when managing foreign "time bombs," as feelings of fear were shared among other Chinese women teachers in the ELT industry, transcending their individual experiences and being instigated by "the whole climate, the feeling, the atmosphere" (Murray, 2018, p. 177) of their White-dominated institutions. This fear unveils the sustained existence of a racial and gendered structure that exerts tangible effects on Chinese women teachers. These effects are born out of historically and socially constructed conditions that consistently marginalize and position Chinese women teachers as subordinate and inferior. This pervasive fear preys on these teachers and propels the growth of the ELT industry, which continues to uphold the predominance of Whiteness.

9.5.2 *Anger*

This section explores participants' pervasive anger toward the White privilege inherent in the ELT industry, referencing the cases of Fan Huiping and Zhen Nifu. The section reviews participants' anger at a system that frequently rewards the unqualified and lopsided power dynamics shaped by historical injustices that allow White teachers to operate without adequate regulation.

Fan Huiping served dual roles as both a manager and an English teacher at an English tutoring institution for primary school students. She taught English while also co-teaching a class led by a foreign teacher, where, like other Chinese teaching assistants, her primary responsibilities were to facilitate the successful delivery of

the foreign teacher's lessons. She described the foreign teacher she worked with as a time bomb:

He was a time bomb. Because you couldn't control him, you couldn't guarantee if he would come to class on time, you didn't know whether he would finish the course as promised till the next semester You know, I prepared most of his lessons, and his salary was far higher than mine, and I served him well. But in the middle, it might implode You know, I had to carry on till that semester finished, so I tolerated him. I thought as long as he did not touch my bottom line, I could still cooperate with him. (Fan Huiping)

This quote conveys Huiping's perspective on her professional interactions with her foreign male co-teacher, who demonstrated an inherent unpredictability due to his lack of punctuality, unreliable behavior, and overall questionable commitment to his teaching responsibilities, all of which made Huiping feel that he was a potential danger. Anger over this co-teacher's irresponsibility, compounded by her undertaking additional tasks and service-minded attitude being unappreciated by the foreign teacher, was palpable in Huiping's tone during her interview. Notably, this anger extended to other foreign educators with whom she had worked in the past, and whom she derogatorily referred to as *zha* (渣), or "rubbish," criticizing their teaching competence and personal ethics. Huiping chose to tolerate her co-teacher's shortcomings to maintain a semblance of normalcy until the semester ended, demonstrating a form of resilience and commitment to her professional duties. She also exhibited a pragmatic approach, providing supplemental instruction to mitigate the potential negative impacts of the foreign teacher's inconsistent performance, including reputational damage to her school, complaints from parents, and bad learning outcomes for students. Her description of establishing a "bottom line" for the foreign teacher's behavior suggested an attempt to preserve her dignity and integrity in this challenging context and, as a manager, laid off the foreign teacher at the end of the term. Unlike other participants in this study, Huiping's managerial duties allowed her to evaluate the risks associated with foreign teachers and exercise discretion over their continued employment. However, even in her elevated role, she still had to navigate emotionally taxing efforts to maintain harmony with the foreign teacher—mirroring Ning Mu's strategy—while also taking on extra work to compensate for the foreign teacher's poor performance. Her expression of anger served as a poignant reflection of her frustration with the inequitable system that unduly privileges foreign teachers while relegating her to a subordinate role.

Almost all participants in this study communicated a substantial degree of anger while discussing their grievances with the ubiquitous presence of *zha* foreign teachers, from whom they were often unable to distance themselves. Consequently, many participants were compelled to undertake additional, uncompensated labor to rectify issues caused by foreign teachers' conduct. This was especially true in the case of Zhen Nifu,⁵ who taught English to junior high school students at an international

⁵Zhen Nifu, after obtaining a bachelor's degree in English, worked as an English teacher in a training center for 1 year. Despite her impeccable pronunciation and intonation in English, her self-confidence was hindered by the fact that she did not graduate from a prestigious university. Consequently, she did not attempt to take the competitive exam to work in public schools, a

school. In addition to teaching her own classes, Nifu was also paired with a foreign teacher who she would assist in English speaking and listening instruction.

Figure 9.2, an Anger Map drawn by Nifu, illustrates the spatial arrangement of her school, highlighting the Teacher's Office where she spent her breaks, and Class 3, where her foreign co-teacher conducted classes. An arrow on the map indicates the path Nifu took from the Teacher's Office to Class 3, a short journey which, she reported, consistently induced in her feelings of anger at her co-teacher:

[The foreign co-teacher] was unable to manage the class. Every time she could not manage it, she would come out of the classroom and head to the office for me, "Could you come to help me? The students are crazy. They are out of control." She wanted me to wipe her butt..... You know, this made me angry.... Why should I work with these foreign teachers? How did they deserve to be a teacher? I had to teach four classes, manage the same problems that they did, and I faced them. And in the end, what [the foreign teachers] did not finish fell to me... Working with them was a nightmare for me. (Zhen Nifu)

Nifu's narrative revealed frustration with her White colleagues' inabilities to effectively manage their classrooms and the privileged positions they held. These foreign teachers subsequently relied heavily on Nifu's support, wielding their racial privilege to avoid the need for self-improvement or self-reflection and essentially offloading their responsibilities onto their co-teachers.

The dynamic between Nifu and the foreign teacher paralleled traditional gender roles where women are expected to be caregivers and problem solvers. Nifu's

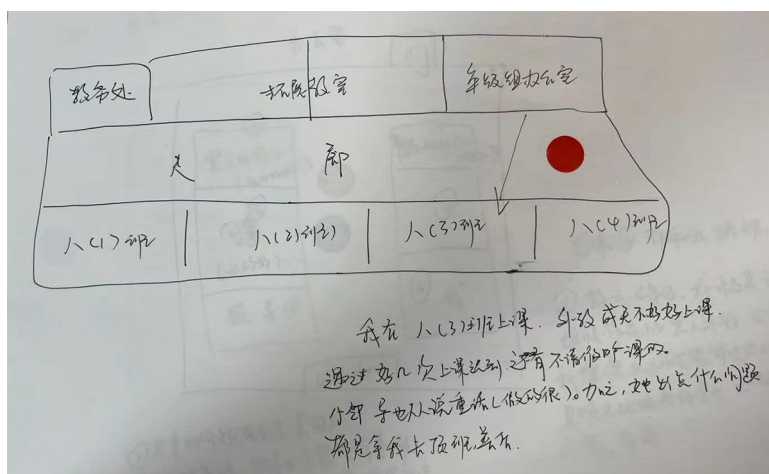


Fig. 9.2 Anger map by Zhen Nifu

decision she has regretted to this day. She turned to an international school, taught English in the Chinese national curriculum, and assisted foreign teachers in their oral English classes. Disappointed with the quality of foreign teachers in the school and the constant need to "wipe their butts" after them, Nifu eventually left her job after about 2 years, pursuing a TESOL at a UK university, and now works at a public school.

account of being called upon to assist the foreign teacher when the classroom spun “out of control,” as well as her reference to the foreign teacher’s wanting Nifu to “wipe her butt,” suggested a nurturing yet demeaning role that Nifu, a qualified English instructor, was expected to play for her White colleagues. This phrase also suggested Nifu’s frustration with a lack of recognition received for the additional work she undertook, further highlighting the inequitable work conditions she experienced. Her portrayal of working with foreign teachers as a “nightmare” signified the heavy toll of these interactions took on her in terms of emotional labor.

Nifu’s resistance to the extra responsibilities thrust upon her by foreign teachers underlined her struggle against an inequitable and demanding professional environment. Her statement that “as a worker, I did not have a say but just worked hard” poignantly articulated her perceived lack of agency within her professional environment, with her school prioritizing the retention and satisfaction of foreign teachers over the welfare and equitable treatment of local instructors. This institutional arrangement trapped Nifu in a cycle of additional, uncompensated work to mitigate issues caused by foreign teachers, intensifying her sense of disempowerment and frustration.

The anger articulated by this study’s participants extended beyond individual instances of unqualified foreign instructors, or unjust practices permitting these instructors to operate without repercussions. Numerous participants claimed that foreign teachers behavior could be explained by their *Diqi* (底气), because of their Whiteness. The concept of *Diqi* can be translated as the foundation(底) of energy(气). As understood in this context, *Diqi* is an unshakeable force that asserts influence on the world. Such an assertion of power was how Chinese women teachers perceived their foreign peers’ racial privilege—as an immovable force that gave these foreign teachers the ability to act with impunity, without concern for the repercussions of their behavior. Participants believed that foreign teachers’ *Diqi* was engendered by socio-historical factors; Ning Mu argued that societal and institutional structures tacitly buttress this *Diqi*, inadvertently bolstering White supremacy. The anger of the participants was therefore also targeted at these institutional arrangements, with many mentioning how schools indulged foreign teachers irrespective of their abilities or ethical conduct, primarily due to their racial, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds. Li Yu further connected this *Diqi* to historical legacies, tracing its origins to the Anglo-Chinese Opium War of the nineteenth century, a reference that highlights the profound impact of colonialism’s enduring effects on present-day Sino-Western relations.

Thus, the anger expressed by the Chinese female teachers in this study may be considered a response to the ELT industry’s hierarchical power relations, signifying these teachers’ ongoing negotiations and resistance to White dominance and authority in their workplace, as well as the gendered expectations that they serve and assist foreign teachers. The outrage sparked in participants by their unacknowledged efforts defusing potential “time bombs” highlights these teachers’ questioning of Whiteness and gender norms, and how their anger could potentially disrupt the system that exploits their labor through assumed servitude; this disruption, in turn, could open opportunities for altering the ELT industry’s dominant patterns to

establish new relationships (Holmes, 2004). Nifu described the potential embedded within her anger as follows:

I think it was very unfair. I had to do this extra work without being paid. I was angry until the third term, then I became hardened. Why should I do their work? Therefore, I refused to do it. In the end he [the foreign teacher] left the school. I felt so good, because sometimes people think it is easy to bully you and then ride above your head; they know you have no power, and they exploit and oppress you. Anyway, I spoke up for myself. It was indeed very satisfying, at least you can vent anger. (Zhen Nifu)

This excerpt presents Nifu's response to the imbalanced power dynamics she experienced working with foreign teachers. Her initial sentiment of unfairness arose from her being compelled to undertake additional, uncompensated work, which was a recurring theme in her professional engagements with foreign teachers. Her assertion that foreign teachers took advantage of and exploited those in subordinate positions encapsulated her own experience of subjugation throughout her encounters with Whiteness. Her outrage later evolved into a form of resilience, leading to her ultimate refusal to take on extra work. By resisting this exploitation, she took a significant step towards reclaiming her autonomy and dignity. Expressing her anger served as a vehicle for self-assertion and resistance against the dominant power structures she faced in her workplace, indicating that anger could work as a tool for resistance, a catalyst for change, and a form of emotional catharsis.

9.5.3 *Exhaustion*

Participants shared a profound sense of exhaustion due to the demanding nature of their work within institutions they perceived as perpetuating racism and sexism. Working in the ELT sector can be physically and emotionally draining, with Chinese female instructors often struggling to manage relationships characterized by dominance. These teachers' exhaustion stems from coping with difficult, often under-qualified and/or inexperienced teachers in an environment that disrespects and undervalues their professional expertise and experience; in other words, in managing their affective responses and negotiating the power relations holding up the status quo of the ELT industry. Drawing upon Chinese women teachers' own narratives regarding their feelings of exhaustion, this section aims to show how managing the potential severity of "time bombs" may result in pervasive physical and emotional weariness, a common occurrence in this context.

Engagement in unpaid and unacknowledged labor, necessitated by favoritism toward foreign educators and in conjunction with pre-existing workloads, causes profound physical exhaustion in Chinese female instructors. Nifu likened her labor intensity to that of a hardworking cow, others described feeling "tired as a dog."

We [Chinese women teachers] know how to teach kids. But what do these foreign teachers specialize in? I was already very tired taking care of the children, but that was my job, and

I was willing to do it. But why should I teach these foreign teachers? They didn't pay my tuition. (Li Ke⁶)

Li Ke found herself bearing additional work burdens when she was tasked with instructing foreign teachers on the smooth delivery of daily lectures. Her experience mirrors that of Fan Huiping and Zhen Nifu, who noted that they were expected to “serve” foreign teachers with lesson preparations and classroom management demonstrations. These jobs put undue strain on participants, augmenting their workload significantly, causing them to face the looming risk of burnout. Moreover, these jobs exemplified the teachers' positions in an unjust power dynamic, as participants seldom received additional compensation or recognition for their efforts.

Navigating the precarious situation of managing “time bomb” foreign teachers also resulted in profound exhaustion among Chinese participants. This exhaustion is multi-faceted, encompassing not only physical but emotional dimensions, as chronic exposure to and anticipation of potential issues instigated by foreign teachers could escalate from mere anxiety to a state of emotional trauma:

Sometimes mental illness is far more difficult to cure than physical illness. Every time [the foreign teacher] could not control the classroom, she would shout, hit the table, or slam the door and leave in the middle of class. Because of this, I suffer from PTSD [Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder]. Most times, my feelings exhaust me. I cannot calm my emotions and my brain is noisy. I must see doctors and take anti-depressants. (Xia Xiaojing⁷)

The excerpt illustrates the destructive emotional trauma that may ensue from attempting to interact with unmanageable foreign teachers. Xiaojing reported symptoms consistent with PTSD, the severity of her emotional turmoil leading to a chronic state of exhaustion characterized by an inability to regulate her emotions and incessant mental noise. Xiaojing's narrative underscores the profound psychological impact that systemic power imbalances and racial dynamics can have on Chinese women teachers, to the point of instigating serious mental health conditions.

Participants indeed indicated that experiencing and regulating intense emotions such as fear and anger tasked them with serious emotional labor, resulting in *xinlei*

⁶Li Ke worked at an international kindergarten. While an educator with a degree in early childhood education, Li Ke was constantly overlooked as a qualified early childhood teacher. She was critical of the quality of the foreign teachers working in the kindergarten. She had observed how two White women teachers from Russia without teaching qualifications were put into teaching positions and struggled with teaching, and also noted how a particular foreign teacher, a former Siberian boatman, was woefully inadequate as an educator but was still favored by parents due to his White European appearance. Her responsibilities as a teaching assistant involved extensive childcare tasks, which made her feel more like a nanny than an educator. Disturbed by the lack of quality foreign teachers, she eventually left the school in frustration after 3 years.

⁷Xia Xiaojing, who graduated from an elite UK university with a master's degree and a US teaching certificate in bilingual education, accepted a teaching assistant role in an international school when the opportunity presented itself, after she had failed to secure a teaching position at a college after graduation. She has been in this school for 2 years, and plans to continue in this position to save money while seeking her next employment opportunity, feeling quite disheartened at her current school due to the consistent oversight of Chinese teachers and preference given to White teachers.

(心累), whose literal translation is “heart tired,” a weariness arising from psychological distress. *Xinlei* represented the emotional burden borne by Chinese participants in their encounters with Whiteness. As part of their daily routines and survival strategies, participants needed to maintain a pleasant façade to conceal their negative emotions, evidenced by Ning Mu’s adoption of a “pleaser” persona, although this requires a strategic suppression of genuine feelings that could result in additional psychological strain. Participants’ constant emotional self-regulation not only depleted their emotional reserves but could also manifest as physical ailments, with symptoms such as chest discomfort, weight loss, and sleep deprivation. Yi Kou’s experience is illustrative.

I was very scared at that time. I thought it was my own problem. I lost more than 10 kg that year. Waking up every day, I told myself I wanted to go to work, because it was a job, and I wanted to persevere. Then a year passed, every day passed, I could do nothing about it, I didn’t know how. I didn’t want to let myself give up so soon. No matter how, I had to drag on. (Yi Kou)

Yi Kou narrates how internalized self-blame and self-responsibility arising from managing her fear on the job caused her exhaustion that produced real material effects such as weight loss. Having to “drag on” and not give up demonstrates her constant struggles to overcome this fear, with Yi Kou framing this suffering as an opportunity for growth, perhaps a sign of last resort stemming from a sense of powerlessness. Having to endure the feeling of being powerless led to an overwhelming depressive exhaustion when she felt there was nothing she could do to change the situation. Yi Kou’s experience unveils how this exhaustion is not individual but structured. This “structural exhaustion” (Emejulu & Bassel, 2020, p. 405) underscores the systemic conditions that compel Chinese women participants to manage “time bombs” by overworking both physically and emotionally. Thus, exhaustion, as an experience of being worn down while grappling with the intersectional race and gender inequalities in ELT, effectively becomes the “weights of oppression” (Nayak, 2014, p. 9) borne by most Chinese women participants.

Exhaustion may be understood as a cumulative outcome of several taxing factors: the constant anticipation of potential crises symbolized by irascible and unprofessional teachers; the undertaking of additional, unrecognized, and unpaid tasks for managing these underqualified and inexperienced teachers; the relentless need to mask their fear and anger; the emotional toll of persistent belittlement and dehumanization; and the struggle to maintain a functioning status quo in the face of adverse circumstances. Participants’ exhaustion reflected their extraordinary commitment to preventing further incursions by unqualified foreign teachers and mitigating their detrimental impacts on learners. Unfortunately, these efforts could push participants to their mental limits, as well as perpetuate the exploitation inherent in the ELT industry.

Still, Chinese women teachers’ state of exhaustion need not be considered solely negative, as it may act as a powerful catalyst for conscious acts of “self-interruption, self-suspension, and self-abeyance” (Berlant, 2010, p. 27). Exhaustion could also function as “an endpoint and gateway to withdrawal” (Emejulu & Bassel, 2020,

p.406). Some participants opted to abstain from their responsibilities when faced with exhaustion, leaving foreign teachers to fulfill their own tasks, while others allowed the metaphorical “time bombs” to detonate, inevitably leading to the expulsion of these problematic foreign teachers. Still others decided to leave their positions and pursue employment in public schools, where they would not have to collaborate with foreign teachers. These decisions and actions may all be considered forms of protest aiming at positive transformations in the private ELT education system. That said, these actions are not without risk, with teachers potentially jeopardizing their livelihoods, and these acts of resistance are a testament to Chinese women teachers’ resilience and determination.

While this chapter has foregrounded feelings of fear, anger, and exhaustion experienced by Chinese women teachers in the face of White power, the positive emotions felt by participants in the workplace should also be acknowledged. These feelings often emerged when foreign teachers demonstrated competence and professionalism, delivering lessons of high quality and efficacy. Chinese women educators cherished the opportunities to learn from and collaborate with such adept counterparts. Positive feelings also flourished when foreign educators actively engaged in pedagogical discussions with Chinese teachers, incorporating their suggestions and acknowledging their contributions. Equally, when space and power was democratically shared, with Chinese teachers invited to share in leading lessons, a mutual sense of respect and appreciation was fostered; as one participant expressed, “It was a collaborative year filled with both joy and challenges. Together, we shaped everything from the teaching space to the content, always aiming for excellence.” Nevertheless, such positive experiences were relatively uncommon, with many participants stating that encountering a qualified foreign teacher who regarded them as an equal seemed to require a stroke of luck. Given the structural biases endemic to the ELT sector, negative emotions remain predominant for Chinese women teachers.

9.6 Discussion

By analyzing the metaphor of White teachers as time bombs, this study exposes how White power in the ELT industry is experienced by Chinese women teachers through affective dimensions. Everyday encounters with White power generate predictable emotions among Chinese women teachers, thus serving as a path towards self-knowing through relationality. As discussed in the previous chapters, institutional arrangements and consumers have fostered White power while simultaneously dismissing Chinese women teachers as incompetent due to their race and gender, which results in marginalization and vulnerability among these teachers. The “time bomb” metaphor reflects the force of this White power, given its connotations of threats to the professional lives of Chinese women teachers. “Time bomb” teachers are not merely created and tolerated in daily encounters but emerge from

the historical legacies, societal norms, and institutional structures that sustain and amplify the privileges of foreignness and Whiteness.

White power is being known in a particular way. It is an emotional knowledge that reveals unequal power relations. Among participants, three primary affective responses were experienced when confronted with “time bombs”: fear, anger, and exhaustion. The fear these teachers experience is primarily in response to foreign teachers who wield power and exert dominance, often through aggressive and abusive behaviors. The anger these teachers express is targeted at foreign teachers who, despite their lack of competence and professionalism, bask in privileges conferred upon them by their Whiteness. Finally, the exhaustion of these teachers stems from their constant negotiation of power imbalances, and the significant physical and emotional labor required for this negotiation. Contrary to the dominant emotional narratives within China’s English classrooms, which are typically characterized by feelings of joy, fun, and aspiration associated with embracing Whiteness (Shahjahan & Edwards, 2022; Stanley, 2013), this study illuminates a counter-narrative. Often, these mainstream narratives tend to obscure the necessity for historical analysis and critical discourse around social power dynamics in the sphere of English language teaching. By foregrounding these often-overlooked affective responses, this study provides a relational lens to examine Whiteness in the neoliberal ELT market.

Teachers’ collective emotional responses of fear, anger, and exhaustion highlight how Whiteness is understood through affect as a power structure of dominance. Ahmed (2004a, 2004b) has emphasized the significance of emotions in understanding the racial dynamics, positing that racism epitomizes a distinct type of inter-corporeal encounter steeped in profound emotional responses. Seen through Ahmed’s (2004a, 2004b) approach, the interactions between Chinese women teachers and foreign, typically White, instructors in China’s ELT industry can be construed as one type of emotionally intense, inter-corporeal encounter, thereby reflecting subtle dynamics of racial violence. Moreover, the emotions arising from these racialized encounters are historically produced and socially embedded (Ahmed, 2013), with structural echoes of the racialized and gendered legacies of colonialism and imperialism. Focus on these often-overlooked affective experiences allows this study to move beyond simply appending emotions to existing narratives. Rather, it contributes to the broader understanding of China’s racial dynamics, shedding light on the ways historical legacies continue to shape present experiences and relationships within the neoliberal English education market.

As demonstrated, these feelings of fear, anger and exhaustion are pathways to knowledge. These affective responses provide a nuanced and profound understanding of how Whiteness, as a structure of dominance and privilege, is negotiated, resisted, and navigated in the context of the ELT industry. They vividly illustrate the challenging circumstances Chinese teachers must endure within the industry. While this linguistic market empowers foreign teachers, granting them race and gender privileges, Chinese women teachers often have to “defuse ticking time bombs,” manage abusive or incompetent foreign teachers, “wipe their butt,” confront their *diqu*, and in the process, become *xinlei*.

Still, Chinese women teachers' feelings of fear, anger, and exhaustion are not merely negative. As these feelings are expressed by individuals who have been disempowered with social norms, these feelings also have the potential to allow Chinese women teachers to see through and resist their profession's current racialized and gendered power structures. By naming, recognizing, and employing these affects, Chinese women teachers are further motivated to question, challenge, and disrupt the Whiteness by which they are disenfranchised. As Muñoz (2006) states, the attentiveness to feelings highlights a need to "not simply cleanse negativity but instead to promote the desire that the subject has in the wake of the negative to reconstruct a relational field" (p. 683). The desire beneath participants' articulations of fear, anger, and exhaustion is not to succumb to paranoia, but negotiate with reality and remap social relations, aspiring to equality by acknowledging barriers (Muñoz, 2006). By examining these feelings, their interactions, and their impacts on Chinese women teachers, paths toward challenging and reshaping uneven power dynamics can be developed, directing Chinese women teachers' further aspirations for social justice, equity, and dignity in their professional lives.

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Chapter 10

Post-Soviet White Femininities and Marriage Migration in China



Elena Barabantseva

10.1 Introduction

China's reform and opening-up period has been accompanied by a loosening of control on international travel, which has led to a growing number of romantic Chinese-foreign relationships. The growth of intra-ethnic ties along Chinese borders, the increasing numbers of educational exchanges and of foreigners working in big Chinese cities, the expansion of the entertainment industry, and the growing network of cross-border matchmaking services have resulted in an increasing number of international marriages (Farrer, 2008; Lehmann, 2014; Nehring & Wang, 2016). China has joined other Asian countries where for decades marriage migration has been popular (Faier, 2009; Jones & Shen, 2008; Kim, 2021; Yeung & Zheng, 2020). Among the common features that shape the experiences of marriage migration in Asia are the global norms of hypergamy, restrictive citizenship laws and local gender, labour and family values (Constable, 2009; Friedman, 2015).

A peculiar aspect of the marriage migration landscape in China is the popular notion that Slavic women from the former Soviet Union make ideal foreign wives for Chinese men. In sharp contrast to the negative representation of 'mail-order brides' from South-East Asia, the mainstream media highlights the positive, progressive, and civilized character of Chinese-post-Soviet marriages (Barabantseva & Grillot, 2019). For example, the definition of transnational love 跨国恋 (*kuaguo lian*) in the popular Chinese online encyclopaedia Baidu Baike uses examples and images of Chinese-Russian marriages and families to explain the meaning of

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transnational love.¹ This conveys the clear notion that gendered Whiteness is desirable in the making of mixed households in China.

To understand the interplay of race and marriage migration from the perspective of embodied experiences, I discuss these post-Soviet women's life stories of migration and marriage journeys from their home countries to China, as they narrated them to me. I pay attention to how the women capitalised on the White privilege that they discovered they possessed during their experiences in China and how they then went on to marry a Chinese citizen because securing a family visa, compared with other categories of visa, promised them stability and a long-term future in China. I argue that the patriarchal immigration regime in China is sustained through marriage, which appears to provide a faster and easier path to long-term residency. However, in reality, it is fraught with hidden risks and unforeseen consequences for family visa holders. Although White femininity is desired in China, its value is limited to its service to the patriarchal family.

In the first section I describe the methodological aspects of the research that informs this discussion. I then situate my analysis in the recent studies on heterogeneous Whiteness, migration, and the body in Asia. The following sections turn to the women's stories of migration and their negotiations of Chinese marriage and immigration regimes.

10.2 Methodology

The fieldwork that informed the analysis in this chapter took place between November 2015 and August 2018 and was conducted through multi-sited ethnographic observations and life story interviews with fifty-three women from the former Soviet states.² My starting point was the so-called 'Russian Brides' village in Shulan town of Jilin province; a village that became famous in the Chinese media for marriages between local villagers and Russian women who they met during their working stints in Russia.³ After visiting the village in 2016 it became clear to me that its fame was a construction of the Chinese media and the popular imagination, based on the idea that large numbers of Chinese men were marrying foreign (White) women. I then started searching for examples of real families of Chinese husbands and post-Soviet wives in the border town of Suifenhe and the capital city

¹Baidu Baike, 'Transnational Love' 跨国恋, <https://baike.baidu.com/item/跨国恋/8592263?fr=aladdin>, accessed 25 September 2023.

²The breakdown of the fifty-three face-to-face and online interviews with the women from the former Soviet Union was the following: 37 from Russia, 10 from Ukraine, 5 from Belarus 5, and 1 Kazakhstan.

³Jingwei Yuan, 'In One Jilin Village Over 200 Fortune Seekers Who Worked in Russia Marry 22 Russian Brides' '吉林1 村庄赴俄淘金出200余户富翁娶22位俄新娘(Jilin yi cunzhuang fu e taojin chu 200 yu hu fuweng qu 22 wei e xinniang)', *Xin wenhua wang*, 16 November 2011, <http://news.sohu.com/20111116/n325764058.shtml>, last accessed 25 September 2023.

of Beijing. Subsequently, my research took me to Harbin, Changchun, Mudangjian and Qiqihar, where I conducted face-to-face interviews with women until I was invited to join lively WeChat communities of Russian-speaking mothers, lovers, wives, and divorcees in China and incorporated these online interviews in my research data. I posted invitations for research participants in WeChat groups and talked to those who added me as their contact and agreed to an interview. As a result, the geography of my field site expanded to cover a wide range of Chinese cities from Guangzhou to Chongqing, and from Xiamen and Guilin. In all cases my participants were living in booming Chinese cities.

The women whom I interviewed came to China from post-Soviet Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Belarus between the mid-1990s and mid-2010s. They were at different stages of their dating, married and post-married lives at the time of our meetings. In addition to these interviews, I analysed the immigration regulations, visual representations, and popular and official discourses on Chinese marriages with Slavic women. In August 2023 I went back to Beijing and conducted follow-up interviews with some of my original participants, with many of whom I maintain contact via social media.

10.3 Whiteness, Post-Soviet Women and the Chinese National Body

A growing body of studies on hegemonic Whiteness point out that White privilege is constituted in relationships of class, gender, place and other markers of identity (Jackson, 1998; McGuiness, 2000; Twine & Gallagher, 2008; Frankenberg, 2001; Steyn & Conway, 2010). For example, in their survey of Whiteness Studies, Twine and Gallagher posit that the latest, third, wave of scholarship shows the contexts and situations ‘in which White privilege can be at the same time a taken-for-granted entitlement, as desired social status, a perceived source of victimisation and a tenuous situational identity’ (Twine & Gallagher, 2008: 7). Similarly, recent research on the experiences of other Whites in the Western European contexts points to the many shades of Whiteness that are identified in various contexts and the role of the intersections of class, gender, language, and nationality in the migrant racialisation process (Blachnica-Ciacek & Budginaite-Mackine, 2022).

Correspondingly, the growing research field on Whiteness in East Asian contexts highlights the heterogeneous character of Whiteness, emphasising its situated and contested nature. The complex role of race in Asia is characterised by the status of Whiteness, which is simultaneously desired and feared, shaping perceptions and functioning as both an enabling and limiting resource. Research on Japan shows that Whiteness works as a double-edged sword that privileges and provides a limited form of capital at the same time (Debnar, 2016, 160–170; Hof, 2018, 2020; Zorko & Debnar, 2021). Lan (2022b), Sier (2022), and Camenisch (2022b) show that in China Whiteness constitutes a form of embodied racial capital that operates

as a source of privilege and precarity. The fragility of White capital in China is made particularly apparent in moments of crisis, such as during the Covid pandemic (Lan, 2022c; Sier, 2022).

An important aspect of Whiteness in China that deserves academic scrutiny is the continued theme of gendered and racialised bodies in the articulation of the Chinese nation. Louise Schein describes the changing meanings of the bodies of White women in China in the early 1990s in her ethnographic discussion of a wedding gift of a poster of a White Western woman wearing a bikini during a traditional Miao wedding ritual in rural south-western China (Schein, 1994). Contextualising this episode in the changing political and social culture of the post-Tiananmen era, Schein shows how the politics of Whiteness gave way to different sexualised and political interpretations of Chinese market reforms, thus informing consumerist interpretations of social relations. In the early Reform Era, for example, a White woman was an object of distant consumption, often featuring on calendars, posters, adverts and billboards to adorn the private sphere and used in public displays of modern family life and domesticity. Schein shows that the White woman was an object of admiration, and longing, and the symbol of qualities, including economic development and civility, that China, in the view of its leaders at the time, lacked.

This has changed with China's rapid economic growth, particularly from the late 1990s onwards when China became more open and started attracting foreign visitors, businesspeople, and students. Due to the particular symbolic meaning of Russia as a geographical neighbour, political ally and a successor to the Soviet Union, Russia emerged as a 'subaltern empire of modernity' positioned as the 'other' to the West and a friend to China (Tlostanova, 2003). Consequently, the image of the 'foreign bride' that was constructed as an available and desirable possession for a Chinese man was a Slavic woman from one of the former Soviet republics. This was reinforced by the cultural politics of gender in post-Mao China that celebrated a particular kind of successful competitive man who needs a certain type of woman 'to monopolise, control and objectify' (Zheng, 2012). It is this junction of racialised, gendered, and embodied practices and social narratives that underlies my analysis of marriage migrations from the post-Soviet republics to China.

10.4 Migration Journeys to China

The main vehicles of increased personal contacts between China and post-Soviet states since the 1990s have been Chinese people moving to these states for business, trade and education and, from the residents of post-Soviet states' perspectives, the new opportunities that China's reforms and openness have brought about (Alexeeva, 2008; Nyiri, 2003). In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the dominant routes for mobility between China and the post-Soviet states were those of educational exchange and cross-border trade. Often, these activities overlapped. These new processes of socioeconomic transformation generated occasions for romantic encounters and the formation of new families. One person affected by this change was

Zhanna (aged 39). She was part of the first wave of migration to China when in 1999 she went from Khabarovsk to Beijing on a language exchange programme to improve her Chinese. In addition to studying, she quickly found a market niche for her language skills and started working as an interpreter at the main Russian trading hub in Beijing's Yabaolu district.⁴ It had been a bustling open-air market until 2008, when during the global economic crisis it went in decline and was finally moved to a purpose-built structure in 2016. Zhanna met her husband in the sports grounds of Beijing University where she was on a student exchange. By the time we met for our interview in November 2015 she had become a long-term member of the 'Chinese wives' community in Beijing, running a successful Russian nursery and holiday and hiking clubs.

By the early 2000s China's development boom and the proliferation of the beauty economy and the public campaigns related to it (the most beautiful family, the most beautiful city and so forth) led to a growing demand for people with European appearance to work in the Chinese bustling entertainment industry as singers, go-go dancers, animators, artists and models (Yang, 2011). The 2013 Immigration Law regularised this new niche in the market for foreign labour with the a 90-day artist visa (category Z), which became a common route for moving across Chinese-post-Soviet borders. Working in entertainment became a popular way to travel and earn money for (mostly female) university students and recent graduates from the former Soviet Union. Initially perceived as a short-term opportunity to earn extra money and get life experience abroad, for many of my research participants these jobs became the road to marriage and family life in China.

Albina (aged 27), a professional sportswoman with a sports MA went to China in 2016 after an unhappy break-up with her boyfriend in Russia. Seeking an opportunity to escape her depression, she signed a 3-month contract to work as an animator in a night club that involved creating a party atmosphere and developing entertainment scenarios for the club goers. She told me that she found this job very hard because it was new to her and she was older than the other girls in this business: 'I wasn't very young—25 rather than 18—with two university degrees and a good job in Russia. I had been a manager before, and here I had to develop scenarios and wear zombie costumes on Halloween. I couldn't do this sort of thing back home because my social status did not allow it. But here, away from home, nobody would judge me for running around in a cat costume. The job wasn't great, but my aim was to go far, far away to get rid myself of depression'.⁵ Her main reason for going to China was to get away and earn some money, and she told me that she was not interested in China as a state or society.

Albina was not alone in searching for a way out of a personal crisis in China. Other women told me that the main reason they went to China was to run away from their family and from personal pressures or tensions. Oxana (aged 28) from an industrial Siberian town told me that she craved for a life away from the grey reality

⁴Interview with Zhanna, Beijing, 11 November 2015.

⁵Interview with Albina, WeChat, 22 August 2018.

of her home town where she graduated from university.⁶ During her studies, she started looking for opportunities to travel abroad and passed the exam to be a tour guide in Turkey and later in Thailand. When the opportunities in tourism in these countries dried out, she agreed to work as a go-go dancer in China, intending to spend the money she earned to train to become an air hostess with Aeroflot. She had no dancing experience but was assured that to succeed in China it was sufficient to have 'a White skin and face' and so she signed the 3-month entertainment contract.

The women's motivations for going to or remaining in China can be explained by the upheavals of the post-socialist transitions that led to the devaluation of the university degrees, as well as low salaries and their impact on the system of locals' values and social priorities. Stories about escaping from their family and from societal pressures in pursuit of better opportunities than those available in their place of origin featured prominently in these women's accounts. Nevertheless, while these motives contributed to these women's decisions to leave for China, they cannot be separated from affective factors, including the break-up of their previous romantic relationships and their search for a new start. Most of the women told me that initially they did not regard China as a place to live. Rather, they viewed it as a new but temporary phase, a personal development opportunity or a way to break with their old life.

China was a place where they could get lost in the journey to discover their self-worth that many women believed their home countries did not nurture. Russia, for example, was presented by many as gloomy, depressing and stagnant. Lena (aged 47) characterised Russians as pessimists: 'We do not have the same sense of optimism as people in China. We are sceptics and nihilists. This is our mentality. Maybe it is an aftermath of socialism?'⁷ China, on the other hand, appeared to them to be more dynamic, positive, and stable, and it was easy enough to earn a living there. The women believed that China offered them more opportunities and a brighter future. Additionally, for those from the Far Eastern and Siberian regions of Russia, the sense that the never-ending consequences of post-Soviet economic disasters was exacerbated by their feeling disconnected from the European part of Russia. Many observed that going home in the Far East for them was closer, cheaper and faster from China than from Moscow. Women from Ukraine said that the appeal of better prospects was the precursor to their decision to go to China. Particularly after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, followed by economic sanctions and the devaluation of the Russian rouble, several women found their way to China in search of new life opportunities there. However, it was common to discover that they were not making long-term plans for the future. Living in the present and going with a flow was the attitude that they adopted in response to the personal pressures and wider structural conditions they faced, which made it difficult for them to make long-term plans.

Another common experience among these women was realising the high value placed on Whiteness and its association with earning opportunities. For Anya (aged

⁶Interview with Oxana, WeChat, 20 August 2018.

⁷Interview with Lena, Changchun, 22 August 2018.

30) from Russia's Far East, it was normal to travel in search of new adventures.⁸ A descendant of German migrants in the Soviet Union exiled to the Far East at the start of the Second World War, she told me that she never meant to stay in Russia and had planned to go abroad as soon as she had the means to do so. Going to China from the Far East was easier than going to Europe, and the prospect of earning extra money there was good. As a student, she agreed to a go-go position in a KTV club in Anhui province. When she arrived in 2009, her impression was that all the locals were 'welcoming and kind'. She recalled that their group generated a lot of interest amongst the locals. 'People surrounded us, staring and pointing.' She thought that this welcome reception helped to boost her self-esteem. As soon as she could find another opportunity to earn a living as a model, she left the KTV club. Her height, at 163 cm, was no barrier in China, where the demand for White models was high. Anya explained: 'I could earn 2,000–3,000 RMB (200–300 USD) for a photo shoot, 2,000 RMB (200 USD) for 40 min in a car advertisement. It was good money, and not dirty work. I got 10,000 to 15,000 RMB (1,400–2,100 USD) per month'.⁹ At the beginning she enjoyed the feeling of being treated like a 'mini-star' but by her second year it had started to irritate her: 'I couldn't take it anymore, because I could not stand Chinese looking at me as if I were a piece of meat (*kusok myasa*)'. She described her modelling experience as a farmers' market: 'We call the men who come to these events farmers. They do not say, "Excuse me, can I take a picture with you", but "Hey, come here" or try to covertly take a picture of you. This makes you very uncomfortable. You never get used to it'. The valorisation of the bodies of White women for Chinese consumption created new opportunities for the women to redress their own socioeconomic problems and personal challenges. However, the terms and conditions of their demand in the Chinese market pressured some of them into deciding to marry even if they were not fully informed about the consequences of their decision.

10.5 The Post-Soviet White Femininity in the Chinese Domestic Sphere

My research participants often mentioned that they had never even imagined dating a Chinese man, let alone marrying one. When I asked Oxana what attracted her in her husband, she said that she had been surprised by her choice herself.¹⁰ When I asked other women why they had not imagined they would marry a Chinese man, they often cited cultural differences or expressed a lack of physical attraction to Chinese men. Some even said that Chinese people looked like aliens when describing their impressions of the Chinese people. When explaining their attraction

⁸ Interview with Anya, WeChat, 24 August 2018.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Interview with Oxana, WeChat, 20 August 2018.

to their husbands, they often pointed out that they thought their husbands did not look Chinese, but looked more like Korean, Japanese, Thai, Tatar or even Cuban people. Kristina (aged 31), for example, explained: 'When I met my husband, I noticed that I was attracted to him because he wasn't like other Chinese, beginning from his appearance. Everybody thinks he is a Korean or Japanese, rather than Chinese. He is stylish, has different manners, is better dressed and is quiet. He likes Western films, music and culture, even his home interior is very European'.¹¹

Nobody mentioned that their decision to date and later marry a Chinese man was prompted by their inability to find a husband in their home country. Rather, the main reasons they gave were their husband's physical attraction and the values that he represented to them during their courtship. Furthermore, marrying appeared to be the best possible option available to them in the circumstances. Just as Kim found in Japan, the effects of state propaganda, along with family and social pressures, strongly influenced the women's decision to marry (Kim, 2014). Many of my interlocutors expressed that they felt unappreciated and undervalued in their home country. Additionally, those who worked in an entertainment industry had to deal with stigma associated with their activity.

Anya met her future husband in a night club and when they started dating, she gradually cut down on her performing and modelling engagements, because they could, in her words, damage her boyfriend's reputation (she used the expression 'to lose face'). Subsequently, thanks to her social care university degree and love of teaching she found a job as a primary-school teacher in an international school, where she continued to work after her marriage had broken down and at the time of our interview in 2018.¹² This is how Anya summarised the public perception of Russian women in China and the symbolic role of marrying a Chinese husband:

If you are White in China and say that you are from Russia, people perceive you as a prostitute. Nobody cares that you have graduated from a university and speak three foreign languages. Nobody sees you as an individual. Everyone sees you as a White woman working in a karaoke bar and selling sex. At the same time, if you go somewhere with your Chinese boyfriend or husband and they know that you are together they will say: 'We love your president. Your country is so strong and great. You are very cool!'¹³

This observation conveys how dominant Chinese perceptions of post-Soviet femininities are related to global images of post-Soviet migrant women oscillating between sex worker and a domestic goddess who can be bought. Most found this dominant stereotype deeply damaging to the reputation of women from post-Soviet countries. Framed by the media as prostitutes, they faced the same attitudes as women caught in the waves of post-Soviet migration to places like Western Europe, the United States, Turkey and Israel (Lemish, 2000; Golden, 2003; Bloch, 2017; Shpeer & Howe, 2020). Stereotypical media-generated images constructed models of post-Soviet female identity as educated, caring, oversexualised, deviant, and

¹¹ Interview with Kristina, WeChat, 21 August 2018.

¹² Interview with Anya, WeChat, 24 August 2018.

¹³ Ibid.

subjected to sex work out of necessity and desperation. In the European context the social associations of Russian femininity with vulgarity made it necessary for women from former Soviet Republics to not look or sound Russian (Diatlova, 2019; Krivonos & Diatlova, 2020; Krivonos, 2020). But in China gendered Whiteness was constructed as an advantage even though the socioeconomic and geopolitical factors that marked these women as ex-Soviet put them in a disadvantage compared with White foreigners from the West. This finding aligns with scholarship exploring the role of Whiteness in shaping European identity, where the 'true' European is associated with White Western Europe while Eastern Europe is marginalised and othered in Western European discourse. Eastern Europeans, particularly those from the former Soviet Union, are also tainted by the failed socialist projects that they or their parents lived through. In China, post-Soviet women are not only seen as oversexualised, but are also assumed to be content with the role of the housewife, a key identity trait of the 'genuine' woman in popular discourse (along with that of the ideal mother, wife, and hostess) after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Zhurzhenko, 2001; Porteous, 2016).

Additionally, Anya's quote conveys the way that perceptions of post-Soviet women in the entertainment industry are paralleled by widespread admiration of their domestic qualities. In her analysis of the changing status and multiple versions of Whiteness that foreigners play in China, Lan Shanshan shows there is a demand for a specific type of Whiteness (Lan, 2022a). She introduces the concept of 'precarious Whiteness' to account for the negative role that White racial capital can play in China. Moreover, the foreign Whiteness so desired in the Chinese context is a gendered Whiteness that must be placed in relation to Chinese masculinity. Only White femininity is wanted in the Chinese national sphere: White masculinity is perceived as a threat. It is in this way that a post-Soviet White woman became a distinct identity able to raise the value of a Chinese man. This was often noted in my conversations with these women when they observed that the level of public interest and attention to them was heightened when they were in the company of their Chinese boyfriend or husband: 'When I walk on my own, only some people look at me, but if I go out with my husband, absolutely everyone stares at us.'¹⁴

The status of Whiteness has been changing and the multiple versions of Whiteness that foreigners play in China show the status precarity and the demand for a specific type of desirable Whiteness (Lan, 2022a; Camenisch, 2022a, b). To marry a foreign woman raises a man's social status. As one of my interlocutors put it, 'when a Chinese man marries a White woman, people admire him, 'how did you manage to convince her?''¹⁵ Similarly, another participant thought that Chinese people liked Russia more than other countries because 'in massage parlours people tell my husband how lucky he is to have a Russian wife'.¹⁶ The attention and admiration that

¹⁴ Interview with Kristina, WeChat, 21 August 2018.

¹⁵ Interview with Lena, Changchun, 22 August 2018.

¹⁶ Interview with Olya, WeChat, 20 August 2018.

the women attracted was focused through a prism where the woman was placed next to a Chinese man and had married into his family.

Alesya came to realise that Chinese men do not chase European women, because 'they have a serious inferiority complex and only choose what is accessible and affordable'.¹⁷ Natasha similarly attributed her husband's instantaneous decision to marry her to her Post-Soviet Slavic background: 'We met 2 weeks before he was leaving Ukraine for China, and he decided straight away that he wanted to marry me. They don't even think about it, particularly if [the woman] is Russian. I didn't know that before, but I realise now that it is their cultural peculiarity'.¹⁸ Olga, who met her future husband in Belarus, made a comparable observation: 'When I worked in the shop where we had many Chinese clients, all my Chinese friends wanted to find a local wife.'¹⁹

10.6 Getting Married as a Way to Remain in China Legally

One of the most common reasons my research participants decided to formalise their relationship was to register their marriage and obtain a family visa, thereby securing long-term legal status in China. In response to my question about why they chose to marry, I was often told, 'I was afraid I would be left without a visa'.²⁰ Those who became pregnant before formalising their relationship believed that marriage was the best and most natural step to legitimise their relationship before giving birth.

Alina (aged 38) from Siberia met her future husband in her hometown where he was working in the timber and metal trade.²¹ She helped him with his accounts, bank operations and local contacts. After she got pregnant and gave birth to their first child in 2003, her husband decided that it was time to move back to China. Alina told me that she unwillingly agreed to go to China for a visit first and enrolled in a Chinese language course at the local university. She then reluctantly settled down in Qiqihar, her husband's hometown, where she invited me to visit her. A striking blue-eyed blond woman, she was wearing dark sunglasses when she met me at the railway station. We rushed to her car as soon as we had met. She told me that she could not stand the stares that her presence in public spaces caused. Although she had lived in China for over 10 years, she still could not get used to the attention she attracted. Two years later, in a different context, Sonya (aged 32), from Belarus, who lived with her Chinese family near Beijing, observed that she felt that she felt like an animal in a zoo, because everyone was pointing at her. Even after spending

¹⁷ Interview with Alesya, Beijing, 20 August 2016.

¹⁸ Interview with Natasha, Beijing, 5 June 2017.

¹⁹ Interview with Oxana, WeChat, 20 August 2018.

²⁰ Interview with Lana, WeChat, 3 June 2018.

²¹ Interview with Alina, Qiqihar, 4 August 2018.

many years in China, and despite the city becoming more cosmopolitan, she felt that people still pointed at her with curiosity.²² Being an object of an intense Chinese gaze was a common theme running through the stories of many women.

During our conversation throughout the day, Alina explained that she married out of bureaucratic necessity. To apply for a 2-year Chinese family visa she had to register the marriage. This was the main reason why she decided to document her relationship, she told me, otherwise she did not need it. Although these women stated that their marriage choices were the result of their own decisions following a period of romantic engagement, they explained that their decision to marry was influenced by an interplay of economic, personal and social factors shaped by post-socialist transitions in their home countries, as well as the lack of better options at the decisive moment. An expiring student or work visa was often given as a reason for registering their marriage so they would qualify for a family visa, that was easier to get than work, business, or student visas. Furthermore, some pointed out that being married in China did not mean that they were regarded as married back home. As Helga (aged 24) explained, 'If you get married in China, but do not legalise your marriage, you are not a married person in your home country, so, if something happens, you are free.'²³

Several women whose relationships or marriages had broken down in their home countries actively sought out a Chinese husband. They told me that they had become attracted by the Chinese men's attitudes and behaviour towards women. For example, Olga (aged 27) from Belarus was divorced and living with her daughter in her flat while working as a cashier in a shop where she met many Chinese men who worked on the construction of a paper plant in her native town. Despite holding a university degree in law, she actually earned more as a cashier in a shop than as a clerk in a court. After observing Chinese men's behaviour and having been continually impressed by their polite and attentive attitude, she registered on a dating application aimed at Chinese people, but met her husband through WeChat when she was looking for nearby contacts and he replied with a message. Their relationship progressed quickly and she got pregnant soon after they moved in together 2 weeks after their first meeting. She was impressed that her boyfriend would have a warm bath ready for her and prepare dinner for her when she came back from work. As his working visa in Belarus was expiring, they decided to register their marriage in Svetlogorsk, where it quickly became the topic of gossip and media attention.²⁴

Some women were uncomfortable to notice the impact that their marriage had on the social status of their husbands among their peer groups. Alesya voiced this discomfort in her observation that 'by marrying a European-looking woman Chinese men raise their own self-esteem, and, in reality, they don't need to do anything more.' In her view, just being seen with a White woman raises their symbolic capital

²² Interview with Sonya, Shijiazhuang, 5 July 2018.

²³ Interview with Helga, WeChat, 22 June 2022.

²⁴ Interview with Olya, WeChat, 21 August 2018.

and earns them face among their social and business circles.²⁵ Similarly, Viktoria noted that she felt that Chinese women paid more attention to her husband because he had a foreign wife. ‘He suddenly became cool in their eyes.’²⁶ Lana, who at this point of our conversation was in the process of divorcing, thought that even after divorce the status of her husband in the eyes of Chinese women would increase, because of his experience with a foreign woman.²⁷

10.7 The Patriarchy Embedded in the Family Guest Visa

China’s rigid citizenship regime, the lack of naturalisation options for foreigners and the constantly changing rules, procedures, and practices across different regions made the topic of legal status in China a source of confusion for some of my interlocutors and of despair for others. The women shared their diverse and often conflicting views, having undergone different experiences, depending on their family situation and where they lived in China. Those who lived in big cities believed that fewer loopholes were available for them to get round the system, whereas those living in smaller urban centres where there were fewer foreigners, believed that finding a way around the law was easier. In either case, personal connections within local state organs could be helpful, but they were not always easily accessible, as they required substantial social and familial capital.

As I stated earlier, one of the main motivations for the women I spoke with to marry a Chinese man in China was to secure a family visitor visa (Q1), because this visa was easier to obtain, and it could be used as a stepping stone to long-term residence status which other visa categories could not guarantee. Out of the fifty-three women I spoke to, only three had secured a long-term residence status. All of them lived in the Beijing area. Other participants had heard of successful applications, but they were very few. According to Lena (aged 47) who was well acquainted with the Russian-speaking community in Changchun, only one couple had managed to get a green card for the foreign spouse thanks to their family connections, whereas all the others who tried were not successful. The unsuccessful couples did not know why their applications had been turned down.²⁸ In other major cities, including Guilin, Xiamen, and Chongqing, my interlocutors did not know anyone who had been granted long-term residency.

While it was easier to obtain a Chinese family visa that could lead to a long-term residency, its main limitation was the prohibition on working in China until long-term residency was granted. Some women did not realise that they were not allowed to work officially on family visas until it was pointed out to them by other women,

²⁵ Interview with Alesya, Beijing, 20 August 2018.

²⁶ Interview with Viktoria, WeChat, 21 February 2018.

²⁷ Interview with Lana, WeChat, 3 June 2018.

²⁸ Interview with Lena, Changchun, 22 August 2022.

their husbands, or the local authorities. Some feared that if they were found violating the immigration laws they could face a fine or a deportation. Others, like Viktoria (aged 30), took the risk, because they thought that they could trust their employers. Viktoria worked as a singer in a restaurant. She renewed her family visa annually and worked informally in restaurants and clubs where her husband had established trust with the local police. Similarly, Masha (aged 28) in Guilin continued working as an English language teacher, despite the new immigration law prohibiting non-native speakers from teaching English as a foreign language. However, since foreign teachers were hard to find in small towns, some institutions continued to hire individuals they trusted and had worked with previously.²⁹

Viktoria recognised that she had no rights, even to work legally, and accepted that she depended on her husband. She explained that at one point she had to transfer her earnings to her husband's bank account, when her 'foreigner's bank card' was suddenly blocked. She received no explanation for why her card had been blocked and concluded that it was best for her husband to keep her money, because foreigners' cards can be blocked at any time.³⁰ Viktoria and her husband ran into another complication when they decided to buy a flat. Despite contributing financially to the purchase, she discovered that her name could not be included on the deeds. They were even advised to get a divorce and marry again after finalising their mortgage application and the flat purchase.³¹

The women often commented that they felt stifled by the administrative restrictions and cultural differences that prevented them from being included in China. Natasha said that she felt 'like a bird in a cage, without any choice. My freedom is very limited by all these political things, [so] I feel as if I signed myself up to a prison sentence'.³² Her realisation that her family life was deeply intertwined with the political structures limiting her ways of belonging in China echoes the experiences of immigrant spouses in other contexts (Friedman, 2015; Yeoh & Heng, 2015). State migration laws and structures, which delineate distinctions between those who belong and those who do not, permeate the private sphere, creating lines of exclusion even within families. These barriers were difficult to overcome, requiring not only financial resources, but also family ties, determination, emotional labour, and the time needed to prepare documents and wait several years for a decision. This was not a challenge that these women could handle without the support of their husbands. Unlike most of these post-Soviet migrants, who typically stay in China on 2-year family visas, Natasha received a Chinese green card in 2016 after being married to her Chinese husband for 5 years. She recalled the long drawn-out trouble that she had faced in securing the document. Even so, she questioned the card's worth:

²⁹ Interview with Masha, WeChat, 19 August 2018.

³⁰ Interview with Viktoria, 21 June 2018.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Interview with Natasha, Beijing 5 June 2017.

I even wrote a resume explaining why I would be useful in China.... I had to wait for the card for nearly two years. I had to get a certificate in Ukraine explaining that I didn't have a criminal past. This certificate is only valid for one month. At the time, the Orange Revolution was unfolding in Ukraine. My father went through the barricades. He had to pay USD 1,000 in order to get this certificate as I could not be there in person. So it cost me a lot of money and anxiety to get this card. But I don't even know if it is of any use... For example, if I divorce my husband, what do I do with it? Will they take it away from me? I don't even know the answer to that.³³

Not everyone was as determined and lucky as Natasha. Anya realised that she qualified for a green card after having been married for more than 5 years, when she was in the process of divorcing. She wanted to apply for the card, because she believed that the card would give her the right to work legally in China. It took her 2 months to get a document from Russia confirming that she had no criminal past. When she went to her local immigration office, she was told it would take 6 months for the local authorities to consider her documents, and then they would send them to Beijing, where it would take another one to 2 years to process. She could not wait because she and her husband had both started new relationships. So she got a 2-year family visa instead as it was a faster and easier procedure. In Anya's words:

One day at 9 am we went to get a 2-year family visa and the same day at 2 pm we filed for a divorce. Migration and civil affairs office do not exchange databases, so they did not know that we had divorced the day that I extended my family visa.³⁴

She then explained that she had considered applying for a Chinese visa through her son, but this was problematic, because with a son who was a Chinese citizen she could apply only for a 3-month family visitor visa (Q2). Anya concluded that it was more important to have a husband than a son in China, because if you were married, you could have a 2-year visa (Q1). She was bemused by this logic:

Husbands aren't constant, they come and go, but son will be yours forever. Why can't you have a green card if you have a child in China? But no, you can only have a green card if you are married.³⁵

This suggests that a foreign spouse is welcomed in the Chinese domestic sphere only in so far as she fulfills the role of the obedient wife, content with her domestic worker status. If she fails in this role and her marriage breaks down, she risks losing her visa status, undermining her legal right to stay and facing the possibility of being separated from her child. This dynamic -- combining the desirability of a White woman with the patriarchal logic of the immigration regime -- offers a glimpse into the challenges these women face as they navigate the geopolitical and socioeconomic realms in which they find themselves.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Interview with Anya, WeChat, 28 August 18.

³⁵ Ibid.

10.8 Conclusion

The stories the women shared with me about their mobility, marriage, and visa decisions were shaped by seismic geopolitical shifts, new opportunities for growth and development, personal tragedies, a desire for adventure, and a journey of self-discovery. Their choices were restricted by immigration regimes and available life opportunities. China's current immigration system does not permit holders of family guest visas (Q1 and Q2) to work, leaving migrant spouses dependent or pushing them into the grey zone of illegal employment. However, the family visa promises the quickest path to a long-term residency. As such, the immigration regime draws clear distinctions between visa categories: if you come to work, you must have a work visa; if you come on a family visa, your role is to stay at home and care for your children. Being economically dependent on their husbands' income was difficult for some highly educated women to accept. The immigration law and related regulations explicitly state that a work permit is issued to foreigners whose 'labour should meet the needs of the socioeconomic development of China' (Liu & Ahl, 2018). As Anya observed, this law was 'stupid, because it means that we need to marry rich men. We are not allowed to have our own money'.³⁶

What was common in my interlocutors' experiences was that their realisation that their White bodies were valuable assets in China, whether through their use in the expanding beauty and entertainment markets or as social capital that boosted the status of their Chinese male partners. There was a disjuncture between the high value placed on the women's White bodies and that attributed to their personal traits, skills, and qualifications, which they felt could not be recognised and valued by a system that confined their activities to the private sphere of the family. Although most women had not planned to start a relationship with a Chinese man before coming to China, for many who were not eager to return to their home countries and wanted to extend their stay, marrying and obtaining a family visitor visa became the default choice to legalise their stay. Obtaining a family visa (Q2) required less paperwork than other visa categories and provided a stable migration status in China, along with the prospect of gaining a 10-year residency and access to labour and social rights. What many women did not realise when they had decided to marry were the underlying norms of Chinese immigration legislation and their potential implications. The family guest visa does not grant its holder the right to work in China, leaving them with either dependent status or the risk of engaging in illegal activities in the grey economy.

For some particularly shrewd women, documenting their marriage in China did not mean legalising it in their home country, where they preferred to maintain their single status. Marrying a Chinese national and securing a family visa seemed like the perfect solution for managing legal paperwork, guaranteeing long-term residence in China. The immigration regime in China is structured in such a way that marriage became the standard option for these foreign women to legalise their stay.

³⁶ Ibid.

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Chapter 11

Conclusion: Opening New Horizons in Race and Migration Studies



Shanshan Lan and Miloš Debnár

This book originates from an international workshop, “Researching Whiteness in a transnational pandemic context” held at the University of Amsterdam on December 1–2, 2022. For various reasons some of the presenters were unable to participate in the book project, which resulted in the over-representation of the ELT sector in comparison to other sectors where migrants under scrutiny are concentrated such as the media, fashion, trade, tourism, entertainment industry, or the private entrepreneurship sector. Nevertheless, the various topics covered in this edited volume still reflect the diversity of foreign migrants in China and Japan and the large proportion of English teachers among migrants from the Western countries. While the ELT sector is already well established in Japan, it is still expanding in China. With the decline of the traditional transnational elite class in East Asia, English teachers have become the group of foreigners that are more likely to engage in daily life interactions with local residents, even those who live in less developed areas (e.g. Litman’s paper in this volume), due to the fast expansion of the ELT industry. This has created a dynamic contact zone for racial learning and racial knowledge production. Since the racialized experiences of foreign English teachers cut across several themes such as race, immigration, gender, citizenship, and pandemic politics, we chose to group the papers by themes, rather than by migrants’ occupations or country of residence. One of the goals of the book is to highlight the intersection of race with other factors such as language, immigration status, gender, neoliberal capitalism, and pandemic politics.

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In Chap. 1 we focused on introducing each individual paper and their contribution to the field of race and migration studies. In this chapter we try to read the papers against each other and identify some of the issues discussed across the chapters. The authors in this edited volume may not agree on these issues, yet they are dialoguing with each other to expand the space where the gaps and tensions between race and migration studies can be openly discussed and critically reflected upon. We identify three tensions that resonate with the majority of the chapters in this book: a tension between the foreigner identity, race and racism; a tension between Whiteness as a transnational power structure and White people as individual migrants; and a tension between the ontological approach and the epistemological approach to the study of migration and race. While discussing these tensions one by one, we also contemplate potential new questions and new topics they might generate in the field of race and migration studies beyond East Asia. Finally, we reflect on the research methodology, positionality of the authors and the limitations of our choice of themes and countries.

11.1 Foreigner Identity, Race and Racism

The crucial importance of a foreigner identity and its racial tenets seem to be a relatively common phenomenon in China and Japan. Importantly, as the chapters in this volume further demonstrate, the racial tenets of a foreigner identity in both countries are applied to those identified as White. This is reflected not only in daily life languages, but in scholarly works where terms such as “foreign” and “White” are often used inter-changeably (Farrer, 2019). On the one hand, it shows the predominance of regional racial regimes in which self/other relations are defined by complex and closely interconnected interplay of ethno-racial-cultural differences.¹ As a result of such dynamics for White migrants, becoming “foreigners” in East Asia is a racialized othering process based on nationality, phenotype, linguistic, and cultural differences. On the other hand, it may lead to the normalization of White migrants as the default, and even deracialized, group of foreigners in East Asia. This, in turn, can lead to obscuring the racialized experiences of other non-White migrant groups.

In other words, the discourse of foreignness may render White identities invisible and thus obscure unequal power relations among migrants from different racial backgrounds. For example, during the Covid-19 pandemic crisis in China, some White migrants assumed the role of spokespeople for all foreigners (Lan in Chap. 4). The authors in this book address the dilemma of foreignness and race (particularly in relation to Whiteness) by critically reflecting on White migrants’ othering experience not as an isolated phenomenon, but in relation to other migrants of color.

¹ See, for example, Yuko Kawai’s (2015) discussion of how Western notions of ethnicity, race and nation coalesced in the category of “the Japanese”.

We try to highlight the relational nature of race and racializing by examining the shifting racial boundaries and hierarchies between White and non-White migrants (Litman; Debnár; Hof; Haye-Matsui) and between White migrants and their underprivileged local colleagues (Wang). We hope such research can encourage and anticipate future scholarship on comparative migration studies and intersectional racialization.

Scrutinizing the relationships between foreigner identity, Whiteness and race leads to the wider issue of racism in East Asia. The first challenge is how to interpret White accusations of racism from local Asian residents. Fetcher (2005) finds that some White corporate expatriates' denunciations of local Indonesians as racist reflect their own uneasiness and unwillingness to acknowledge Whiteness as a racially marked identity in Asia. We want to add that the easiness for some White migrants to claim the authority to define the meaning of racism in a cross-cultural context points to the urgency and necessity to decolonialize Western-centric racial knowledge and to explore local constructions of racialized differences. In this vein, Wang's research on the racialization of White English teachers as "time bombs" by their female Chinese colleagues (Chap. 9) adds new vocabulary to indigenous racial learning. It also represents an excellent example of an anti-racist project developed by underprivileged local women.

The second and broader issue is the question of how to interpret the experiences of discrimination by racialized minorities in East Asia. As we suggested in the introduction to this volume, asking whether the Asians are racists based on the Western-centric notions of race and White hegemony is insufficient for understanding such experiences. Steven Garner reminds us of the potential for critical Whiteness studies to undermine anti-racist projects (Garner, 2007). At the same time, however, he also points out in his critical discussion of the super-diversity concept that "while including race and racism in your set of assumptions about how the social world functions and trying to account for it is always a political act, so is discounting it, a priori, from accounts of how the social world functions. There isn't a 'neutral' unraced position" (Garner, 2022, p. 360). Thus, our volume also attests to the view that whether it is the case of increasingly diversifying migration studies, critical Whiteness studies, or the context of East Asia, avoiding the discussion of race and racism does not represent, in our view, a plausible solution.

It needs to be acknowledged that the discussion of racism in Japan or China gained very limited attention particularly because of the understanding that racism is an issue where the White racializes the other (Ang et al., 2022) and thus, is irrelevant to these countries (see, for example, Kawai, 2015 on Japan). For example, Sara Park (2017, 2023) points out that previous research on discrimination against Koreans (and Chinese) in Japan and particularly hate speech has been often framed as research on xenophobia rather than racism, which she argues is trivializing and oversimplifying (2023, p. 340). This opens up a space to discuss the pluralization of racism or addressing racism in plural forms. In the Haye-Matsui's chapter, as well as other chapters discussing the experience of White individuals in Japan and China, authors in this volume acknowledge that besides the anti-Black racism in Japan even White individuals can also be subjected to discrimination in one way or

another. Our issue thus clearly demonstrates the need to include the relation between non-White majority and diverse groups of racialized migrants, particularly those identified as White, in the discussion of racism in East Asia. Moreover, some chapters demonstrate internal hierarchies within categories such as Black (Haye-Matsui) or White (Litman; Barabantseva) based on nationality or native-speakerism and add further layers to the complexity of social relations between different groups.

We prefer to leave the question concerning the issue of proper framing and labeling of “racism” in East Asia open for further discussion. Our volume demonstrates that we need to examine racism in East Asia with its particularities that are shaped by the historical adoption of the Western norms, their amalgamation with local notions and regional geopolitical relations as well as post-war shifts in national self-identification (Kawai, 2015; Park, 2023). We hope to raise important questions that need to be addressed in the future: how can we study Whiteness without undermining an anti-racist agenda? What are the differences and commonalities between different contexts and forms of racism? How to describe and theorize these differences in a decolonized way that would not reproduce the hegemony of Western racial knowledge? To what extent can we utilize the Western notions of race and racism and how to decolonize them?

11.2 Whiteness as a Transnational Power Structure Versus White People as Individual Migrants

As we already suggested in the introduction to this volume, researching race in the context of migration and particularly focusing on Whiteness brings several pitfalls that we need to be aware of. One of the pitfalls in Whiteness studies noted by Garner (2007) is the shift from researching Whiteness as a power structure to researching Whiteness as individual identities. This pitfall can be easily replicated in migration studies with its heavy focus on the transnational and cross-border movement of people. Scholarly works that are too preoccupied with the visibility of White migrants as the racialized foreign other in East Asia may fall short in interrogating the invisibility of Whiteness as the transnational social and cultural norm. This might become particularly problematic considering the changing geo-political and economic dynamics between the West and China or Japan or, as authors in this book have noted, considering the decline of White privileges in neoliberal Asian economies, especially during the global Covid-19 pandemic. The authors here attempt to address the tension between the Whiteness as a power structure and as an individual migrant identity by examining the boundaries of Whiteness and its ability to incorporate non-White elements (Henry; Leonard; Debnár; Hof). Instead of attesting to the decline of White hegemony, the fact that Whiteness may open up its borders to admit new members only helps to testify to its resilience as a transnational norm. As noted by authors in this book, Whiteness as a transnational power structure can be sustained by both White and non-White social actors. Some non-White people may

also benefit from White supremacist ideologies by conforming to it (Litman; Debnár; Wang).

Another important question this book contemplates is: to what extent can White migrants perpetuate White hegemony in a transnational context? Scholars have noted the increasing heterogeneity in White migration to Asia and the decline of the transnational elite class (Pieke Frank, 2012; Leonard, 2019; Camenisch, 2022). Due to their relative marginalization in the expatriate communities and precarious job situations, the lived experiences of some White migrants, especially English teachers and women in interracial marriages, may fail to reflect the desirable attributes associated with White hegemony (Leonard; Hof; Barabantseva). This calls for scholarly attention to stratification within the White population based on nationality, gender, class, and native English speaker status. Meanwhile, it also pushes us to address the complex layers of racialized and gendered hierarchies in the context of the global circulation of White power structures (Owens, 2021). In other words, one should not lose sight of the historically accumulated legacies of racial inequality that have been deeply embedded in social institutional structures, linguistic and cultural representations, immigration policies, and our epistemological and cognitive systems (Henry; Debnár; Lan). Future research may contemplate the role of White migrants in anti-racist coalition building with migrants of color. By foregrounding the voices and perspectives of Chinese and Black women teachers in relation to White teachers, the chapters by Wang and Haye-Matsui make important steps in this direction.

11.3 The Ontological Approach Versus the Epistemological Approach

Traditional migration studies tend to frame the movement of people by the binary between the home country and the host country. They usually ask ontological questions concerning migrant motivation and integration within the context of shifting immigration policies in both the sending and receiving countries. While defining ontological approach in migration studies is contestable, we understand it as an approach that primarily focuses (and tends to overemphasize) human-centred movements and is characterized by a set of assumptions such as clear-cut boundaries between migrants and non-migrants or between the sending and receiving societies. This edited volume tries to make a distinction between the transnational flow of people and the transnational flow of racial knowledge. Our attempt to bridge the gap between studies on race and migration does not mean to simply add White Westerners as another new group of migrants to existing research paradigms. We want to argue that researching White migration challenges scholars to ask new questions beyond the nation-state and people-focused ontological framework. In this book, we advocate a shift to the epistemological approach by examining the transnational circulation of Whiteness as a power structure and as an interactive and

intersectional process of racial knowledge formation. Focusing on epistemological questions does not mean neglecting the materiality of race in terms of distribution of resources, job opportunities, and citizenship status, which are precisely some of the key issues discussed in the book.

This epistemological turn is important for several reasons. First, it facilitates critical reflection on Eurocentrism and White supremacy inherent in the receiving state's immigration policies and in migration studies as an academic discipline. For example, traditional migration studies mainly focus on how people of color from the global South are trying to "integrate" or are being "integrated" to White-majority countries in the global North by learning new languages and cultural norms in the host country. Such research projects unwittingly reinforce White normativity by generating policy applications that serve the interests of the receiving state. The racialized dimension of immigrant integration has been addressed by historians who studied the becoming White experiences of European migrants in the United States (Brodkin, 1998; Guglielmo, 2003; Ignatiev, 1995; Roediger, 1992), but it was seldom raised again in contemporary literature on race and migration studies. Some of the papers in this volume try to contemplate the following questions: What does it mean for White migrants to "integrate" in Asian majority societies? Do they want to integrate, or do they just want to continue their White lifestyle? Do questions such as integration still make sense in studying White migration or should we ask new questions?

As noted by Leonard in Chap. 3, ELT-based migration challenges the boundary between economic migration, lifestyle migration, tourism, and youth mobility studies. We want to argue that instead of focusing on issues of migration motivation and integration, one should move beyond methodological nationalism and explore the changing racial hierarchy and dynamics in the globalization of the ELT industry, where racial capitalism and neoliberal consumerism create new inequalities based on the commodification of White looks and White skills. Last but not least, an epistemological approach enables us to examine how representations of Whiteness in East Asia are fraught with both global racial hierarchy and the reworkings of such hierarchy in specific local contexts. Lan's distinction between the White gaze and the Chinese gazes (Chap. 4), and Debnár's research on White migrants as "good migrants" (Chap. 6), all attest to the intersection of the global and local in White racial formation in East Asia. Together, papers in this book highlight the multiple and contested meanings of Whiteness. It is associated with modernity, cosmopolitanism, transnational mobility, innovation and creativity, yet also with immigration control, foreignness, stigmatization, vulnerability, and racialized and gendered subjectivities.

11.4 Limitations and Future Research Directions

Contributors to this volume constitute a team of scholars from multiple racial and cultural backgrounds: some are popularly categorized as “White,” some are labelled “Black,” and some are labelled “Asian.” As social scientists and critical race and migration studies scholars, we share a keen awareness of the socially and culturally constructed nature of race and racial categorizations. By reading and commenting on each other’s work we treat the book as a collective project, rather than a combination of many individual projects. However, since our research projects are mainly based in China and Japan, this book has a limited scope and do not cover countries in other parts of Asia. Our methodology mainly consists of qualitative methods, such as semi-structured interviews and ethnographic fieldwork. We do realize the need to incorporate more regional diversity in future research and the importance of using quantitative or mixed methods in examining the transnational formation of racial knowledge among migrant populations. Below we anticipate three future research directions.

First is the need to decolonize Eurocentric racial knowledge and to examine the key role of indigenous terminologies in the dynamic and interactive process of racial formation in the context of East Asia (and beyond). Second, there is a need to move beyond methodological nationalism and develop comparative race and migration studies projects. For example, comparative studies on Chinese migrants in Africa and African migrants in China, or racialization of Asian migrants in Europe and North America and racialization of Western migrants in Asia could further help us to understand the issues discussed in this volume and contribute to answering questions we raised here. Finally, more research should be done on racialization in intra-Asia (or in South-South) migration and how it is mediated by the global circulation of White supremacist ideologies, focusing, for example, on topics such as discrimination against English teachers from the Philippines, India, Pakistan, and African countries in China. With the rise of right-wing politics on the global scale, and the persistence of racism and racially based hate crimes and violence against people of color in the Western world (especially during the Covid-19 pandemic), research on race, migration and transnational flows will continue to be a timely and important field for scholars within and beyond East Asia.

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