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Introduction

HISTORICALLY, the Western encounter with difference has been catastrophic. Europe's first encounter with significantly different peoples on a large scale—during its “Age of Discovery”—led to the decimation of 95 percent of the native Amerindian population in what one historian calls “the most massive act of genocide in the history of the world” (Stannard 1992: x). The European encounter with difference also gave rise to the transatlantic slave trade, which, according to demographers' estimates, may have halved Africa's population through deaths on the continent and exportation of its population (Bayley 2004: 409). The United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Rhodesia, and South Africa were all founded on the extermination, displacement, or herding onto reservations of aboriginal populations (Mills 1997: 28). By 1914 colonialism had brought 85 percent of the earth under European rule as colonies, protectorates, dependencies, dominions, and commonwealths (29).

This colonial world order is now being challenged by China, which has a different way of understanding difference. It is little realized in the West that China and Chinese culture have not been static throughout the country's history. With a dynamic identity created out of difference, China has always been “cosmopolitan.” Throughout history, the Chinese have dealt better with difference than have the Europeans, owing to fundamentally different philosophical and cultural assumptions. This study argues that Chinese philosophy has the conceptual resources to provide alternative paradigms for thinking about pluralism—which have never been more needed than in our current era.

The Chinese Tradition's Challenge to Western Racism and Colonialism

I had several interconnected motivations for pursuing this project. One is the need to set the record straight about the nature of the Chinese tradition. At a time when China's global profile is rising, misunderstanding China is likely to have significant geopolitical consequences. It is thus imperative that the nature of Chinese self-identity, the Chinese worldview with regard to difference, and the Chinese historical view of the "other" be more clearly understood. Second, I believe it is important to correct a pervasive assumption in modern academia that colonialism, genocide, racial violence, and hatred of the other arise from universal and stable characteristics of human nature. Instead, as I argue here, these phenomena are culturally contingent. Third, it is my hope to correct the increasingly popular assumption among many contemporary Sinologists and Western academics, that the Western discourse of race is applicable to the Chinese tradition. As shown here, employing the Western discourse of race to frame the Chinese view toward non-Chinese is a category mistake, as well as irresponsible in that making this mistake can have grave consequences. Just as the Jesuits mistranslated *tian* as the Christian "heaven," so do many contemporary Sinologists mistranslate certain Chinese concepts as "race." Applying the concepts related to the ideological constellation of Western racism—such as referring to non-Greeks and non-Europeans as "barbarians" and viewing the European encounter with others as a "civilizing mission"—is problematic with respect to the Chinese relationship with its historic border peoples.

Finally, I hope to show here that Chinese philosophy is of relevance in thinking about contemporary issues related to pluralism; indeed, it has many valuable lessons to offer in this regard. Charles Mills puts it well: "How is cosmopolitanism to be realized on a globe shaped by hundreds of years of European expansionism?" (Mills 2005: 190). Chinese philosophy can help us rethink how to create a multipolar world, and it can make valuable contributions to contemporary discussions of the critical philosophy of race and decolonialism. If we are to think of serious alternatives to racial and colonial order, then Chinese philosophers, postcolonial scholars, decolonial scholars, and critical philosophers of race need to start engaging with each other's works.

Famously, the philosopher Zhao Tingyang gives an account of the Chinese tradition's notion of *tianxia*, or "all under heaven," as a borderless world. He contrasts it with the notion of the nation-state in Western history, which

he considers to be the largest political entity in the Western political framework. Unexplored in Zhao's work is the issue of Western racism (Zhao 2021). Any notion of *tianxia* would have been metaphysically impossible in the Western tradition, which sees the world as populated only by those who embody civilization and those who embody barbarism. This Manichean division between ontologically distinct groups is perennial and irreconcilable in the Western tradition. Projecting the concept of the barbarian onto the racial other, the Spanish conquistadors understood colonialism as a holy war in which the native Americans, whom they viewed as barbarians and natural slaves as well as minions of the devil, had to be either converted or extinguished in order to secure humanity, Christendom, and civilization. Relatedly, Western metaphysics understood the world in terms of the ontological Great Chain of Being, no element of which had the same worth. In the natural order of things, according to this metaphysical view, different peoples are created unequal and "white" peoples or nations dominate racial others; hence the casual racial violence toward and genocide of nonwhite peoples during settler colonialism. The ontological dualism and Great Chain of Being intrinsic to Western metaphysics prevented the Western tradition from developing a notion of *tianxia*.

The history and nature of Western racism is not well known. In *The Racial Contract*, Charles Mills coined the term "the epistemology of ignorance" to refer to a systematic ignorance of how "race" epistemologically, materially, and historically shaped and continues to shape our world. Here, the "racial contract" is used as a theoretical concept for recognizing, describing, and understanding how racism *actually* structures the politics of the West and elsewhere. Under the two-tiered moral code of the racial contract, we have been living with one set of morals for whites and another for nonwhites (Mills 1997: 23). However, the architects and beneficiaries of this white, racialized world also benefit from obscuring how race (the system they created) works. The epistemology of ignorance is a framework that inculcates peoples with a self-deception that makes them blind to or denies the reality of how racial hierarchy materially and epistemically shapes our world. This ignorance is not accidental, but purposeful. Nonwhites are not immune to the epistemology of ignorance, or "white ignorance," or "white denial," since the power relations and patterns of ideological hegemony can inculcate such ignorance into them as well.

The "epistemology of ignorance," (Mills 1997: 18) pervading the Western academy about the West's racial violence and genocidal actions has combined with the Western academy's dominance in international academic discourse to keep this history from being well known. It is only when we place issues of

race and racial hierarchy in the picture can we understand why the Western tradition has historically been so incapable of tolerating difference. It is my intention here to make clear the formative impact of concepts of the barbarian, race, and associated ideas on Western historical practice and to describe the positive impact of the absence of such ideas and the presence of alternatives on Chinese historical practice with regard to the embrace of difference. I begin by establishing what we mean when we speak of “racism.”

The Singularity of (Western) Racism

As the editors of the collected volume *The Origins of Racism in the West* put it, “One often encounters a vague sense that racism is basically the same as ethnic prejudice and discrimination, but in a more malicious and serious form.” This understanding of racism, however, is “an erroneous view” (Eliav-Feldon, Isaac, and Ziegler 2009: 5). Apprehension of different and unfamiliar things and peoples is a universal and instinctive human reaction. There is a difference between an initial mistrust of something unknown and the ideology of racism. The initial distrust of the unknown fulfills the practical purpose of preserving one’s own well-being, the reification of this fear of the unknown turns it into the ideology of racism. In other words, the ideology of racism begins when a fear of foreigners is sustained after it has outlasted its practical purpose. As Miriam Eliav-Feldon, Benjamin Isaac, and Joseph Ziegler write:

We do not assume that prejudice and bigotry were invented in the West; we claim rather that the specific form of rationalizing these prejudices and attempting to base them on systematic, abstract thought was developed in antiquity and taken over in early modern Europe. Racism, the nineteenth- and twentieth-century ideology familiar to us, developed in Europe, not in China, Japan or India. (Eliav-Feldon, Isaac, and Ziegler 2009: 9)

It is the ossification of the fear of difference into an ideology that is distinctive of racism. We can see this ideology structuring the European encounter with the Amerindians. “Despite increased contact with other continents during this part of the age of discovery,” writes the American historian Paul Gordon Lauren, “Europeans’ attitudes about race demonstrated little change at all. Growing familiarity did not result in greater toleration, compassion, or acceptance, and the old stereotyped images showed tenacious persistence” (Lauren 2018: 10).

Absent the ideology of race, greater interaction with initially different peoples would lead to the understanding that we are all human. It is only the

presence of racial ideology that blinds us to this fact. This ideology is not universal but rather mainly, if not exclusively, Western. The classicist Benjamin Isaac, in *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*, notes that the Greeks and Romans “have given us, through their literature, many of the ideas of freedom, democracy, philosophy, novel artistic concepts and so much else that we regard as essential to our culture” (Isaac 2004: 516). If such foundational aspects of Western culture come from the Greeks and Romans, “can it be denied,” he asks, “that they were instrumental in conveying the idea of racism?” (131). We must recognize racism as a legacy of Western culture.

As we will see, what sets (Western) racism apart from normal prejudice and bigotry is the idea that some people are (ontological) barbarians—quasi-human beings who are irredeemably other. Ever since ancient Greece, the essence of the barbarian and Manichean racial other has been seen as antithetical to Western civilization. There is no point in educating non-Greeks because no amount of education can rehabilitate them for civilization. Just as the philosopher Alfred North Whitehead famously characterized all of Western philosophy as a footnote to Plato, we could say that all of the West’s later racial ideology and practice has been a footnote to Aristotle and his theory of natural slavery. Aristotle first formulated the consequential idea that non-Greeks are subhumans whose purpose (*telos*) is to be enslaved by the (white) Greek man. Natural slaves are those who, left on their own, are incapable of reason and must be subjugated by a rational (read: male, Greek) agent in order to partake of reason. For Aristotle, because non-Greeks are barbarians and barbarians are natural slaves, *all* non-Greeks are natural slaves. The status of barbarians is thus ontological. They have no way of improving their status and can never become non-barbarian, non-natural slaves. Just as it is in the nature of a dog to be a dog, the essence of the barbarian is to be a barbarian. A barbarian can never become properly human, just as a dog can never become human. By no means does the Greek concept of “barbarism” merely describe uncouthness. It carries the culturally specific meaning of the Manichean other who, being eternally (essentially) savage, is antithetical to civilization.

The record of the meaning of “barbarian” in the Western historical context and its association with the (genocidal) project of Western colonialism is the background and point of contrast for this study. The assumption underlying the Western project has been what Aimé Césaire calls a “dependency complex,” that is, the assumption that natives, being irrational, are incapable of self-rule and so the white man must rule on their behalf *for their own good* (a literal reading of Aristotle’s theory of natural slavery) (Césaire 2000). It is this

assumption that precludes our equating Chinese attitudes toward non-Chinese with the Greek view toward non-Greeks. As this study will elucidate, the Chinese historically never had a conception of non-Chinese as unimprovable. By the time of the Qing dynasty, the Chinese accounted for about 40 percent of the world's population; only a history of intermarriage with all kinds of "foreigners" could produce so populous a people. Further, and this is the more crucial point, there is no *metaphysical* basis in the Chinese context for the thinking that underlies Aristotle's views about natural slavery. That thinking depends on a *substance ontology* in which the substance determines the being or becoming of the thing. As will be clarified in this study, Chinese metaphysics, by contrast, is *processual*. If, as the central tenet of Confucianism has it, one is not born human and one only *becomes* human through acculturation and practice, then no groups of peoples are ontologically superior and there can be no natural hierarchies as in the Platonic-Aristotelian conception (the different grades of soul and the hierarchy of Greek and barbarian) and later the Christian conception (the Great Chain of Being).

Signification must be understood in a structuralist manner; an isolated example is meaningful only within the context of the whole. Those who assume that Western concepts, phenomena, and behaviors have parallels in the Chinese tradition bear a burden of proof. Can they point to a broader meaning context in which certain Chinese ideas and practices can coherently be framed in terms of Western racism? Can this context be shown on a philosophical and mainly metaphysical level? My study argues that the nature of Western racial practice and the absence of such practice in the Chinese context are primarily explained by their differing metaphysics.¹

The different metaphysical models underlying the Western and Chinese worldviews have practical implications for their understandings of what is efficacious and virtuous. In his paper "Devastation: The Destruction of Populations and Human Landscapes and the Roman Imperial Project," Myles Lavan observes that, throughout Roman rule, the image of devastation is the "single most common metaphor for empire as a relationship of power" (Lavan 2020: 179n2). Lavan notes the prominence of verbs such as *uasto* (devastate), *tollo* (remove, eliminate), *excido* (eradicate), and *deleo* (erase) in the lexicon of public service and aristocratic achievement. Lavan singles out *deleo*: intimating "total obliteration and the sense of creating a blank space to be filled by something else." This term, he argues, is most saliently associated with aristocratic achievement (189). "To claim to have erased a people or a city was to inscribe oneself into a long tradition of Roman excellence" (190). For example, one

element of the “iconography of victory” is the image of desertification: “The desertification of Jerusalem’s hinterland during the war seems to have been transformed into a central image of the awful outcome of the revolt against Rome” (181). Lavan finds it paradoxical that many of these terms connote ameliorative actions when the violence they describe was so horrific. The verb *excido*, for example, “is shared with technical discourses such as medicine which impart connotations of reasoned and ameliorative action” (198). As I show in discussing the Great Chain of Being (chapter 4), we can argue that imperial Roman discourse celebrated violence against barbarian tribes because, under the ontology of the Great Chain of Being, violence was a display of virtue. Interestingly, for Lavan, “Roman culture is in no way unusual in this respect.” The images and texts he discusses “stand at the end of a long Near Eastern and Mediterranean discourse of state formation and empire, in which the capacity to destroy populations and landscapes was an important index of state power” (180). We can say that Roman culture shared with these Near Eastern and Mediterranean discourses the ontology of the Great Chain of Being.

A contemporary example of the Great Chain of Being psychology in action could be seen in the shock-and-awe tactic employed by the US Army in its 2003 invasion of Iraq. Nothing better captured domination through erasure than the US military camp built on the archaeological site of the Babylonians’ famous Ishtar Gate south of Baghdad (built in 575 BC). Around three hundred thousand square meters were covered over with gravel; three areas were flattened to make a helicopter landing pad, a parking lot, and a site for portable toilets; and trenches were dug, dispersing brick fragments bearing cuneiform inscriptions (Sigal 2018). Arguably, the psychology that is informed by the ideology of the Great Chain of Being is not a mere historical curiosity but still shapes Western practice today. There is no place, however, for the Chinese tradition’s understanding of efficacy within the (Western) framework of the Great Chain of Being, where the physical eradication of a people and place is a sign of virtue. The very different metaphysics of the Chinese tradition has helped to shape the noncolonial behavior of Chinese states throughout history.

Enrique Dussel is one of the foremost philosophers of the Latin Americas. Born in Argentina, he fled to Mexico in 1975 when socialist sympathizers were being hunted down and some thirty thousand civilians were “disappeared” during a period of US-backed state terrorism known as the “dirty war” (Feitlowitz 2011: ix). For Dussel, the Spanish conquistadors (symbolic of Western military aggression) and their missionaries (embodying Western ideologies

and philosophy) during the conquest of the Americas reduced the Amerindian other to a mere object onto which could be imprinted the form of European civilization; the Amerindian was reduced to the same. This meant that these Europeans never arrived at the metaphilosophical position foundational for intercultural dialogue: an ability to assess their own presuppositions (Dussel 1995). The difference between cultural exchange and cultural appropriation is that, in the former, one learns the culture of the other in order to gain a metaphilosophical perspective on one's own culture—the double vision of which W.E.B. Du Bois spoke. A true comparative philosophy is an ongoing dialogue that cannot proceed without recognizing that one is making cultural assumptions.² In cultural appropriation, the culture of the other is reduced to a dead object from which one can learn nothing about oneself. Any knowledge of this object, like cultural objects in the British Museum, serves merely to consolidate one's own ego. Today examples of China being treated like a dead object to which theoretical paradigms can uncritically and arbitrarily be applied are ubiquitous, if not the norm.³

The West's current confrontation with China will be the biggest shock to the Eurocentric worldview since the Spaniards' confrontation with the differences of the other embodied by the Amerindian. The question is, how will the West cope with an other or a difference that cannot be reduced to the same in the way that many others throughout history were? This time, will the West finally learn the humility needed to assess its own assumptions and intellectually make room for the presence of strangers and their differences?

A Summary of the Chapters

Chapter 1, "A Brief History of Chinese Cosmopolitanism," establishes that historically China was both internally cosmopolitan, in that it incorporated an enormous number of originally distinct peoples and their cultures into a common identity, and externally cosmopolitan in that its extensive knowledge of faraway lands did not give rise to an ideology that required the subjugation of these lands. This chapter shows that this internal and external embrace of difference was indebted to both an ideal of "harmony" premised on the metaphysics of organic life and the (Confucian) "cultural" conception of personhood that was operative in Chinese history. After providing brief surveys of Chinese history focused on the issues of pluralism, the chapter ends by addressing some common fallacies in writings about China that reveal important unexamined assumptions and problematic motivations.

Chapter 2, “The Barbarian in the Western Imagination and History,” describes the formative influence on Western practice throughout history of the idea of the barbarian. Crucially, the barbarian embodies two antithetical characteristics: formlessness, but also the form of evil. This chapter provides a historical survey of the European tradition’s negative self-definition. Since its Greek inception, civilization and humanity were defined through an imagined barbarian who is the antipode of the Greeks’ own espoused cultural values. This barbarian became the medieval “wild man” when inherited by the Christian consciousness. During the age of empire, the subliminal barbarian of the European subconscious was projected, with devastating consequences, onto the newly encountered peoples of the “New World,” who were so physically and culturally different from the Europeans.

Chapter 3, “Chinese Processual Holism and Its Attitude toward ‘Barbarians’ and Nonhumans,” describes the dynamic processual nature of Chinese metaphysics, especially with respect to its view of nonhumans, such as animals and demons. Key to Western colonialism’s violence toward the native was its view of the “barbarian” other as merely nature and so beyond the pale of moral concern. The ideology informing Western colonialism provided a metaphysical framework where a preestablished ontological hierarchy did not grant to animals and nonwhite races the same moral status as whites. Since Chinese metaphysics, in contrast, never saw (certain) human beings as transcending nature, it also did not see nonhuman aspects of the natural continuum as “mere nature.” Concomitantly, there was no place in such a metaphysics for the dualistic Western idea of the transcendent dominating mere nature because the latter had no moral status. The implication of the stark contrast between the Western view and the Chinese view of the relationship between the myriad things is that the Chinese saw their relationship to foreigners in very different terms.

Chapter 4, “Race, Metaphysical Determinism, and the Great Chain of Being,” explores in more detail the assumption of racial hierarchy that underlies the colonial view of the world. From the view that difference must be situated in an ontological hierarchy, it follows that the white races bear an ontological mandate to subjugate the “lesser” races to safeguard the cosmic order.

Chapter 5, “The Metaphysics of Harmony and the Metaphysics of Colonialism,” contrasts the Chinese understanding of efficacy, described as “harmony,” with the Western understanding of efficacy, which, following the ontology of the Great Chain of Being, is described as imposing form upon matter.

Chapter 6, “The Metaphysics of Harmony in Practice,” shows the practical implications of the Chinese (harmony) understanding of efficacy. The Chinese traditionally did not see imposing one’s will on others—manifested in the international context as “colonialism”—as efficacious because they understood that this would lead only to the other’s resentment of the colonizer. Instead, the Chinese sought to gain influence over others by noncoercively convincing them of the attractiveness of the Chinese position. In this worldview, the only way for the agent to sustain long-term influence over others was to persuade them to view the agent as a person whose abilities, qualities, and continued existence would ensure their collective flourishing. Furthermore, in the absence of the idea that the foreigner was a formless barbarian onto whom form should be imposed, the historical relationship between China and its neighbors was not one of unilinear domination but of attempts to harmonize—that is, mutual exchange.

A New Model of Comparative Philosophy

Today’s dominant model of “comparative” philosophy cannot but affirm its detractors’ opinion that introducing other philosophic traditions to the canon is a superficial exercise in political correctness. If “comparing” philosophies from different cultures only reveals that philosophies in the West find their commensurable counterparts in non-Western philosophies, then there is nothing of significance that other philosophies can add to the existing Western canon.⁴ We need to discard this paradigm of (asymmetrically) comparing non-Western philosophy with Western philosophy and replace it with a paradigm that allows us to learn from each other’s traditions.

In *Analects* 7.22, Confucius says, “When walking in the company of two others, I am bound to learn from them. The good points of the one I copy; the bad points of the other I correct in myself.” Taking this attitude of humility and applying it to philosophy, we can envision comparative philosophy as a company of others in which—and only in which—we can fully understand and improve ourselves. In the words used by the decolonial scholar and revolutionary Frantz Fanon to describe his vision for a more inclusive humanity: “What we want to do is to go forward all the time, night and day, in the company of Man, in the company of all men” (Fanon 1963: 314–15). Nobody in Confucius’s “company” of fellow travelers or Fanon’s “caravan” can claim an exclusive monopoly on truth. Instead, both regard difference as enriching.

The image that Confucius paints of understanding oneself and improving oneself by being in *dialogue* with others is not so different from Goethe's idea of *Weltliteratur*, whereby the literatures of different nations form a symphonic whole: each instrumental note does not merely assert its own uniqueness but also understands its uniqueness in relation to the uniqueness of other notes and the *complementarity* of its own uniqueness with the uniqueness of others. In both Confucius's and Goethe's vision, none of us can be the best version of ourselves isolated from others. For Confucius, the isolated individual has no chance to improve himself. For Goethe, without other instrumental notes, one instrumental note cannot produce music. For Fanon, the future of humanity lies not in the "obscene caricature" of merely imitating any one member of humanity, but in a caravan whose members recognize each other, meet with each other, and talk to each other (Fanon 1963: 315). For philosophy, each tradition can only truly understand itself and what it offers the world in relation to other traditions. In my own version of comparative philosophy, (1) the uniqueness of each tradition is affirmed and respected; (2) the uniqueness of each tradition enriches other traditions; (3) difference is understood as enriching; and (4) an openness to change through engagement is maintained through an understanding that cultural traditions are dynamic and evolving.

Just as the previous generation asked the "Needham Question" of why modern science did not develop in China but did in Europe (posed by the British biochemist and historian of Chinese science Joseph Needham), it is now time to subject the Western tradition to similar scrutiny and ask: Why did racism become such a pernicious problem in the Western tradition? The old anthropological model of the West studying "the Rest" should be replaced by a more equal relationship whereby all traditions can be the subject of analysis. Western culture is just another world culture, not an Archimedean point, devoid of perspective, from which to study the (merely cultural) traditions of others.

Relatedly, we could ask a question just as important as the Needham Question: Why did racist ideology *not* develop in China? If the project launched by Needham's question is worth the gamut of an ever-expanding series and a Cambridge research institute, then the question of why racism did not develop in China is also a case study worthy of extensive scholarly engagement. One could even argue that this question has greater social repercussions than the Needham Question. If Niall Ferguson could famously offer, in *Civilization: The West and the Rest*, the six "killer apps" that explain why Western civilization came out on top, my project can respond by detailing the "killer apps" of Chinese

cosmopolitanism and revealing, in stark contrast, the “kill apps” employed in Western racism. Comparative philosophy needs to question its *raison d'être* if it refuses to accept that there are in fact alternatives to the West as the end of human history. To explain this point I borrow from James Baldwin, who writes in *The Fire Next Time*:

I cannot accept the proposition that the four-hundred-year travail of the American Negro should result merely in his attainment of the present level of American civilization. I am far from convinced that being released from the African witch doctor was worthwhile if I am now—in order to support the moral contradictions and the spiritual aridity of my life—expected to become dependent on the American psychiatrist. It is a bargain I refuse. The only thing white people have that black people need, or should want, is power—and no one holds power forever. White people cannot, in the generality, be taken as models of how to live. Rather, the white man is himself in sore need of new standards, which will release him from his confusion and place him once again in fruitful communion with the depths of his own being. (Baldwin 1998: 341–42)

It should be the work of comparative philosophy to find such “new standards.”

What this book strives to do is to imagine the horizons of a “larger, freer, and more loving” humanity (Baldwin 1998: 314). No one holds on to power forever. When that power is gone, we cannot ignore the fact that we were always alone in a universe with nothing but each other. Comparative philosophy can either take the lead or be the Owl of Minerva who flies only after the battle is over.

This project is as much about understanding Western racism as it is about understanding Chinese pluralism. The Chinese tradition is not utopistic, and I do not mean to present historical China as such by highlighting certain aspects of Chinese culture for their contributions to a more cosmopolitan world. However, juxtaposing Chinese culture with the Western tradition around the issue of pluralism helps us understand why Western racism became so pernicious in human history. Some of the resistance to this thesis is grounded in the very Western chauvinism I critique. With Chinese history placed alongside Western history, we are able to see why Chinese history was *comparably* far more cosmopolitan than the Western tradition. What we will not see is historical China as a utopia (which, after all, means a “no-place”). Critics of this work should keep in mind that the epistemology of ignorance will be the Western audience’s greatest obstacle in understanding the arguments in this book.⁵

The Epistemology of Ignorance and the Universalization of Western Racism

There is a recent trend⁶ among Western Sinologists of mapping the colonial paradigm of otherness and race relations onto the Chinese tradition (Nylan 2012).⁷ These same Western Sinologists think they are scientists of primary texts who bring no *a priori* assumptions to the texts they are interpreting. Many of those who work on traditional Chinese relationships to the non-Chinese remain unaware of the voluminous work conducted in the critical philosophy of race, a field in which it is orthodoxy that racism was a Western invention. For instance, as stated in *Racism: A Short History*, a staple of undergraduate critical philosophy of race curricula, racism “is mainly, if not exclusively, a product of the West” (Fredrickson 2002: 6). The methodological ignorance of some Sinologists has allowed an uncritical uptake of common folk beliefs in Western societies. Given that, since World War II, Western societies and governments have made a concerted effort to whitewash the history of their racism, this folk belief amounts to amnesia about Western racism. In his novel *Fatherland*, Robert Harris depicts an alternative reality in which the Nazis won World War II and eradicated all the records of their genocide of the Jews, so that only scattered evidence remains. Such a reality is not altogether fictional: as Charles Mills writes, in certain respects we do in fact

live in an actual, nonalternative world where the victors of racial killing really *did* win and have reconstructed and falsified the record accordingly. Holocaust denial and Holocaust apologia thus long precede the post-1945 period, going back all the way to the original response to the revelations of Las Casas’s *Devastation of the Indies* in 1542. (Mills 1997: 104–5)

Amnesia about Western racism takes various forms. It is found in the assumption that colonialism, genocide, racial violence, and hatred of the other is a universal feature of human nature and human practice, as well as in the assumption that terms used in the Western discourse of race such as “barbarian” and “civilizing mission” are applicable to the Chinese context.⁸ The folk beliefs that many Sinologists uncritically apply to their interpretations of Chinese texts arose from a careful process of censorship and vetting designed to legitimize and further the project of Western imperialism. For example, as Robert Bernasconi has shown, even after the idea of race lost its respectability in the post-World War II period, major international institutions, such as the United Nations and UNESCO, tended to equate racism with a fallacious

biological understanding of race that was applied to Jews (Bernasconi 2019). This neat equation confined racism to fringe figures associated with the Nazi movement, thus avoiding any association with the genocidal history of European colonialism. The *cordon sanitaire* erected around the concept and history of “race” allowed most peoples of European descent to disassociate themselves from this purportedly anomalous history.

Bernasconi’s account of racism being narrowly defined so as to save the West from moral damage shows us but a snippet of Western institutions’ concerted campaign to suppress the West’s history of racial violence. In *The Silent War*, the sociologist Frank Füredi describes the “compulsive [...] desire” of postwar Western governments and the Western academy to transform Western racism into a universal human trait (Füredi 1998: 229). In his account of the efforts of the postwar Western governments, institutions, and academy to reconstruct Western racism as “an attitude that characterizes the behaviour of all people” (225), Füredi writes:

It is striking just how far the specialist academic literature echoed the official line that racism was not the monopoly of white people. There was something compulsive about this desire to transform racism into a transcendental curse that afflicted all societies throughout history. In the 1950s, even UNESCO publications adopted the perspective that Western racism was one among many examples of racism. (Füredi 1998: 228–29)

The willingness to equate Western racism with “literally all forms of group conflicts” led to it being “recast as a catch-all category that could be discovered in all cultures and was seen to define most relations of conflict” (Füredi 1998: 228). With racism reduced to a universal trait, Western societies were absolved of any greater responsibility for racism than others (229). “Diverse forms of human cruelty are abstractly compared, and not surprisingly, Western racism emerges with flying colours” (229). It was Western racism’s exposure of “an important flaw in Western societies”—one that was difficult to refute (231)—that explains the efforts, both cynical and sincere, to discount the uniqueness of Western racism by painting it as universal. As Füredi writes, “The literature reflected an instinctive reaction against the moral damage which the accusation of racism imposed on the West” (230). To defend the universality of Western values and history, such a blatant historical failing was projected onto the global South—that is, those states that were victims of Western racism and colonialism.

Sinological works that argue for the existence of racism in the premodern Chinese tradition not only are a product of the epistemology of ignorance but further that project. The most prominent example is Frank Dikötter's⁹ *The Discourse of Race in Modern China*, which attempts to prove the existence of race-consciousness in premodern and modern China.¹⁰ Seeking to overturn the measured consensus of a previous generation, Dikötter concludes, within the space of ten pages, that "race" or "racism" existed in early China, and within thirty pages he establishes that "race" or "racism" existed during the whole span of Chinese history until 1793. By attempting to prove that proto-racism existed in China prior to the introduction of such concepts by the West, Dikötter's work plays into the narrative of apologia for Western racism, both historic and contemporary.¹¹ The paucity of scholarship that Dikötter marshals to support his thesis, along with the incommensurable alacrity with which it was greeted by the Western academy,¹² speaks volumes about how much the West wants to believe that China is just as guilty of racism as the West.¹³ A more recent instance of this epistemology of ignorance is Odd Arne Westad's foreword to Zhao Tingyang's *All under Heaven*, in which Westad translates *yi* (夷) as "barbarian" and casually writes of "durable traditions of Chinese exceptionalism and preoccupations with race" (Zhao 2021: xxi).

This book challenges China scholars to do better. There is nothing innocent about perpetuating the amnesia of the West's historic racism. As Linda Martín Alcoff puts it, "Eurocentrism has a need *not to know*, a motivation *not to learn*, in the service of its material and discursive conquests"¹⁴ (Alcoff 2017: 402, emphasis in original). As a result of this ignorance about the nature and scale of Western racism, some Sinologists and Western scholars regard their attempts to find historical instances of "racism" in the Chinese tradition as particularly virtuous. Automatically assuming that Chinese civilization is just as racist as Western civilization, these academics cannot countenance the alternative: that the Chinese tradition is morally superior to the Western tradition in this one regard of *not* being racist.

It should be acknowledged, however, that confronting the Western academy's amnesia about the nature of Western racism and ignorance of the colonial geopolitics under which Sinologists work is exhausting. As Lewis Gordon puts it:

A great deal of the effort to study racism is marred by the core problem of self-evasion. This is partly because the study of racism is dirty business. It

unveils things about ourselves that we may prefer not to know. If racism emerges out of an evasive spirit, it is hardly the case that it would stand still and permit itself to be unmasked. Race theorists theorize in a racist world. The degree to which that world is made evident will have an impact on the question of whether the theorist not only sees, but also admits what is seen. The same applies to the society in which the theorist theorizes. (Gordon 1995: ix)

In 2017, Reni Eddo-Lodge, a British writer of Nigerian descent, wrote a book entitled *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People about Race*. Eddo-Lodge writes of her utter exhaustion in trying to educate white people on how the Western world earns its continued moral authority through an institutional forgetting, repressing, and suppressing of the history of murderous white supremacy that accompanied its ascent. The West, she writes, has “rewritte[n] history” to “make the lies the truth” (Eddo-Lodge 2017: xi), and its “white denial” follows a well-worn circuit: “Their mouths start twitching as they get defensive. Their throats open up as they try to interrupt, itching to talk over you but not really listen, because they need to let you know that you’ve got it wrong” (x). Eddo-Lodge gave up on talking to whites about race “because of the consequent denials, awkward cartwheels and mental acrobatics that they display when this is brought to their attention” (x–xi). The same issues that frustrate Eddo-Lodge were already described by James Baldwin in 1965. Half a century has passed, and not much has changed since Baldwin wrote in an essay entitled “The White Man’s Guilt”:

They [white Americans] *do* see what they see [the color of Baldwin’s skin]. And what they see is an appallingly oppressive and bloody history, known all over the world. What they see is a disastrous, continuing, present condition which menaces them, and for which they bear an inescapable responsibility. But since, in the main, they seem to lack the energy to change this condition, they would rather not be reminded of it. [. . .] And to have to deal with such people can be unutterably exhausting, for they, with a really dazzling ingenuity, a tireless agility, are perpetually defending themselves against charges which one, disagreeable mirror though one may be, has not, really, for the moment, made. One does not *have* to make them. The record is there for all to read. It resounds all over the world. It might as well be written in the sky. One wishes that Americans, white Americans, would read, for their own sakes, this record, and stop defending themselves against it. Only then will they be enabled to change their lives. The fact that they

have not yet been able to do this—to face their history, to change their lives—hideously menaces this country. Indeed, it menaces the entire world. (Baldwin 1998: 722)

Applying Baldwin's sentiments to those Western Sinologists and academics working on traditional China's relationship with the non-Chinese who are wont to uncritically apply Western concepts of race and its associated history to the Chinese context, these Sinologists should read, for their own sakes, the record of Western colonial aggression. They should recall the genocide, violence, and oppression behind the West's arrival at geopolitical preeminence through which Western ideas became the standard by which all other thinking is judged. Only if we learn this history can we change our lives and work. My conjecture is that there are four nonmutually exclusive explanations for why so many Western Sinologists lack the energy to truly learn about the history of Western racism and its relationship to colonial aggression. First, the culture of imperialism has informed their scholarly orientation in the sense that they are either unwilling to acknowledge the atrocities and violent practices that have helped the rise of Western powers, or they believe that this violent behavior was for a "greater good." Acknowledging this bloody history does not help their arguments that Western values produce better civilization. Nor is there any willingness on their part to acknowledge modern forms of (violent) Western oppression as a continuation of the same project. Second, paternalistic attitudes toward the cultural other have been normalized in Western academia and normal society. Orientalism, a cultural framework that normalizes these aggressive and paternalistic attitudes toward the cultural other, helps to make the very domination or subservience of the other seem reasonable and "moral." Third, there is, on some level, a subconscious awareness of how bad Western colonialism was historically. The desire to make racism both a naturally occurring phenomenon and a practice that anyone could be guilty of committing speaks to a desire to sweep Western responsibility under the rug. Making such behaviors simply "natural" excuses those who are responsible. The West simply did what any other cultural tradition would do if given the same power and technology. Finally, all of these issues and more are aspects of the "epistemology of ignorance." To all these points, Baldwin's voice is once again hauntingly relevant:

And I know, which is much worse, and this is the crime of which I accuse my country and my countrymen, and for which neither I nor time nor history will ever forgive them, that they have destroyed and are destroying

hundreds of thousands of lives and do not know it and do not want to know it. (Baldwin 1998: 292)

Our continuing inability to face this history hideously menaces the possibility of East-West dialogue; indeed it menaces the entire world. Much of the Western academy suffers from an inertia that prevents any recognition that China, or the non-West in general, could have historically been Europe's moral superior in certain respects—or, to be blunt, just not as perverse. (It's a *very* low bar.) Certain Sinologists and a not insignificant demographic of the Western academy *tout court* need to ask themselves why they so automatically assume that the Chinese tradition was just as guilty of Western-style racism as the West. When they finally work up the courage to look, what they will find, I hazard, is an ugly and uncomfortable truth.

As an “other” in the view of the Western academy, the Chinese tradition has suffered the same demonization under racist ideology as many other traditions throughout colonial history. Historically, the pervasive tendency to characterize another culture (including aspects of Chinese culture) as illegitimate and morally suspect preceded colonial takeover. The phrase “Yellow Peril” (*Gelbe Gefahr*), for instance, was coined at the end of the century by Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany to justify Germany's grab for concessions in China. To illustrate his point, in 1895 the Kaiser commissioned a painting of the nations of Europe dressed as female warriors and defending Christendom from the Yellow Peril (Lee 1999: 246n4). However, Yellow Peril racism preceded the invention of the term. As the “great” idealist philosopher Ernst Renan (1823–1892) wrote, “Nature has made a race of workers, the Chinese race, who have wonderful manual dexterity and almost no sense of honor.” The Chinese were thus, he declared, “crying aloud for foreign conquest” (quoted in Césaire 2000: 38).

Yellow Peril racism or Sinophobia is normalized today in a way similar to the normalization of Islamophobia, especially in the post-9/11 period; indeed, much of current Western Sinological and academic work on China's historic relationship to non-Chinese peoples is an exercise in Yellow Peril racism. A veritable cottage industry is dedicated to demonizing the Chinese tradition as racist. This cottage industry is part of an even larger industry that manufactures consent in the American and other Western populations. Once the Chinese have been well and truly demonized as the worst racists of them all, then the military-industrial-capitalist state can legitimately step in and make yet another windfall selling weapons to subjugate China (or any other enemy of the state) without the Western public identifying said subjugation as a moral

transgression.¹⁵ The subjugated are architects of their own oppression for being so morally reprehensible to begin with.

As we will see in greater detail, portraying the racial other as immoral—or victim blaming—is one of the oldest tricks in the racist handbook for legitimizing colonial takeover of non-Western land. Before so painstakingly detecting the faintest traces that might be construed as “racism” in the Chinese tradition, the virtue-signaling Western Sinologist or scholar should critically ask themselves three questions: (1) Why is it always states that pose a threat to Western hegemony that are simultaneously portrayed as moral transgressors and subjected to the greatest moral scrutiny by the Western academy, the media, and the public? (2) Why is there no dearth of works on “racism” and “perceptions of otherness” in China when critical philosophers of race, especially those of color, working on Western racism are marginalized and struggle to gain visibility for their own works, especially from the most respected publishers and journals?¹⁶ (3) Is the Sinological class, which is overwhelmingly white, middle-class, and from the heart of the Anglo-American empire, culturally (mis)appropriating the discourse of African-Americans (the “critical philosophy of race”), whose original purpose was to critically assess structures of white-supremacist oppression toward nonwhites within their *own* (American) society and internationally? Further, in so doing, are these Sinologists helping to diminish the capacity of a discourse that was one of the few ways in which the global South could understand and critique the racist hegemony of the West? They should ask if they themselves have not become enablers of a narrative that justifies Western aggression.

As is well known, America was founded on an imagined moral superiority and purity, but Europe too still believes in its own (equally imagined) mythic innocence. According to this myth, colonial Europeans, the “gentle civilizers”¹⁷ of the world, were kind enough to bring civilization to the primitive peoples of the world.¹⁸ Europe’s current global eminence, in this construction, is only a result of its own virtues. The myth of its own innocence is an almost impregnable fortress that renders its host psychologically unassailable by empirical facts about its actual historical conduct. The West’s inability to take responsibility for its historic actions creates a perverse psychosis in which its own guilt is projected onto the racial other. Chris Hedges eloquently summarizes Baldwin’s social critique of this white denial:

The steadfast failure to face the truth, Baldwin warned, perpetuates a kind of collective psychosis. Unable to face the truth, white Americans stunt and

destroy their capacity for self-reflection and self-criticism. They construct a world of self-serving fantasy. Those who imbibe the myth of whiteness externalize evil—their own evil—onto their victims. (Hedges 2019: 54)

Those Sinologists and Western academics who depict China as historically racist need to remember that the racist actions of the West have all but wiped out the entire peoples of three of the earth's six inhabitable continents (North and South America and Australia), enslaved and killed half the population of a fourth (Africa), and, in Aimé Césaire's words, "defiled and perverted" one of the remaining ones (Asia) (Césaire 2000: 74). Just as white people have projected their guilt onto the African-American so as to avoid facing their trespasses, so has the Western academy projected its racism onto China. "Such is the 'East,'" writes François Jullien, "or rather its mirage, the eternal, exotic East that the 'West' has chosen to represent as its polar opposite that so conveniently fuels its own fantasies and that it constantly exploits to compensate for its own failings" (Jullien 2004: 84–5).

Before so quickly calling out the perceived shortcomings of others, some Western academics need to remember that it was the West, and no one else, that committed genocide and pursued colonialism on so global a scale. They need to remember that the status of the Western academy was won and has been sustained through violence and genocidal suppression of other peoples and their cultures.¹⁹ There is very little in the history of Western engagement with the non-West that warrants the moral authority that Western academia arrogates to itself for judging others. By so enthusiastically framing another culture with the original sin that led to white peoples' domination of the globe, certain Sinologists and Western academics have forgotten that "all of the Western nations have been caught in a lie, the lie of their pretended humanism; this means that their history has no moral justification, and that the West has no moral authority" (Baldwin 1998: 404).

Although much of the West lives by the myth of its own innocence, "the Rest" of the world will never forget that, as Césaire wrote in *Discourse on Colonialism*, the West "is responsible before the human community for the highest heap of corpses in history" (Césaire 2000: 45). In this respect, the "wretched of the earth" possess a marked epistemological advantage over those who suffer under the illusions of exceptionalism. In *Anti-Semite and Jew*, Sartre describes the classic behavior of a racist: "demand[ing] rigorous order for others, and for himself disorder without responsibility" (Sartre 1995: 31).

What Sartre says about the hypocrisy of the racist corresponds with what he calls the “racist humanism” of the West:

Chatter, chatter: liberty, equality, fraternity, love, honour, patriotism and what have you. All this did not prevent us from making anti-racial speeches about dirty niggers, dirty Jews and dirty Arabs. High-minded people, liberal or just soft-hearted, protest that they were shocked by such inconsistency; but they were either mistaken or dishonest, for with us there is nothing more consistent than a racist humanism since the European has only been able to become a man through creating slaves and monsters. (Fanon 1963: 22)

We can say that part of the racist or racist-humanist agenda of a representative proportion of the Western academy is to legitimize and academically normalize its asymmetrical expectations for others. It is only through demonizing the other in this way that the racist-humanist can live with the record of what they themselves have done.

In a 1965 speech entitled “The American Dream and the American Negro.” James Baldwin said, “What we are not facing is the result of what we’ve done. What one begs the American people to do for all our sakes is simply to accept our history” (Baldwin 1998: 716–17). Relatedly, Baldwin also said, in *The Fire Next Time*, “People who cannot suffer can never grow up, can never discover who they are” (343). Some intellectual opinion-makers in the West need to face the reality of what the West has done. “People pay for what they do,” Baldwin wrote, “and, still more, for what they have allowed themselves to become. And they pay for it very simply: by the lives they lead. The crucial thing, here, is that the sum of these individual abdications menaces life all over the world” (386).

I have few illusions that important sections of the Western academy will ever undertake the necessary self-critique, owing to the moral apathy that I have already mentioned. Nevertheless, I would urge certain Sinologists and Western academics to make some changes. First, Sinology cannot persist in using the terms “barbarian” and “race” and their cognates to describe the relationship between “the Chinese” and China’s neighbors throughout history without first establishing the necessary frameworks. There are many historical works by Western scholars, from the earliest writings of the Greek tradition and throughout Western history, on the history of the (Greek) “barbarian” as a Manichean other antithetically opposed to civilization. These “barbarians” tend to be animalistic, passion-driven others who cannot be assimilated into

civilization because, having been metaphysically determined to be ontologically other, they are dualistically opposed to civilization. The Western tradition then identified these “barbarians” with the Persians and subsequently with all non-Europeans.²⁰ Sinologists need to establish whether the Chinese have subscribed to a similarly dualistic ontology or whether, as I argue in chapter 3, the processual nature of Chinese metaphysics in fact enables a different understanding of ontological otherness.

Second, the notion of the barbarian and the related ideas of natural slavery and oriental despotism as formulated by Aristotle in the *Politics* and elsewhere became instrumental in the project of Western colonialism and racial genocide. Indeed, Europeans legitimated their depopulation of the Americas and colonial takeover on the basis of Aristotle’s theory of natural slavery. Such ideas about race and their later formulations by Enlightenment philosophers during the age of empire are implicated in Europe’s responsibility before the human community for committing racial genocide on an unprecedented scale around the world. Sinologists therefore need to ask if it is intellectually sound to use terms like “race” for other cultures that have not committed mass killings or undertaken projects to dominate the globe on the basis of the ideology of race supremacy.

Third, racism is neither purely ideology nor purely practice; racism is simultaneously a theory and a practice. If Sinologists want to argue for the existence of racism in premodern China, they must provide evidence on both an ideological level and a material level. Further, they must be able to find coherence between the ideological and material, between the cultural and practical spheres of human life. Pointing to a few instances of either the theory or the practice and isolating them from the larger cultural framework is not sufficient evidence. Scholars must be able to find systematic coherence among the different theories and practices of the culture they analyze for any claim of racism to be instantiated.

Fourth, Sinologists who use Western paradigms of race and barbarism need to describe how they will avoid what Füredi called the post–World War II compulsion on the part of Western political elites and the Western academy to transform Western racism into a universal condition that afflicts all humankind. That is, these academics need to explain how, in using terms such as “barbarian” and “racism,” they do not further the West’s project of universalizing its own historic racism and so become court-rationalists for Western imperialism, both contemporary and historic. Can they argue that applying Western paradigms as consequential as “race” and its related idea of “barbarism”

is truly critical work and academically acceptable on philosophical, historical, and political grounds?

Finally, Sinologists need to remember what Edward Said wrote in his 2003 preface to *Orientalism* about Orientalists who “betrayed their calling as scholars” by justifying the American invasion of Iraq in 2003:

What I do argue also is that there is a difference between knowledge of other peoples and other times that is the result of understanding, compassion, careful study and analysis for their own sakes, and on the other hand *knowledge—if that is what it is—that is part of an overall campaign of self-affirmation, belligerency and outright war. There is, after all, a profound difference between the will to understand for purposes of co-existence and humanistic enlargement of horizons, and the will to dominate for the purposes of control and external dominion.* It is surely one of the intellectual catastrophes of history that an imperialist war confected by a small group of unelected US officials (they’ve been called chickenhawks, since none of them ever served in the military) was waged against a devastated Third World dictatorship on thoroughly ideological grounds having to do with world dominance, security control, and scarce resources, *but disguised for its true intent, hastened and reasoned for by Orientalists who betrayed their calling as scholars.* (Said 2003: xiv–xv, emphasis added)

Imperialism, as Said reminds us, is not simply the political and physical domination of one group of peoples by another. Imperialism relies on a discursive, symbolic, philosophical infrastructure, an entire mode of knowledge production whose violence is epistemic as well as physical. Making imperialism appear reasonable and even *moral* to its citizens requires a sophisticated cultural and ideological infrastructure. A culture of exceptionalism is integral to this ideological infrastructure in America, where an entire population has been systematically convinced of its exceptionalism. The Chinese cosmopolitan ideal explored in this book is offered not only as an alternative ideal but as a critical response to exceptionalism and the attendant moral obtuseness that dominates much of cultural, political, and academic life in the West, where, in the words of Pankaj Mishra, “self-congratulation” is used as an “analytical framework” (Mishra 2021: 15). Bearing the material and social costs of this exceptionalism are those whom Frantz Fanon has called the “wretched of the earth.” In this respect, the “wretched of the earth” possess a marked epistemological advantage over those who suffer under the illusions of exceptionalism

in that they see beyond the rhetoric of imperialism as they endure its material consequences.

One defining feature of Western exceptionalism has been the willingness of academics to participate in manufacturing master “narratives” that defend the imperial status quo. Sinologists will increasingly find themselves in the limelight in the coming years. Whether they betray their calling as scholars, as did many Western scholars of the Islamic-Arabic world early in the twenty-first century, will be the measure of their integrity.

Clarification of Terms

The terms “cosmopolitanism” and “racism” are umbrella terms that are used loosely in the English language. To avoid misunderstanding, I specify here the senses in which I employ these terms throughout the book; I define the terms “barbarism/barbarian,” “China/Chinese,” “colonization/colonialism,” and “the West/Western” in the glossary.

Cosmopolitanism

I use the term “cosmopolitan” to describe the view that difference is enriching. I do not use it in the sense of those who coined the term, the fourth-century BCE cynics for whom a cosmopolitan was a citizen of the cosmos and thus not a citizen grounded in a particular culture and community. This universalistic sense of cosmopolitanism underlay some of the great moral landmarks of the Enlightenment, such as the 1789 “Declaration of the Rights of Man.” Relatedly, I also do not use the term as it is used by current moral and political philosophy to refer to a global justice owed to individuals directly, rather than indirectly as members of different states. I also do not use “cosmopolitan” in the superficial way it is understood by the liberal left. As I use it, “cosmopolitanism” is not a vacuous buzzword signaling a safe space in which one can be conversant with the merely decorative and thus non-offensive aspects of foreign cultures, such as their art and food, while never seriously engaging with the perspectives of others and thus challenging one’s own.

I use “cosmopolitanism” in the same way that the Chinese use “harmony,” and as Césaire conceives of a universal:

I’m not burying myself in a narrow particularism. But neither do I want to lose myself in an emaciated universalism. There are two ways to lose

oneself: walled segregation in the particular or dilution in the “universal.” My conception of the universal is that of a universal enriched by all that is particular, a universal enriched by every particular: the deepening and co-existence of all particulars. (Césaire 2010: 152)

I too use “cosmopolitanism” to refer to a “universal enriched by every particular: the deepening and coexistence of all particulars.” The universal is not a static, eternal ideal that is merely imprinted onto the docile matter of the particular. Rather, the universal is the result of interactive engagement between all the particulars, which are in turn constantly changing because they are interacting with and being enriched by each other.²¹

Racism

I take the idea of “race” to mean that a group of people have inborn characteristics that define them and that cannot be changed through the actions or acculturation of the group or of individuals in the group. Race is the substantial and unchangeable *essence* of a person. The essences of peoples are furthermore understood hierarchically, such that those with higher essences legitimately dominate those with inferior essences. Racism as an ideology is inextricable from its practice (Fredrickson 2002: 6). Ideas about race are manifested in social, cultural, economic, and institutional practice. The geopolitical manifestation of racism is colonialism. I do not take the materialist position that racial ideology is merely an outcome of historical capitalist expansion.

The academic philosophical discourse of race and racism adheres to the opinion that racism did not exist prior to the invention of the concept.²² The accepted wisdom is that “racist” practice waited upon systematic racist theory, that is, the “scientific” ideology of racism that rationalized Western imperialism and colonization. Under this view, systematic European intolerance of the other emerged from a historical vacuum sometime around the Enlightenment owing to the confluence of the rise of the biological sciences and the growth of colonialism. I think this view, which makes racism a strictly modern phenomenon, is mistaken. It does little to explain why Aristotle, back in antiquity, regarded all non-Greeks as barbarians and thus natural slaves. Nor does it account for the ostracization of Jews and Muslims through medieval purity-of-blood laws, or for what David Stannard has termed the “American Holocaust”—the near-annihilation by the European elite of the population of

the American continent in *good conscience* because they understood the Amerindians to be naturally inferior savages (Stannard 1992).

My argument emphasizes the strong connection between Western racism and its metaphysics. As I have said, the *locus classicus* of racism is Aristotle's theory of natural slavery. Therefore, I take racism to be a practice that preceded its naming and theorization; racism existed *avant la lettre*. I define racism in such a way as to avoid a definition that relies on the espousal of the term by racism's practitioners before their actions and motives can be characterized as such. Broadly, I am in agreement with the likes of Benjamin Isaac and George Fredrickson, who argue that racism is a Western phenomenon (Isaac 2004; Fredrickson 2002). Although being wary of unknown individuals serves a pragmatic function and so may be a universal characteristic, racism differs in that it reifies this fear of difference into a systematic worldview even after the fear has outlasted its practical purpose. To fear the foreigner for ideological reasons rather than out of pragmatic need is racism.²³

This book limits its scope to showing that traditional China did not have a concept of "race." Although there may be other, premodern, non-Western cultural traditions that harbor something akin to the Western notion of race, their existence needs to be established in a separate work; it is outside my present purview. Following previous scholars, I understand racial metaphysics as a culturally specific ideology, and a specifically Western one. China, as I show, did not theorize about difference; nor did it, in practice, oppress and destroy encountered difference to nearly the same level and degree as the West did.

I also reject the dominant tendency today to understand "racism" as intrinsic to human nature. Much of this argument speciously conflates the ability to recognize difference and a pathological hatred of difference. All humans recognize human difference; it is only under certain forms of cultural conditioning that this recognition leads to racist behaviors. The desire to dominate humans perceived to be different is not a stable feature of human nature, but rather a learned behavior that makes sense only in certain cultural environments enabled by certain philosophical assumptions.

One final note: The question of whether "racism" is a stable feature of human nature is relevant to how we understand modern China and the drastic changes to its habits wrought by globalization. Readers are probably aware of the current situation with the Uyghurs in the Xinjiang region and might wonder if the ethnic tensions there present a challenge to the idea of a Chinese cosmopolitanism that I defend here. Providing an account of it that does justice to that complexity would deflect from the main purpose of this

project: to present a cosmopolitan ideal found in China's history and to show the relation between this cosmopolitanism and the Chinese philosophical worldview. Suffice to say here that the very complex history of the Xinjiang issue is intimately tied to America's "Global War on Terror," and that the situation has been very politicized in both China and the West. Not only is doing it academic justice beyond the scope of this book, but any such effort will become possible only when the issue is less politicized. Thankfully, a recent publication has already rigorously and charitably examined the causes and conditions giving rise to recent ethnic tensions in the Xinjiang region, Yan Sun's *From Empire to Nation State*.²⁴ As Sun notes, premodern China (consistent with the thesis of this book) interpreted differences among peoples as cultural and not as essentially or ontologically unbridgeable. Globalization, colonialism, and the Chinese state's use of the Soviet model of ethnic classification led the CPC to adopt institutions that were foreign to the traditional Chinese way of thinking about cultural difference. Further, being unfamiliar with Western ideas and models for dealing with difference, party leaders were unable to anticipate the problems that such institutions would produce.

In sum, racism cannot be defined simply as any form of intergroup tensions. Further, this study argues only for the nonexistence of racism in premodern China and does not widen the lens to look at racism in the modern world. All of the cultural interaction and spread of practices and ideas in the modern era—including both modern science and modern philosophies—put doing justice to the complexity of modern racist ideology beyond the scope of this book.

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