**From “Chinese Colonist” to “Yellow Peril”**

**Appendix**

**Debating the capital-race nexus**

For Du Bois, racism’s singularity derived from its role in organizing an imperial division of labor on a global scale. In “Souls of White Folk” (2022 [1917], 42), he wrote, “degrading of men is old as mankind and invention of no one race or people; ever have men strove to conceive of their victims as different from the victor, endlessly different in soul and blood,” and continued, “[t]he “using of men for the benefit of masters is no new invention of modern Europe. It is quite as old as the world. … The imperial width of the thing — the heaven-defying audacity makes it modern newness.” For Du Bois, the capitalist anchors of the color line were also evident. Although the racist assumption “that Africans and Asiatics were born slaves, serfs or inferiors” was “ostensibly after Gobineau and Darwin,” it was “in reality after James Watt, Eli Whitney, Warren Hastings, and Cecil Rhodes.” (Du Bois 2022 [1943], 179).

The structural “articulation” of capitalist division of labor and inequality through “race” has emerged as the central leitmotif of the recent racial capitalism scholarship. Following Oliver Cromwell Cox and Walter Rodney, Charisse Burden-Stelly (2018) has positioned racialization as “integral to and endemic in the capitalist world system” in its capacity to “justif[y] super exploitation, extreme surplus value extraction, and resource expropriation for the purpose of accumulation and profit.” In an exchange with Michael Dawson (2016), Nancy Fraser (2016) has explicated the structural imbrication of racism and capitalism in “racialized regimes of accumulation,” wherein “race” operates as a political principle of devalorization of lives, labor, and ecologies that can be expropriated and pressed into capital’s circuits at little cost (also see Moore 2018, Gorup 2023). In their introduction to *Histories of Racial Capitalism*, Destin Jenkins and Justin Leroy (2021, 3) have similarly spotlighted the racialized organization and legitimation of capitalist dispossession and inequality. Finally, others have explored the racialized strategies of cleaving divisions amongst workers, segmenting labor markets, and defusing anti-capitalist solidarities (Virdee 2014; Roediger 2017). The Marxist analytic of the “primitive accumulation of capital” has furnished many of these accounts with a conceptual bridge between capitalism and racism, grounding the necessity of racialized devalorization and disposability in the structural dependence of capitalist reproduction on violent extra-economic methods (Melamed 2015; Singh 2016; Issar 2021).

These contributions, however, have not been without their critics. Sanjay Subrahmanyam has taken to task not only the civilizational paradigm of Robinson’s original formulation but also the tendency in recent literature to reduce the diverse historical configurations of capitalism and race into “such rigid theorems as “capitalism *is* racial capitalism” [Melamed 2015] or that “the historical development of capitalism and race were inseparable” [Hall 2022].” His criticism of the conceptual imprecision and empirical overextension of “racial capitalism” has been amplified by Loïc Wacquant’s (2023b) warning that the label risks becoming a “conceptual speculative bubble.” For Wacquant (2023b, 6), the problem with the extant literature is that is starts with the “*premise* of the “inextricability of race and capitalism”” and thereby stipulating that which needs to be explained. Foreclosed by this theoretical postulation is a historically grounded and conceptually rigorous analysis of the “social conditions under which capitalism takes (or not) racial division on board differentially and could eventually throw it overboard” (Wacquant 2023b, 6). Despite disagreeing on the salubrity of nomothetic theorization, Subrahmanyam and Wacquant both press for a more conceptually discerning and historically attuned approach to the capital-race nexus. This approach recalls Stuart Hall’s (1980, 338) methodological stricture that any analysis of race ought to start from “from the concrete historical “work” which racism accomplishes under specific historical conditions — as a set of economic, political and ideological practices, of a distinctive kind, concretely articulated with other practices in a social formation.” It also aligns with this article’s deployment of “capitalist racialization” as an ideological process of differentiation-in-commensurability. The analytic power of this concept — if, when, and to what extent it illuminates the constitution of specific racial formations— cannot be postulated *a priori* but gauged only through historical and empirical investigation.

**Capital, race, and difference**

A number of works have mobilized Marxist social theory to delineate the distinctly capitalist lineaments of racial differentiation. In an exemplary essay, Hylton White (2020) has conceptualized of anti-blackness and antisemitism as “fetishistic” expressions of the functioning of capital via the dialectical pair of labor-in-itself and capital-in-itself. Similarly, Matthew Dimick (2023) has turned to Marxist theories of “reification” to unlock the specificity of race as a modality of stratification. As I have argued elsewhere (Ince 2022) as well as in this article, such attempts hew to an Atlanticist historical frame of reference and fail to grasp the dynamics of racialization rooted in colonial capitalism in Asia. This is concretely evidenced by the ambivalence and fluidity of the Chinese racial type as simultaneously embodying both labor *and* capital, which defies the neat binary of labor-in-itself and capital-in-itself.

An alternative Marxist theory capitalist differentiation, one that matches the imperial-global scope of analysis proposed here, takes as its departure point the mediation of preexisting social relations of production by the capitalist pursuit of endless accumulation. Capitalist mediation here denotes not the homogenization but the subordinate articulation and synchronization (what Marx called “formal subsumption”) of diverse laboring processes under capital (Marx 1976, 1019-38). On this understanding, social differentiation is internalto and necessarily structures the process of capital accumulation. A sustained theoretical elaboration of this point is offered by Harry Harootunian’s (2015, 197-234) rejoinder to Dipesh Chakrabarty’s (2000, 47-71) postcolonial critique of Marx. Jairus Banaji’s (2003) analysis of colonial capitalist strategies of commanding labor and Lucia Pradella’s (2017) appraisal of racial and gendered mechanisms of global value transfer exemplify this perspective’s productive potential. Other concrete illustrations of capitalist mediation of social difference include Walter Johnson’s (2013, 8-13) explication of “the hand” as an abstract unit of labor power and a key unit of accounting in the capitalist slave economy of the antebellum South, or Andrew Liu’s (2020, 62-73) delineation of capitalist temporality in the outwardly traditional (family- and village-based) labor practices in nineteenth-century Chinese tea production (Liu 2020, 62-73).

This brief survey would seem to support Julian Go’s (2021, 44) conjecture that *social difference* of various types (gender, ethnicity, kinship, region, religion, culture) rather than race as such is structurally necessary for capitalism, and that race ought to be understood as a specific modality of differentiation that draws upon and dissolves into other modalities under certain historical conditions (also see Wacquant 2023b). These modalities have been variously explored around mutations of “race” into “ethnicity” under neoliberal capitalism (Koshy 2001), transnational racial formations accompanying post-Fordist strategies of accumulation (Lowe 2001), and afterlives of colonial stereotypes threading through discourses of racist exclusion and ethnocultural assimilation (Cheng 2013). Further widening the comparative gaze, recent efforts have sought to situate “caste” in the same history of colonial capitalism as “race” (Khan 2021), ranging from micro-histories of the tangled workings of race, capital and caste (Dilawri 2023) to programmatic calls to theorize “both race and caste identity as outcomes of a single imperial dynamic relation between labor and capital” (Chhabria 2023, 20).

**British expansion in Southeast Asia**

The economics of British expansion in Southeast Asia has been systematically laid out by Anthony Webster (1998). Of particular importance here is the alliance between British merchant capital in South and Southeast Asia and the northern industrial interests in Britain which, through East India Associations, clamored for access to Southeast Asia both as a market and as a staging post for reaching Chinese consumers. Further uniting the two interests was the project of developing the region into a resource hinterland in an imperial division of labor. Commercial development of Britain’s Asian possessions would at once absorb surplus British capital and manufactures and supply the industrial metropole with tropical products, especially sugar, coffee, cotton, and rice. In addition to the strategic case for reducing Britain’s dependency on her commercial rivals for tropical commodities, the project’s exponents defended it on the moral grounds of undermining American slavery by outcompeting slave-grown produce (Major 2012).

While such grandiose visions were bound to be disappointed, they nonetheless gave momentum to British expansion into Southeast Asia culminating in the establishment of the Straits Settlements (Singapore, Malacca, Penang) in 1826. Singapore in particular proved a remarkable economic success and vindicated for many British liberals the promise of a reformed empire of free trade and free labor in the East. In mere two decades, the island became the epicenter of Chinese migration in the region, the main hub of the Asian opium trade, and the financial and administrative nervous center of British Southeast Asia. The extant Chinese networks in the Nanyang were key to early colonial Singapore’s meteoric rise (Neal 2019, 16). Alongside their routine functions of labor recruitment, planting, and mining, the *kongsi* intermediated the opium revenue system in the Straits Settlement, rendering the Chinese diaspora a mainstay of the British colonial state and colonial capitalism in the region (Trocki 2002). As I have proposed in another essay (Ince 2022), Singapore had an outsized impact on British imperial imagination not only as a laboratory for comparing and ranking Britain’s Asian subjects but also as a concrete example of what a liberal and multicultural British Indian empire could look like.

**Colonists and immigrants in the empire**

James Belich (2005, 53) has pointed out the fraught boundary between the “emigrant” and the “settler” in nineteenth century colonization debates. This was not least because in the first half of the century the figure of the colonist represented “not so much as a standard-bearer of Britain’s civilizing mission, but as a casualty of industrialization, war, and poverty, and as an economic migrant” (O’Brien 2010, 161). The ambivalence of the “Chinese colonist” confounded this already troubled distinction, inflecting the question of who was a “colonist” (and thereby a constituent of the settler society) and who was an “immigrant” (and thus conditionally admitted to that society) with a racial element. Viewed thus, white supremacy appears as less an ideological driver of settler colonization than one of its emergent effects from the last third of the century – an ideological association that solidified through political-legal interventions that resolved the ambiguity of the Chinese by recasting it first as a racialized migrant to be excluded and later as an ethnic minority to be assimilated to what, through this very process of exclusion, became “white man’s countries.”

A striking parallel is offered by the stillborn plans for the “Indian agricultural colonization” of British East Africa in the early-twentieth century. Several imperial functionaries, most notably Henry Bartle Frere, Harry Johnston, and Theodore Morrison, hoped to integrate East African territories to Britain’s imperial economy by transplanting “Indian colonists” whom they deemed to be more “civilized” than the Africans. Indian colonization would not only populate and improve a “sparsely inhabited” continent but it would also contribute to the civilizing mission by instructing Africans in the arts of agriculture proper. Just as Raffles and Crawfurd had likened Chinese settlements in the Malay Archipelago to European colonies in North America, Johnston envisaged East Africa as “an America for the Hindu.” The vision ultimately foundered on fierce resistance from both metropolitan circles and white settlers in Uganda and Kenya who claimed the latter as “white man’s countries.” Severing the colonial connection between India and East Africa once again enshrined the British as the legitimate “colonists” and the governing element of the empire while reducing Indians to imperial subjects and “migrants” (Metcalf 2008, 165-184).

These specific and entwined trajectories of racialization in the Indian Ocean littoral hold tremendous potential for studying the history of “comparative racialization” (Lye 2008). Realizing this potential, however, requires breaking with the dominant American-centric understanding of comparative racialization around the white-Black-Asian triad and taking seriously the autonomous though networked dynamics of colonialism and racial stratification in the Indo-Pacific.