East Meets West: 全球化时代的文化、 fultures, Literatures and Languages in the Global Age 文学和语言

林精华 Ji Fengyuan Susan Bouterey 刘心华





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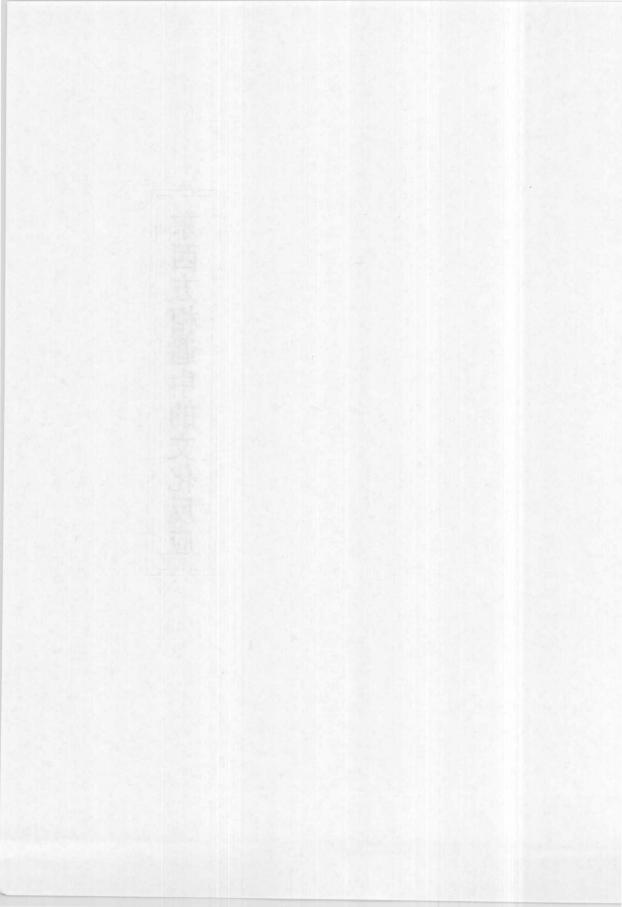
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东西方相遇中的文化反应



West Meets East: The Rise of Western Racism

Chris Connolly

(University of Canterbury)

What is racism? When and where did it originate? When, where and why has it become stronger and more rigid? These are big questions that cannot be answered within the scope of a short essay. I will therefore confine my attention to three very specific historical questions. Is racism purely a recent phenomenon, confined to the modern West? What led to the emergence of virulent anti-black racism in parts of the West world from the 1830s? And what led to the emergence, a couple of decades later, of extreme and rigid forms of racism directed first at the Chinese and then at other Asians as well?

The word "racism" has many meanings in popular discourse, but in academic contexts it is nearly always used to distinguish prejudices that are strictly "racial" in their character from those that are really social, cultural or religious. The most useful definition of the word, perhaps, is that racism is the belief that humanity is divided into a number of broad descent groups with unalterable characteristics that mark them out as superior or inferior. This means that when people are stigmatised as members of an inferior race, the prejudice is directed at something they cannot change—at the ineradicable biological, intellectual, psychological or spiritual characteristics that they are alleged to share with other members of their descent group. Racism therefore has implications that differ from those of prejudices that are based on social position, culture or religion, for these latter prejudices can be removed by social mobility, acculturation or religious conversion, respectively. People

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who are the victims of racism have to live with the fact that the prejudice against them is based on an objection to their unalterable nature. $^{\oplus}$

Many historians have argued that racism is purely a modern invention, designed to justify European imperialism and the exploitation of non-European labour through slavery. This argument was always difficult to reconcile with a good deal of evidence, and since the publication of Benjamin Isaac's The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity in 2004 it has become completely untenable. Combining thorough research and sharp analysis, Isaac has documented the existence of types of racism—at the very least proto-racism—amongst the ancient Greeks and Romans. This racism was linked to the belief that climatic extremes had produced an irreversible deterioration in humans who had lived for too long in certain parts of the world. The Greeks believed that the cold climate in Northern Europe had made the barbarians there hardy and courageous but slow of mind, while the hot climate in Asian lands had made its inhabitants indolent and servile. In

There is an extensive literature on the meaning of the term "racism". I have found the following discussions particularly valuable: Benjamin Isaac, The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004, pp. 15-39; George M. Fredrickson, Racism: A Short History, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002, pp. 1-13, 151-70; Pierre L. Van Den Berghe, Race and Racism: a Comparative Perspective, New York and Sydney: John Wiley, 1967; and the selections in Martin Bulmer and John Solomos, eds., Racism, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, Section VII: "Theories of Racism", pp. 327-78.

② Isaac, Invention of Racism. See also the contributions to Miriam Eliav-Feldon, Benjamin Isaac and Joseph Ziegler, eds., The Origins of Racism in the West, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009. The existence of pre-modern racism is also documented in David M. Goldenberg, "The Development of the Idea of Race: Classical Paradigms and Medieval Elaborations", International Journal of the Classical Tradition, Vol. 5, No. 4, (1999), pp. 561-70, and in David Brion Davis, Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World, New York: Oxford University Press, 2006, Chapter 3. An influential earlier account whose conclusions must be rejected in the light of these works is Ivan Hannaford, Race: The History of an Idea in the West, Baltimore and Washington: Johns Hopkins University Press and Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1996.

Greece, by contrast, the climate was neither too hot nor too cold, and the people retained their original intelligence, courage and independence. This was what made the Greeks natural masters and both the Northern barbarians and the Asians natural slaves. ^①

The Greeks were not alone in such beliefs. Some of the medieval Arabs, influenced in some measure by Greek thought, believed that a cold climate had slowed the blood of the fair-skinned people to the North, leading to intellectual deterioration. Far more common, however, was the belief that in the hot lands to the South the sun had not only blackened people's skins but dulled their intellects as well. The learned Arab geographer Idrisi, for example, spoke of the "defective minds" of the black peoples, and the great Arab historian Ibn Khaldun said that "the Negro nations... have little [that is essentially] human and have attributes that are quite similar to those of dumb animals". Similar prejudices existed in neighbouring Persia, where a thirteenth century writer remarked that the black Zanj people differed from animals only in that "their two hands are lifted above the ground", then noted that "Many have observed that the ape is more teachable and intelligent than the Zanji". Prejudices like these served to rationalise the importation of millions of slaves from sub-Saharan Africa to the Islamic world from the

① Isaac, Invention of Racism, pp. 1-257.

② Bernard Lewis, Race and Slavery in the Middle East, New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 47, 54-5. See also p. 52 on the influence of the Greek physician Galen.

³ Lewis, Race and Slavery, p. 53.

① Lewis, Race and Slavery, p. 53. For further discussion of racism in the Islamic world, see Goldenberg, "Development", pp. 566-70 and the references that it provides.

seventh to the nineteenth centuries. ^①

However, the racism of the Arabs and Persians, or for that matter the Romans, did not usually set up impermeable barriers. It was religion, not race, that ultimately determined who could legitimately be enslaved. In Islamic doctrine, all Muslims were born free irrespective of their race and it was unlawful to make them slaves. It was also virtuous, although not obligatory, to free slaves who converted to Islam, and the children of those who had converted were born into Islam and hence born free. Some Muslims ignored these precepts and enslaved black Muslims regardless, but their actions were widely criticised. In general, while racism affected the status and opportunities of the black population, it was religion, not race, that set the fundamental boundaries between the dominant in-group and the subordinate out-group in the Islamic world.

When the European conquest of the New World began after Columbus's discovery of the Americas in 1492, looser forms of racism like those in the Ancient and Islamic worlds at first prevailed. Europeans sometimes denigrated both the Amerindians and black Africans in racist terms, but their prejudices

The sources do not allow us to calculate the numbers of slaves imported from sub-Saharan Africa to the Islamic world with any precision, especially for the period before 1700. A plausible calculation, relying heavily on Ralph A. Austen's various estimates, is that the total number of slaves taken from sub-Saharan Africa to the Islamic world between 650 and 1900 was between eleven and twelve million—roughly the same as the number taken from Africa to the Americas over a much shorter period. See Paul E. Lovejoy, Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa, second edition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 26, 62, 142. Austen's estimates have varied between about eight million and seventeen million: see John Ralph Willis, "Preface", in John Ralph Willis, ed., Slaves and Slavery in Muslim Africa, Vol. 2: The Servile Estate, London and Totowa: Frank Cass, 1985, p. x, n. 2; Ralph A. Austen, African Economic History, London: James Currey, 1987, p. 275; and Ralph A. Austen, "Trans-Saharan Trade", in Seymour Drescher and Stanley L. Engerman, eds., A Historical Guide to World Slavery, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 368.

② On Islamic slavery, see Lewis, Race and Slavery, pp. 5-15.

were not set in stone and could be offset by other factors. Nor was there an impermeable colour bar. In Central and South America, for example, the Spanish and Portuguese conquerors brought few of their own women, and it was common for leading men to take Native American and black women as mistresses and even as wives. They recognised the children of these mixed-race unions as their own, and as a result the boundaries between races became blurred at the edges. Moreover, because slaves were often freed, it became impossible to identify the black population as a whole with slavery. So while racism certainly existed, it was just one of several criteria that determined status. A rigid system of exploitation and exclusion based purely on racial criteria never developed. ^①

Similarly, in the early days of slavery in southern Africa and British North America the presence of racial stereotypes did not produce a system of rigid racial stratification. In southern Africa, the original white settlers—Dutch, Germans and Huguenots—had Asian and African slaves, but the population also included free Africans and Asians. Until well after 1800 a significant minority of marriages were between white settlers and non-Europeans of Asian or (less frequently) indigenous African descent, and the more economically successful offspring of these marriages could gain acceptance into white society. ^② So the Cape had not yet developed caste-like racial barriers and was a relatively fluid society based more on class than on

[©] See Carl N. Degler, Neither Black Nor White: Slavery and Race Relations in Brazil and the United States, New York: Macmillan, 1971; Marvin Harris, Patterns of Race in the Americas, New York: Walker & Co. 1964; David W. Cohen and Jack P. Greene, eds., Neither Slave Nor Free: the Freedmen of African Descent in the Slave Societies of the New World, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972; and H. Hoetinck, Race Relations in the Americas: an Inquiry into their Nature and Nexus, New York: 1973.

[©] George M. Fredrickson, White Supremacy: a Comparative Study in American and South African History, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981, pp. 108-24. The children of these marriages and less formal sexual relationships were the forbears of the large "Coloured" population that was classified as a separate group under Apartheid and that exists till this day.

race. It was, as George Fredrickson puts it, "a class society in which race mattered in the determination of status but was not all-important."

□

The full-fledged racism of later years was not characteristic of the early history of British North America either. The colonists did not rationalise their purchase of slaves with the claim that black Africans were members of an inferior race that was well suited to servitude. Instead, they argued that the purchase was acceptable because the slaves were heathen and because they had been purchased from other Africans who had enslaved them legitimately as criminals or prisoners of war. In other words, the colonists defended slavery on religious and cultural grounds, not racial ones. Moreover, as at the Cape of Good Hope, there was as yet no legal obstacle to interracial marriage and marriages in fact occurred between black male slaves and white female indentured servants.

It was in British North America, however, that racial distinctions first became more rigid and discriminatory. The process began in the 1660s, when the slave-owners became concerned at the frequency of marriages and informal relationships between white servant women and black slaves. Their objections were both economic and social. They resented the loss of labour when female servants became pregnant and had children; they were unhappy that the children of these interracial unions inherited their mothers' free status, undermining attempts to build up a class of hereditary slaves; and they knew that marriages between black slaves and white women created a class of poor white males who could never marry, frustrating attempts to replicate the family-based social order of English society. The slave-owners therefore sought to deter interracial sexual relationships by advancing moral objections to them, and eventually by legislating against them. Between 1691

① Fredrickson, White Supremacy, p. 88.

② Fredrickson, White Supremacy, pp. 70-75.

³ Fredrickson, White Supremacy, pp. 108-24.

and 1750 six of the thirteen colonies banned interracial marriages altogether. ¹⁰

However, anti-black racism did not harden any further until the late eighteenth century and its most extreme and rigid forms did not start to emerge until the 1830s. Why did they emerge in this period, rather than earlier or later? One of the reasons most commonly suggested is that the eighteenth century saw the emergence of scientific racism. Beginning with the great Swedish naturalist Carl Linnaeus in 1738, scientists began to view human beings "as part of the natural kingdom" rather than as "children of God". They classified humans as a species within the primate genus, and then divided that species into varieties or races on the basis of skin colour and physical type. Some naturalists also attributed inherent intellectual and moral qualities to each race. For a long time, few of these scholars were full-blown racists who ranked the races in a rigid hierarchy and pressed the social implications of that ranking. However, their writings created a platform on which many of their nineteenth century successors did erect extreme forms of scientific racism—a racism that posited a hierarchy with the white race (or some portion of it) on top and all the other races ranked in descending order. The most inferior races, it was now said with scientific confidence, ranked scarcely above the more intelligent animals.

The development of scientific racism is very important, for it explains why many racists began to speak the language of science and were able to enlist the growing authority of science in support of claims that black people were intellectually inferior. What it does not do is give a satisfactory answer to the specific question that I have asked: why did racism begin to harden only in the late eighteenth century, and why did its most extreme forms begin to spread only in the 1830s? After all, scientific racism in its looser forms had been around since 1738, so it took about a hundred years before it was widely

① This paragraph is based on Fredrickson, White Supremacy, pp. 99-108.

[©] George M. Fredrickson, Racism: A Short History, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002, p. 57.

used to justify slavery and systematic racial discrimination. [®] Moreover, when scientific racism did become more extreme and influential, it did not do so mainly for autonomous *scientific* reasons. Instead, it developed largely as an ideology that served emerging economic and political interests, and it marched in lockstep with forms of folk racism and religiously-justified racism that also became more extreme in the service of those interests.

What were the interests whose defence required more rigid forms of racism, both scientific and non-scientific? In answering this question, we clearly cannot say simply that racial attitudes hardened to rationalise the existence of slavery or to rationalise imperialist expansion. After all, Europeans had been involved in both slavery and imperialist expansion in a big way for about three hundred years without having their racial attitudes harden to anything like the same extent. Moreover, during the period in which racism began to harden, imperialist expansion was rather slower than it had been, and slavery was increasingly under attack. It was in fact precisely in this period that slavery was abolished.

It is this last point that gives us the clue that we need. The eighteenth century had seen the slow spread of a belief in human equality, and the final decades of the century saw the emergence of doctrines of human rights—including the claim that all men (and in some contexts all women too) were by nature equal and free. In many countries, these doctrines were taken up in their own interests by ordinary people who were becoming more literate and assertive. They were also adopted with great enthusiasm during the French and American revolutions since they enabled the revolutionaries to argue that their rulers deserved to be overthrown because they had denied fundamental human freedoms. However, having used the discourse of human

① I here follow the chronology set out in the very careful survey by George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind*: the Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914, New York: Harper & Row, 1972, Chapters 2, 3 and p. 322.

② Lynn Hunt, Inventing Human Rights: a History, New York: Norton, 2007.