

Are We “Yellow”? And Who is “Us”? – China’s Problems with Glocalising the Concept of “Race” (around 1900)

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This essay proposes to look at the process of introducing Western “scientific” concepts of “race” into China in terms of a negotiated process of “glocalisation” (Robertson), i.e. of being global and local *at the same time*. In comparison to other terms like indigenisation, appropriation, adaptation etc., the advantage of the “glocalisation” approach is to acknowledge the remaining link (and even at times contribution) to global discourse while at the same time focusing on a specific locality into which something is introduced and by which it is framed. This essay will demonstrate on the one hand in which ways linguistic, cultural and above all historical contingencies were of crucial importance in the process of glocalising “race” in China; on the other it will show how the specific motivation of individual actors made for notable twists in this development. Thus, it will become evident that although the Western “race” concept was taken up by various Chinese, this should not just be interpreted as a passive submission to an “imposed hegemonic discourse” but rather as an active manipulation by different “glocalisers” with their own ends, at times consciously using the pseudo-scientificity of a global discourse to fight against local, i.e. inner-Chinese adversaries. For demonstrating the above, a close reading and a historical contextualisation of texts and authors is proposed here, focusing on texts by Chinese intellectuals of the time.

Introduction

China has often been cited as a case of “cultural ethnocentrism” (sinocentrism) vs. “racial ethnocentrism”. In fact, even though “racial” definitions of self are not entirely absent in pre-modern China,¹ the historically dominant trend – in the sense of elite Confucian literati culture which produced the main sources which we still use today – was to define “Chineseness” in cultural terms.² In this view, one could become accepted as “Chinese” if one took on Chinese cultural habits. This led to the widespread image of the “melting pot”, which e.g. explained early Chinese contacts with “barbarians” primarily in the framework of acculturation and assimilation, a classic example being the treatment of alien dynasties on “Chinese soil” in Chinese historiography which are portrayed in Chinese terms according to the paradigm of “sinicisation”.³ This was also closely linked to a concentric image of

¹ Cf. Dikötter (1992: ch. 1), stimulated also by the predating works of specialists on late imperial China and the Manchus like Pamela Crossley. “Racial” is to be understood here very broadly in the sense of perceived special biological traits common to groups of people.

² It was primarily mainstream Confucianism that constructed *culture* as defining “Chineseness”, whereas sources closer to folk beliefs (and some minor strands in elite discourse) suggest the existence of some “proto-racialised” views (Dikötter 1992, ch. 1).

³ A divergent view was proposed, among others, by Wolfram Eberhard (1952), for the early alien dynasties (3rd to 6th century) in Northern China, but the subsequent debate centred mostly on the later ones (since the 12th century), being stimulated, among others, by Tao Jing-shen (1976). For a thoughtful review of Western and Chinese approaches to Chinese “ethnicity” see Crossley (1990).

the world: the nearer to the centre, the more Chinese, the farther away, the more “barbaric”; the “radiating centre”, though, supposedly of almost “irresistible attraction” to the “barbarians”.⁴ Differences within this cultural in-group with shadowy boundaries were framed in locality (place of origin) and descent which were usually closely linked, and status, the most “cultured” being the educated elite (Harrell 1992: 18). Thus, the more appropriate image would be a pyramid, integrating the “horizontal” geographical concentric image of “inner–outer” or “centre–periphery” with a social/educational “vertical” dimension of “higher–lower”. Biological traits, though, were of no primary concern. This has been attributed to the relative lack of phenotypic variance encountered inside “China” (e.g. with the so-called “minorities” who were rather identified through divergent cultural features and descent) or in territories bordering on China (Dikötter 1992: x). Even though “Chinese” came into contact time and again with other peoples from farther away and noted physical differences,⁵ the received historiographical (and visual) sources do not demonstrate any overt interest in them or, rather, there was more curiosity than outright disdain (Hildebrand 1987). Only animosity for other reasons led to decidedly deprecating views of bodily/physical difference (e.g. racialised to “racist” views on Westerners in the 19th century vs. a basically “non-racialised” view of Westerners in the 17th/18th century – a period when Westerners were much rarer, locally restricted and in contact primarily with literati or business elites). Even in cases where a “proto-nationalist” tendency in China has been found,⁶ namely since the Song dynasty (960–1276), entailing a stronger “ethnicist” consciousness of what defined “a Chinese” (*Han*) in drawing the line against foreign threatening powers (which, in the end, achieved the first complete domination of “China” in her history with the Mongols), real or perceived biological traits were not an important argument in defining “Chineseness”, and hatred of “the other” was primarily culturally and politically motivated but did not remain prominent after foreign rule ended. The indigenous Ming dynasty, following the era of Mongol domination, translated this heightened Chinese ethnic self-awareness into a fad for genealogies and even developed some idea of “purity of blood” against the traditionally dominant interpretation of genealogy based primarily on social-ritual factors; and in the subsequent Qing dynasty, again founded by foreigners, this time the Manchus, a first “racial” self-definition by the latter can be attested to in the 18th century, but this was mainly designed (and invented) for self-reference and for bolstering internal cohesion of the ruling group. It was not until middle of the 19th century – a time when Western influence had

⁴ For this model see Müller (1980: 43–76) and Fairbank (1968).

⁵ Contact with other peoples was frequent and reported in historical writings especially since the Han dynasty (206 BC – 202 AD). Apart from historical encounters, there is, of course, also the realm of fantasies about others to be considered which also coloured views on foreigners to a certain extent. Here, in fact, imagined physical difference was an important aspect.

⁶ On Chinese “proto-nationalism” see the works of Hoyt C. Tillman (1979) and Rolf Trauzettel (1975).

started to make its presence felt –, that a first “peak” of “pre-scientific” race concepts can be discerned with the huge and in itself also ethnically marked Taiping uprising, struggling against the Manchu-Qing, which in its promulgations defined *both* “Chinese” (*Hanzu*) and “Manchus” (*Manzu*) vis-à-vis each other, including an element of “systematic hatred” that even translated into local attempts at genocide.⁷ Still, this was only developed in and aimed at a specific historical setting; it was not yet elaborated or systemised on a more general scale. This is hardly surprising since in the West, too, the latter could only build upon a modern “biologist” and “scientist” medical understanding of the “fixed” and “categorisable” material body which contrasted with traditional, more “fluid” Chinese views of the body.⁸

The Western “scientific” theory of mankind being divided into “races”,⁹ assigning the Chinese to the “mongoloid” / “yellow” race, was introduced in China in the late 19th century. The theory itself went back to Bernier, Buffon, Kant (the first to speak of a “yellow race”, though not intending China) and Blumenbach, “father” of anthropology as a “scientific” discipline, who propagated the influential theory of mankind being divided into five races, one of them being the “mongoloid” “yellows” living in Asia. This concept was popularised and systematically matched with supposed mental and cultural characteristics to “demonstrate” the “inequality of races” by Gobineau and Chamberlain in the second half of the 19th century. Thus, at the time, more or less accepted “scientific knowledge” suggested the existence of differently coloured “races” inhabiting certain parts of the world and being graded in their “civilised” status, usually numbering the “whites” in Europe, the “yellows” in continental Asia, the “blacks” in Africa, the “reds” in America and the “browns” in maritime Asia, even though a simpler threefold structure of the “whites”, “yellows” and “blacks” was also current.

The introduction of these ideas into China was influenced by two factors: On the one hand, works by Western missionaries started to make these ideas known via translations or summaries; on the other hand, and with much greater long-term effect, Japanese works and translations moulded Chinese perceptions, so that the newly coined Chinese terms for “race” in fact were almost exclusively graphic loans from Japanese. (This, of course, holds true for much of modern Chinese scientific vo-

⁷ For the above, see Crossley (1990: 8, 11, 28). One may add that the Manchus were identified as “devils” and thus also integrated in the religious symbolism of the Taipings. The Christian concept of the “heathen” very probably played a role in this classification. For Taiping “theology” see Wagner (1982).

⁸ Several examples which Dikötter (1992) cites for pre-modern cases of proto-“racial” views in China appear as “racial” only if interpreted in the light of a modern “biologist” and “materialist” medical understanding of the body, which the Chinese arguably did not share at the time.

⁹ The literature on this topic is extensive. For a concise overview of the historical development of Western “race” concepts from the perspective of the history of the term, see, for example, Conze/Sommer (2004). For a sociological perspective see Banton (1977, 1987); for a historical perspective, integrating the problem of “racism” in this framework, see Mosse (1978) and Geiss (1988). Ivan Hannaford (1996) presents an approach from intellectual history.

cabulary.¹⁰) Terms used for “race” in China since the 1890s included *renzhong* (Jap. *jinshu*; lit. “man-kind”), *zhongzu* (Jap. *shuzoku*; lit. “kind-lineage”),¹¹ *minzu* (Jap. *minzoku*; lit. “people-lineage”, concurrently used also as a translation term for “people” in the sense of *Volk* and “nation”)¹² or *zhonglei* (Jap. *shurui*; lit. “kind-category”), all transporting specific shades of meaning via the characters chosen.¹³ *Renzhong* was the closest to a biological-anthropological interpretation, *zhonglei* was a “neutral” categorisation without specific reference to human beings, whereas both *zhongzu* and *minzu* included the lineage element, with *minzu* (adding the “people” character) being the term closest to a purely social interpretation. And it was especially the latter term that sparked the most heated debates due to its ambiguous shifting between “race”, *Volk* and “nation”.¹⁴ Though the terms *renzhong* and *zhongzu* ultimately became established as translation terms for “race”, the other terms are still not entirely obsolete even today; the multifaceted *minzu* especially retains some “racial” flavour. This in itself suggests a certain malleability of the whole “race” concept in Chinese via “flexibility” in linguistic options.¹⁵

But for the named linguistic aspects, when introducing Western “race” concepts it also became an issue of who was to be subsumed under these categories – a question

¹⁰ See Gao (1958); Gao/Liu (1984); Liu (1995), updating Gao/Liu’s lists by integrating Federico Masini’s work on the linguistic contributions of the missionaries in China; Lackner/Aemelung/Kurtz (2001), focusing on some chosen terms.

¹¹ There is some discussion about the historical meanings of *zu*. The term’s shades of meaning varied through history but its early meaning has now been shown by Gassman to be a kinship term (translated by him as *Sippe* which I render here as “lineage”), i.e. a subdivision of a “sub-clan” or “tribe” (*Stamm*; *zong*), again subsumed under the over-arching “clan” (*Klan*; *xing*), sharing the same family name. In any case its original meaning is (even if ascribed) genealogical, not local (as e.g. Crossley assumes), though people supposed to be of the same kin usually lived close to each other, thus blurring the line between genealogy and territory (Gassmann 2006).

¹² The term *minzu* seems to have appeared in China as early as 1837 (Fang 2007: 159), but was not yet used as a translation term for “race”.

¹³ It might be noted that in Hepburn’s Japanese–English/English–Japanese dictionaries the term “race” in the biological sense only appears in 1886 (3rd edition), providing also as a subentry “human race” or “human species” and “anthropology”, rendered by *jinrui* and *jinruigaku* respectively. (An “Anthropological Society” [Jinrui Gakkai] had been formed in Japan shortly before, i.e. in 1884). Thus, the term “race” in the sense of a subdivision of the human species seems not to have gained currency even in Japan before that time, in spite of the first Japanese book on anthropology appearing in 1874, using the term *jinshu*. (The various editions of Hepburn’s dictionaries can be accessed via www.meijigakuin.ac.jp/mgda/index.html.) For reference to the introduction of anthropology into Japan see Ishikawa (2003).

¹⁴ See Dikötter’s long note in (1992: 108–110 [n. 41]). Incidentally, *minzu* (*minzoku*) in its Japanese usage seems to have had strongly “national” overtones via its nativist and populist associations. See Harootunian (1988), cited also by Crossley (1990: 20 [n. 39]).

¹⁵ For the different uses see also Chow (2001).

that was already inconsistently answered in the West.¹⁶ Some authors, when referring to “the yellows” or “mongoloids”, had generically intended “the Asians”, some excluded the Indians, others excluded the Malays as a “race” in itself etc. The Chinese in the late 19th century, in any case, found themselves grouped with (somewhat varying) others under the label “yellow” or “mongoloid”. How did they view and react to this? Two cases were of special salience in this regard at the time when Western notions of “race” were being introduced: one was the being grouped with the ruling Manchus and all (other) “minorities” in China. When anti-Manchu nationalism arose about 1900, this came to be seen by Han nationalists as problematic since the question entailed the issue of domination, i.e. power relations. The other case was the being grouped together of China and Japan – two countries whose relationship was undergoing a substantial shift at the time.¹⁷ Japan herself struggled with this Western categorisation in the contested process of self-definition between (Western) “civilisation” and “Asianness”, highlighting the ever present interference between “racial” and “cultural” categories. The parallel case on the Chinese side will be addressed in the following, focusing on the struggle with “glocalising” (in the sense of Robertson)¹⁸ the Western concept of “race” in China in the specific setting of the time, the problems this generated and the motives that were driving (or hampering) it.

Are we “yellow”?

When the Chinese found out in the late 19th century they were defined by the West according to supposed skin colour as “yellow”, this came quite as a surprise. Skin colour had not been an important issue, rather difference of “fair” and “dark” complexion signified (as in early modern Europe) social distinction between the wealthy and the poor who had to work in the fields etc. (Dikötter 1992: 10–13). If

¹⁶ The great variety of Western schemes, ranging from three “races” to several hundred, was also introduced in China. See Guanyun, i.e. Jiang Zhiyou, “Zhongguo renzhong kao” (Investigation into the Chinese race), a very long article in many instalments in the reformist journal *Xinmin congbao* (1903: 61). The problem also entailed the question of whether “races” are eternally stable entities or may change over time.

¹⁷ One may note, though, that Gobineau (writing in the 1850s) – for all his influence – saw the Chinese (to whom he even dedicated a whole chapter), Mongols and Finns as the main examples of the “yellow race”, whereas the Japanese were regarded as a mixture with black and “maybe some white” “racial components” (Gobineau 1898–1908, II: 358; 1983, I: 605). Therefore, even though the Japanese were said to have been influenced by Chinese “yellow” “civilisation” (like the Koreans), they are briefly dealt with in the chapter on “the origin of the white race”, not in the chapter on the “yellow race”. The general “yellowing” of the Japanese in Western racial taxonomies obviously had to do with their rising importance in world politics during the Meiji era (since 1868).

¹⁸ Robertson (1998: 192–200; I refer to the German version since the newest English reprint in Robertson/White 2003 reproduces an older version than the reworked German one). It may be recalled here that the term “glocalisation” has been coined with a view to the Japanese term *do-chakuka* used in economics for an adaptation of globally distributed products to target markets.

anything, Chinese tended to see themselves as of “white complexion” (Dikötter 1992: 10, referring to Maspéro). Apart from the fact that “yellow” has favourable symbolic connotations in Chinese traditional culture, being closely associated with the emperor, and apart from the possibility that Jesuit information about the symbolic value of “yellow” in China might have played a role in prompting *Westerners* to finally opt for “yellow” as the supposed skin colour of the Chinese,¹⁹ this definition was clearly a heteronomous one for the Chinese themselves.²⁰ Consequently, Chinese reactions (and here I limit myself to intellectuals) were divided: some rejected it and advocated auto-defining themselves “white”, others saw no problem in accepting a symbolically positive marker, though the realisation of a hierarchy between the colours in this Western “race” concept (namely since Gobineau’s influential mid-19th century work on the “inequality of the races”) complicated things. “Yellow” would be acceptable if it were not inferior to “white”.

Various strategies were available to cope with this situation. One of these can be gleaned from an early reference to Western ideas on “race” in Chinese: The article “Renfen wulei shuo” (On the division of men into five categories/races) in the

¹⁹ As Demel (1992) has demonstrated, this took some time to arrive at. “Brown” etc. had also been an option.

²⁰ Here I disagree slightly with Dikötter (1997: 12f.). Dikötter questions the view that the notion of a “yellow race” should have been imposed on the Chinese by the West and argues for various antecedents in traditional China, adding, e.g. to the named symbolic value of “yellow” the case of Wang Fuzhi, a 17th century intellectual, who named China the “yellow centre” and wrote a *Yellow book* (*Huangshu*). Wang, however, is a rather isolated voice in this respect with little potential to influence (his writings being banned and mostly circulating only as manuscripts in a rather closed circle until the mid-19th century; the *Yellow Book*, e.g. has survived only in a censored version with many “blanks” (see Wang Fuzhi 1972: xvii). He was consciously picked up, “revived” and “used” by later revolutionaries around 1900. In any case one certainly cannot discern a “common” auto-perception of the Chinese as “being yellow”. Furthermore, Wang’s calling China the “yellow centre” is still a far cry from a definition of a “yellow race” according to skin colour, and Wang himself even distinguished the elite from the “common people” as being *of different stock* (something obviously *not* revived around 1900), thus undermining a possible “unity” of “the Chinese”, when simultaneously stating that “the barbarians” and “the Chinese” “in their bone structures, sensory organs [...] are no different”. Cf. De Bary/Lufrano (2000: 33), who conclude that even with Wang, cultural issues remained primary vis-à-vis racial ones; for the second part of the reference see De Bary (1960: 547). Of course, Dikötter is completely right in stressing that the intellectuals in the late 19th century were not simply on the “receiving end” but actively took up the Western race discourse and used it to their own ends (see below); still this is not the same as stating that the notion of a “yellow race” was not imposed on the Chinese. Furthermore, the lack of frequency of the term “yellow race” (*huangzhong*) before the 1890s and Chinese reactions in the mid/late 1890s, explicitly stating the “newness” of (and sometimes aversion to) this term, suggest it was perceived as heteronomous. Cf. “Bianfa dang xian fang liubi lun” in the influential Chinese daily *Shenbao* (13 June, 1898), where the author claimed the term “yellow race” had been in use only “for three to five years”. For the citation see also Janku (2003: 187).

Western-directed Chinese language journal *Gezhi huibian* in 1892,²¹ which presented the Blumenbach classification (without mentioning the name), started quite tellingly with the “Mongoloids”/“Yellows” before the “Caucasians”/“Whites”, followed by the “Africans”/“Blacks”, “Malayans”/“Browns” and finally the “Americans”/“Reds” (Blumenbach’s original order had been: 1. Caucasians as the “primary” and “most beautiful”, 2. Mongoloids, 3. Ethiopians, 4. Americans, 5. Malayans). Thus, in a subtle way the hierarchy implicit in the numbering was changed to suit Chinese readers (also upgrading the Asian Malaysians vis-à-vis the far away Native Americans). That this was no accident is borne out by the fact that in the text itself the “old” sequence of Americans-before-Malayans reappears, and that the existence of other Western, less “favourable” schemes, integrating the “Americans”, “Malayans” and “Mongoloids” into one single “race”, is casually admitted.²² The attached drawing also presented the “Mongoloids”/“Yellows” in the “Chinese” fashion of the time, i.e. with the Manchurian queue obligatory under Qing rule for every male, thus making the Manchu-Qing dynasty subjects stand for “the Mongoloids”. The negative physical or mental features that Blumenbach’s (and followers’) scheme attributed to the “Mongoloids” were downplayed, and an image of a race outstanding in wisdom and the arts (though somewhat deficient in moral judgement and bound by conventions) was presented, including besides the Chinese also Mongols as Manchus, Japanese as Koreans, Tibetans as Vietnamese, all of whom comprised this “most numerous race” on earth. The “Caucasians”/“Whites”, who follow, were regarded as especially skilled in material and practical matters (foreshadowing the later image of the “spiritual East vs. the material West”), whereas with the “Africans”/“Blacks” the topic of slavery was invariably introduced, the “Malayans”/“Browns” were assigned the status of infants not yet knowing to behave morally, whereas the Native “Americans”/“Reds” were presented as a totally hopeless case, being unable to be educated. The main aim of the presentation, though, was to emphasise the transformative power of “today’s civilisation” as an implicit agenda to follow. Furthermore, the article is one of the rather rare instances where the term “Mongoloids” (in Chinese equivalent to “Mongol” [*Menggu*]) appears, which was superseded increasingly by the term “yellow race” (*huangzhong*) since the mid-1890s, overcoming the “problematic” identification with a one-time enemy, “invader” and current “minority”, dislocating “the Chinese” even further.²³

²¹ The author/translator of the article is not given. John Fryer, the editor, is presumed to have written most of the articles, but also had some Chinese staff and other Westerners contribute materials (Xiong 1994: 418–426).

²² My reading of the article therefore differs from that of Ishikawa (2003) who sees it only as a faithful rendering of Blumenbach’s outline but pays no attention to the subtle shifts in presentation.

²³ The term “mongoloid” (notably used by Blumenbach) necessarily evoked bad memories of Mongol domination – the first complete foreign domination of China in her history, but (different from the Manchus as the “second case” of complete domination) even degrading China to just a part of a world empire.

The point of arguing for “reform” could also be made the other way round by using precisely the “secondary” status of “yellow” to “white” in this supposedly “scientific” and “universal” race concept. Calling for policies that would “whiten” China’s future (and thus giving credit to ideas current with both Gobineau and Social Darwinists, of an integral link between “race” and “survival” chances for peoples), one could easily explain China’s historically factual weakness by its “lack of whiteness”. “Whitening” would thus represent the only way to secure one’s future existence in view of the threatening “racial competition” which had already claimed several “victims” worldwide,²⁴ to achieve an era of “equal strength of the whites and yellows”.²⁵ This “whitening” program could entail copying Western institutions as well as more biological tactics like intermarriage. (Not surprisingly, the latter tactic was highly controversial.)²⁶ This was a strategy opted for by, e.g. reformer Yan Fu who in 1895 (after China’s defeat in the war against Japan) urged educating the “yellow race” (obviously intending only the Chinese here) to prevent its perishing,²⁷ or Kang Youwei, who rhetorically accepted the “priority” of “white”, transforming this into his agenda to reform China which culminated in his ill-fated 1898 reform endeavours, and later in his work *Datong shu* (Book of the Great Union) into a program of racial amalgamation, dissolving the “yellows” via intermarriage into the “whites” (again relegating the “hopeless” case to “inferior races”, i.e. “the browns” and especially “the blacks” who would not be able to “whiten”).²⁸ Apart from the final utopian rendering, Kang’s argument was not intended as a glorification of “whiteness” in a racial sense (*nota bene*: he occasionally switched from “white/yellow” to “silver/gold”, implying a reversed hierarchy of values),²⁹ but identified “whiteness” basically as

²⁴ The usual reference was to the Indians as having lost their “nation” in this competition with the British, and the Native Americans as having been nearly extinguished as a “race”. See e.g. Liang (1903b: 71) in the reformist *Xinmin congbao*.

²⁵ See e.g. the outline of the revolutionary 1904 treaties on “Chinese history” by Tao (1986: 226).

²⁶ One major early proponent was late 19th century reformer Kang Youwei, even though his most radical (or “utopian”) ideas became known widely only very late, i.e. in the 1930s. But reformer Tang Caichang also advocated white-yellow crossbreeding. Cf. citations in Ishikawa (2003: 13). See also Teng (2006) and Sakamoto (2004: esp. 329–340). The strategy of intermarriage, though, was also advocated by some other social reformers or revolutionaries, e.g. including biologist and leading anarchist Li Shizeng (see Müller 2001: 241; not discussed by the authors referred to above). On the other hand – as in other parts of the world –, Chinese actually intermarrying with other “races” were often ostracised by their co-nationals.

²⁷ “Lun kaimin zhi zhi” (On educating the people) in the Western-financed Chinese daily *Shenbao* (27 July, 1895). The article in the daily is not signed but has been identified by Andrea Janku in her electronic index to the early *Shenbao* 1872–1898 (Janku 2002). In the article, the “yellow race” is identified as roughly 400 million, which would indicate that Yan regarded only the Chinese as the “yellows” here.

²⁸ Kang (1935, part 4). For a translation see Thompson (1958: 140–148).

²⁹ Strangely, existing scholarship seems to have overlooked this curious but telling switch, including the very recent discussion of Kang, which even cites the passage, in Tsu (2005: 43–47).

“civilisation”. In this way, he always remained true to his culturalist Confucian framework. Characterising the “yellows” as being equally spread over the globe like the “whites” and even superior in wisdom, there was no big gap to bridge in order to amalgamate the two, citing also the example of overseas Chinese who had adopted Western cultural habits without problems. And Yan Fu, too, obviously identified the colours with civilisation, since education would otherwise not be a possible way out.

Another strategy of coping with imported race concepts was to opt for *accepting* “yellowness” – and turn it into an asset. As [at that time] revolutionary Liu Shipei stated: “In recent times [...] Chinese³⁰ are called the ‘yellow race’. If we check with the Chinese ancient books, [we see] that among the five colours only yellow was revered [...] In ancient times, yellow was interpreted as the middle and harmonising colour [...] It means also brightness and from this the meaning of “China” is derived [...] The people on the yellow earth are the Han lineage people” (Liu Guanghan [1905]). The focus in this process of “glocalising” the foreign ascription was thus significantly *shifted away* from skin colour – something the above cited reformers had already started to do – either towards a purely *cultural* definition of “yellowness” or merging the *cultural* with *biological* descent. The latter was done in a more elaborate form by constructing a lineage down from the “Yellow Emperor” (Huangdi), one of the mythical first rulers of China (*nota bene*: *di* in “Huangdi” has the original meaning of “divine *ancestor*”), to “re-invent” “Chineseness”, which could, in turn, also be used to differentiate between the only “true Yellows”, i.e. the Han, and the non-Han. Thus the figure of the Yellow Emperor turned into a site for political contestation among the Chinese reformers (who had been the first to revive him in the 1890s)³¹ and later revolutionaries around the turn of the century. Whereas the reformers stressed the *cultural* side, building up the Yellow Emperor as a symbol of pride for all people living in China as heirs of a “great civilisation” that was set in motion by the early cultural heroes like “Huangdi”, and consequently arguing for their own reform ideas to “preserve Chinese culture”, the revolutionaries eagerly took up this politically useful symbol but re-invented Huangdi as an *ancestor* exclusively of the Han, stripping him (also visually) of his *emperorship* and transforming him into an ancestor with marked military skills and “conquering” abilities of that which now was “Chinese soil”.³² Thus, he was declared to be the founding father of the Chinese and establisher of their state and the “first nationalist hero”

³⁰ Significantly, Liu here uses the Sanskrit rendering of “China” in Chinese translation (*zhendan*), indicating an “outsider’s view”.

³¹ Kang Youwei referred to him several times in his private lectures in 1896 as a cultural hero. S *Kang Youwei quanji* (1987–1992, II: 272f., 276). Also see Kang (1897: ch. 4).

³² For the development of the image of the “Yellow Emperor” in this period see Sakamoto (1995) and especially the richly documented article by Shen (1997). For the shift in the visual treatment of Huangdi see the added plates in Shen (1997: 23f., 39). I am grateful to Hsü Hui-ch’i for providing me with a copy of Prof. Shen’s article. For a systematisation of the different roles already ascribed to the “Yellow Emperor” in early China, see Le Blanc (1985–1986: 45–63).

(*minzuzhuyi daweiren*) on earth.³³ At times the revolutionaries also integrated into this vision another foreign theory, namely that of the Han's "Western" origin and their migration from Mesopotamia towards the East. This theory, proposed by the Frenchman Terrien de Lacouperie, implied a common place of origin with the "Western whites" as well as the martial vigour of a conquering race easily subduing the "natives" already living in what today is "China" (in a consciously constructed parallel to the Aryans or to the Spanish conquest of Latin America).³⁴ A further motivation for creating the "Yellow emperor myth" was the Japanese parallel case of constructing Japaneseness based on a supposed ancestor of the Japanese emperor, Jinmu, even introducing a calendar reckoning starting with his "reign which was then also copied by the Chinese revolutionaries for Huangdi (albeit, as already mentioned, eliminating the monarchist element).³⁵ Accordingly, taking up the "challenge" of being defined "yellow" could be translated into a conscious strategy to build up nationalism in the future around "yellowness", be it in a culturalist (the reformers' option) or a primarily racial way (the revolutionaries' option).

In one way or the other, the blending of nationalism and "yellowness" was common to many reformers and revolutionaries around 1900. Yan Fu, the reformer mentioned earlier, who aimed at "strengthening the *nation*", is one example; revolutionary Sun Yatsen, who was primarily preoccupied with a "restricted" definition of "yellow race" as equating the Han, blending it with the race-nation (*minzu*), even though he occasionally extended the "race" concept to "Asia" to motivate alliances (namely with the Japanese), is another.³⁶ Further examples include Chen Duxiu, later one of the founding fathers of the Chinese Communist Party, who in 1904 was convinced that a nation equals a "race" (and therefore argued for the alien Manchus to be excluded; Feigon 1983: 63–65). (It should be stressed, though, that in the West as well "race" often came to be used synonymously with "nation" at the time,³⁷ thus de facto undermining the categorical "unity" of a "white" or "Caucasian" "race".)

³³ See *Huangdi hun* (Soul of the Yellow Emperor; 1979), a booklet assembling a host of articles on Huangdi by the revolutionaries, published in 1904.

³⁴ Cf. Shen (1997: 38, 40). Terrien de Lacouperie's theory had become known to the Chinese mainly via Japanese digests (Ishikawa 2003: 22–25). His work *Western Origin of the Early Chinese Civilisation* (1894) was reprinted in 1966.

³⁵ "Wuwei" (1979). See also Bernal (1976: 99). The reformers, in contrast, opted for a reckoning starting with Confucius.

³⁶ Though Sun's own understanding of *minzuzhuyi* was not very clearly expressed (he propagated it as part of his "three principles of the people" in the editorial of the revolutionaries' main journal *Minbao* (The People) in 1905 (Sun 1905), he had his co-revolutionaries spell it out, namely Wang Jingwei, who entered the debate against the reformers' faction with a long article, "Minzu de guomin" (National-racial citizens) also in *Minbao*, stressing above all the "blood" factor in addition to common language, territory, habits and religion (Wang 1905). Sun's own vagueness lent itself to later "adjustments" to this theory.

³⁷ See Conze/Sommer (2004: 156–158, 169). Fenton in his new article on race and nation, referring to Foucault, argues that the shift to identify nation and race has a "counter-revolutionary"

Earlier reformers like Kang Youwei, basing himself on Confucianism, had obviously viewed “race” in a larger, i.e. supranational context, even if China as a *cultural* category remained central to his political aims. But Liang Qichao, Kang’s one-time pupil, moved on to an in-between position: while he shared Kang’s Confucian “larger” model he developed a more national interpretation after the turn of the century.³⁸ He noted, e.g. in 1903, that even though (in the West) Spaniards and English looked alike and could not be differentiated at first glance like “whites” from “blacks”, they still constituted different “races” because “racial consciousness” was based on two factors: biological heredity *and* psychological features. Therefore, Spaniards and English were different “races” due to the second factor which implied a psychic “heredity” which was then explained basically as cultural-moral traditions: a neat example of blending “race” and “culture”. And without this two-tiered “racial consciousness”, Liang’s brother added, no state could be set up (Liang Qixun 1903: esp. 52–54).

At the time, one may add, Kang and Liang had both gained personal experience of “foreignness” by travelling, due to their being exiled after the ill-fated 1898 reform, and especially their experiences in America heightened their sensitivity to the connection between “race” and discrimination. (This is very evident in Liang’s travel reports.³⁹ Quite naturally, he paid special attention to the treatment of Chinese in America, but he also noted the fate of the Native Americans.) In any case, Liang was especially important in establishing the link between “race” and nationalism in the Chinese discourse by his influential articles, namely by focusing on the impending “perishing of the nation” that would come with “racial” weakness. And on this basis the revolutionaries now would join the debate.

Not without significance, Liang Qichao (basically a “reformer”) and many revolutionaries (criticising reformism) were soon writing mainly in Japan, where they were strongly influenced by their reading of Japanese publications and translations⁴⁰ (though using them at times deliberately in a “creative” way to comply with their own respective agendas). A telling case in point is Liang’s introducing his Chinese readers in 1900 to a piece by Japanese journalist Ishikawa Hanzan on “the struggle in the racial world”, arguing that although there were “three races”, i.e. white, yellow and black, the “white race” should actually be subdivided into a “red-white” (i.e. the Westerners) and a “yellow-white” race (i.e. China – in the Chinese version named first –, Japan, Korea, Hungary and Turkey). Who then would be left to constitute the “yellow race” was not even discussed (Ishikawa 1900: 3097). Here, again, we see an example of only superficially acknowledging Western “scientific”

effect vis-à-vis “race as class” (Fenton 2006: 197). However, for “third world” people, this obviously could very well have “revolutionary” potential since it was articulated “from below”.

³⁸ His first use of “race” categories seems to have been in 1896, echoing Kang’s above-stated views of the “yellows” being “almost like the whites” (see Liang Qichao 1896).

³⁹ Liang’s travel reports appeared in *Xinmin congbao*, special edition (Liang Qichao 1903a).

⁴⁰ On the influence of Japan on Liang see Xiajian (2001) and Fogel (2004b).

theories and changing it to fit in with their own agendas – a strategy already familiar with the Chinese and demonstrating to Chinese readers that the Japanese, as well, had developed flexible ways of glocalising Western “race” concepts. And Japan was obviously succeeding in her struggle for “racial survival” by this “semi-whitening” *without* denying her “yellow” roots. This was the way Liang thought China must follow, too.

Linked to this whole scenario and providing an important background to the sense of crisis shared by many Chinese intellectuals around the turn of the century was the Sino-Japanese war 1894/95: China’s unexpected and total defeat by a country viewed as culturally dependent on China throughout history (Fogel 2004a; Iriye 1980; Keene 1971: 121–175; Chu 1980) exposed the utter state of decay in China and – together with the scramble for concessions following this “encouraging” exposure of weakness to the world which gave rise to the fear of a “splitting of the melon” – first spurred the Chinese reform movements, starting with the ill-fated 100-days reform in 1898 and leading to more revolutionary approaches shortly after the turn of the century.

Who is “us”?

The Sino-Japanese war led not only to a perceived urgency for “reform” in China, but also gave the question of “race” a new turn: who should count as “our” race? Who should count among “the yellows”?

This problem worked on two layers: one was the inclusiveness or exclusiveness *inside* of China, i.e. with regard to non-Han, namely the ruling Manchus, the other *beyond* China: Who else would “yellowness” or the “mongoloid” race comprise (the latter term tended to be avoided in China, as already stated)? Asia or East Asia? And, more specifically, were the Chinese and Japanese members of one “race”?⁴¹

As to the first layer, the focus of the debate in the early 1900s was on the “racial” relation between Manchu and Han, though it was sometimes extended to include the minority of the Miao living in Southern China as the archetypical Chinese category of “barbarians” to be “civilised”.⁴² (Typically, this discussion was not politically “neutral” but intertwined “race” and “domination”, including the problem of whether the Han had been “imperialists” themselves towards “their” minorities.) In a famous debate, Liang Qichao as spokesman of the reformers and proponents of a constitutional monarchy by the Manchus, argued for inclusion. On the other hand, anti-Manchu revolutionaries used precisely the “racial” difference theory to argue the case for toppling the Manchu regime (Gasster 1969: ch. 3, esp. 76–84; Bernal 1976: esp. 95–99; Furth 1976: esp. 128–139): the Manchus were a “racially retarded” or “lower level” ethnic minority that had unjustly usurped the Chinese throne. Therefore, the

⁴¹ As already stated, this question was not answered consistently in the West either, partly being due to the influence of the conflation of the categories of “race” and “culture”.

⁴² Cf. Diamond (1995: 99f.). They were also paralleled with the “typical” “race” threatened by extinction in the West: the Native Americans. See Liang Qichao (1903b: 71).

“higher” Chinese “race” had lived through all the humiliations of the 19th century because the “barbarian” Manchus had obstructed “Chinese civilisation”. On the road to progress they were the brakes that now had to be removed. In fact, they were accused of endangering the Chinese “race” with extinction by their incompetent rule. Ousting them was thus necessary for “racial” survival in the Social Darwinist struggle setting of the time (Rankin 1971: 26–30).

The Kang/Liang camp, on the other hand, argued that there was no “racial” difference between the Manchus and the Han, since the Manchus lived out and practiced Chinese *cultural* norms. Their *sinicisation* precisely guaranteed their “sameness”. (Here, the universalist Confucian background of the reformers becomes evident.) In any case, it could be argued that the Manchus had already been part of the Chinese empire before their conquest which then, in an interesting argumentative twist, could not be considered that “alien”.⁴³ And the current government was run with many Han involved, so it had to be seen as “Chinese” for this reason, too. On the other hand, the Miao were a highly diversified group of people,⁴⁴ thus not qualifying for the construction of a historical “parallel case” at all. Liang, therefore, suggested a “broad nationalism” (*da minzuzhuyi*) vs. a “narrow” Han-centred one to include all peoples living in China,⁴⁵ though by doing so, he in fact rejected the “race” argument altogether for the sake of a common national interest of a multi-ethnic society. Obviously, then, when the revolutionaries started to play the “race” card to support their political ends, Liang abandoned the “race” concept that had seemed useful to him as long as it meant “the nation” in a political sense, though the ambiguous term *minzu* (“people-lineage”, *Volk*, nation) used by both sides hid this shift to a certain extent. But Liang now clearly distanced himself from a less ambiguous “race” definition connoted by the term *zhongzu* (kind-lineage) and attacked his opponents for using the latter.

Liang’s allegation of anti-Manchu “racism” in the revolutionaries’ camp, implying also “mean” motives of envy and resentment, had been directed mainly against fervent anti-Manchu intellectual Zhang Binglin who countered the “sinicisation” thesis of the Kang/Liang faction mainly by pointing to the historical fact of the Manchus being the rulers, imposing their ways and not the other way round (1981: 51f.), and against even more radical calls like those of Zou Rong to “kill the Manchus living in China” (1981: 125, 137). To oppose Liang’s accusation of the revolutionaries being simply racist, Liu Shippei thus tried to bolster the latter’s position by bringing the whole question of minorities, mainly the Miao, into the debate (Liu 1903: esp.

⁴³ See Liang Qichao under pseudonym “Yinbing” (1906). Liang aimed his attack at the *Minbao* where namely Wang Jingwei voiced the opposing view. Wang pointed out, e.g. that the Manchus themselves never claimed to be “Chinese” (Wang 1907: esp. 1892f.). Wang was supported by Liu Shippei who (under a pen name) wrote a serialised article in the revolutionaries’ *Minbao* about the Manchus having never been “Chinese subjects” (Weiyi 1907). And much less have they been “Chinese” (Weiyi 1907: 2882), though Liu, now claiming to be an anarchist, dissociated himself from the earlier “racial” hatred still being advocated by other revolutionaries.

⁴⁴ S.C.Y. (1905) with an introduction by Liang.

⁴⁵ See *Zhongguo zhi xinmin* (1903: 32), where he introduced these terms.

ch. 2). The Mongols, another – but historically more sensitive – issue, were occasionally integrated as well.

Since the Miao are not Han, Liu concludes, then neither are the Manchus. But the Miao are less problematic, because they either migrated after their subjugation by Huangdi or were assimilated into the Han race. The Manchus, by contrast, are a conquering people with a clear-cut identity and thus cannot be said to have been assimilated into the Han at all. They, in fact, use the “white race” to help them keep in check the “yellow race” – thus excluding the Manchus from the “yellows” who are obviously synonymous here with the Han (Liu 1903: 622). The Han, then, are different in terms of territorial spread, language, religion and customs – the characteristics that constitute a distinct *minzu* – from the Mongols, Manchus, Hui and Miao (Liu 1903: ch. 17). And Zhang Binglin, in an interesting twist (and in factual contradiction to his earlier hailing of Terrien de Lacouperie and Huangdi as a “conqueror”), points out during the evolving debate with Liang Qichao, that even the argument of a parallel one-time Han “invasion” cannot be proved. Therefore one cannot – as the Liang camp had argued – say that the Han then would also have been “aggressors”.⁴⁶ In any case, even if the origin of all mankind were to be somewhere West, then the Miao, too, were only immigrants.⁴⁷

“Our race” thus became narrowly defined as “Han” and linked to ancestry which Liu had already constructed via the “Yellow Emperor theory”: this figure, then, is only the progenitor of the Han and not of any of the minorities. According to Liu, who based himself on a Japanese source (!),⁴⁸ the subdivision of the “yellow race” in “Chinese” and “Siberians” saw the “Chinese” only as Han, Tibetans and Indo-Chinese. The “Siberians” grouped together the Japanese (!),⁴⁹ Tungus (i.e. including mainly the Manchus), Mongols and Turkish. Other revolutionaries, though, suggested a slightly different division in the larger “yellow race”, first dividing it likewise into the two main streams of “Chinese” and “Siberians”, but then subdividing it into different groups: according to already named Zou Rong’s influential chart, the “Chinese race” included the Han and “others” (specified as Koreans, Burmese, Japanese, Tibetans and “other East Asians”); the “Siberian race” included the Mongols (subdivided into Mongols, Manchus, Siberians and “other Asians”) and the Turkish

⁴⁶ This, in fact, had been promoted outright by revolutionary Song Jiaoren in 1905 in a positive sense (Chow 2001: 62).

⁴⁷ Taiyan (1908: 2f. [reprint 3294f.]). Interestingly, although the article sets out to argue that there is a lack of historical evidence to suggest who arrived “first”, it goes on to state that it was of course the Han.

⁴⁸ Liu only names “Kuwabara”. The source was China historian Kuwabara Jitsuzō’s (1870–1931) *Tōyō shiyō* (Historical outline of Asia) (Liu 1903: ch. 1, 599).

⁴⁹ For the Japanese motives in distancing themselves from the Chinese and the implications for devising schemes of differentiation in Asian populations see Tanaka (1993) Ching (1998). Ching stresses that around the time of the Russo-Japanese War and Western “Yellow Peril” rhetoric directed against the Japanese, these tended to “draw” themselves out of the “yellow” category altogether, assigning the latter exclusively to the Chinese.

(including the Turkish, the Hungarians and “other European Yellows”). But Zou Rong himself gave a somewhat different categorisation in the text preceding the chart, though he like Liu clearly stressed that the Manchus were definitely not part of the “Chinese” category (though keeping them here in the “yellow” category, obviously for lack of alternatives),⁵⁰ but still leaving a close reader of Zou Rong’s inflammatory tract bewildered by these contradictions in the space of two pages.⁵¹ This, again, leads to the conclusion that the whole enterprise of glocalising “scientific” “race” categories was highly malleable. (And it should be noted that these utterances were made in polemical literature where logical consistency was not a primary concern, whereas the same authors often argued less “racially” in their other writings.⁵²)

Revolutionary par excellence, Sun Yatsen, and his followers as well were further telling examples of the “flexibility” of “racial” boundaries: first, when anti-Manchuism was on the main agenda, the principle of “nationalism” (*minzuzhuyi*) was clearly defined “racially” against inclusion of the Manchus.⁵³ After the Manchu court had abdicated and the Republic was established, the agenda was to argue for the “inheritance” of all territory under the Manchu-Qing dynasty, i.e. including minority terrain. Now, it was argued that the “five races” of China (one of them the Manchus) constituted the “nation”. In other words, the “Han” were still seen as constituting a “race”, but only as part of what should be the “Chinese” nation. But later the trend changed towards inclusion of the minorities in a single “Chinese race” to bolster internal cohesion (Leibold 2006: 181–220) – ironically reviving reformer and one-time arch-rival Liang Qichao’s call for a “broad” understanding of the race-nation.

On the “outward” level, the “racial” relation especially between China and Japan was a constant issue. As long as Japan was in the position of a traditional “vassal” country, the question from the Chinese perspective was not pressing: the Japanese were usually called “dwarfs” (*wo*), which obviously had a “racist” flavour.⁵⁴ But in terms of *culture*, they were acceptable, since they had proven “receptive” to Chinese civilisation.

⁵⁰ We saw earlier that Liu at other times equated the “yellow race” exclusively with the Han. Therefore, it seems obvious that here the “totality” of a chart necessitated a solution to the “colour” assignment of the Manchus, whereas in the above-cited case Liu had simply excluded them, without bothering about suggesting an “alternative”.

⁵¹ See Zou Rong (1981: 129) vs. scheme on p. 130.

⁵² The aspect of intended audiences has often been disregarded hitherto in evaluating such “racist” comments.

⁵³ Ironically, one of the major spokesmen in the pages of the revolutionaries’ journal *Minbao* was Wang Jingwei, later noted in history for his “flexibility” to redefine “Chineseness” in a way suitable to his Japanese-sponsored “puppet” regime in Nanjing during WW II.

⁵⁴ The term has been also explained as of (at least partly) phonetic character, but clearly came to be understood in time as derogatory. If not read as purely phonetic, it combined the meaning of “crooked” with the classifier (“radical”) for “human being”, thus inviting semantic interpretation.

Things changed dramatically with the First Sino-Japanese War. Even though some Chinese diplomats had realised earlier that Japan was a growing factor in power politics, and even though China had “magnanimously” given in to Japan several times since the 1870s (notably on suzerainty issues concerning the Ryūkyū archipelago, Taiwan and Korea), China never would have thought about not being able to stand up to Japan. With the Sino-Japanese war and China’s blatant defeat, the relationship to Japan was turned upside down. Significantly, only after the war, which was seen in the West as a war between the “yellows”, did Japan become the primary symbol of “yellow peril” for the West,⁵⁵ and the term “yellow race” only then became common in China also.⁵⁶ Before, it had been China holding the place for “the yellows” and their possible endangering the West in Western minds, partly connected to Chinese emigration since the middle of the 19th century.⁵⁷

Those in China bound on reform argued that Japan should be the model, precisely because she was culturally and “racially” “close”: if the Japanese as “part of the yellow race” could “civilise” (i.e. Westernise), the Chinese should be able to do so as well. Thus, Kang Youwei, for instance, proposed the Japanese as an example in the 1890s. And Liang Qichao in 1896 stated explicitly that since the “whites” and “yellows” were close, whatever the “whites” could do, the “yellows” must be able

⁵⁵ For the history of this term, see Gollwitzer (1962). This shift towards Japan can be seen in the British novel *The Yellow danger* (1898) with a Japanese-Chinese main figure (Zachman 2007: 108). Already in July 1895 the Japanese daily *Kokumin shinbun* wrote of Western perceptions of the “rise of the yellow race” as mainly directed towards Japan and only secondarily towards China (Zachman 2007: 80f.). The painting (1895) by Knackfuß, commissioned by Kaiser Wilhelm, is well-known. For a collection of Western materials on the “yellow peril” in Chinese translation, including some Chinese reactions to this discourse (dating only from *after* the turn of the century, namely from the time of the Russo-Japanese war) see Lü/Zhang (1979). Some *Chinese* literary reactions to the “yellow peril” paradigm, again *after* the turn of the century, are discussed by Tsu (2005: ch. 3).

⁵⁶ Earlier references are extremely scarce, but with the war the term *huangzhong* (yellow race) gains currency in Chinese publications and was even used by Chinese chief negotiator at the Shimonoseki peace talks, Li Hongzhang, who hoped (in vain) to talk the Japanese into an alliance of the “yellows” against the “whites” and to lessen Japanese pressure on the defeated Chinese side (Dikötter 1992: 55). Casual checks of important Chinese newspapers suggest that the term *huangzhong* gained currency only with the Sino-Japanese war.

⁵⁷ Among the pull factors were the Gold rush in America and the need for “coolies” to build railways in the West of North America as well as opportunities to gain a living in mines or as launderers. A decisive push factor was the huge Taiping rebellion in the 1850s to ‘60s which devastated great parts of central and southern China, together with an exploding population and early industrialisation leading to social dislocation and shifts on the job market. – In the US the “Exclusion Act” of the 1870s gave rise to a whole series of fiction portraying the “yellow peril” (without using that expression), due to Chinese emigration (Wu 1982). For late 19th century graphical representations of Chinese in the US see Choy/Dong/Hom (1994). Interestingly, earlier cartoons tended to use the word “Mongolians”, to be superseded then in time by “yellows” and meaning the Chinese. Only at the turn of the century was the “yellow peril” primarily directed against the Japanese (Choy/Dong/Hom 1994: 161).

to do as well, citing Japan as the visible proof (without openly mentioning the recent Sino-Japanese War). He immediately went on to “conclude”: “Since the Japanese race (*Riben zhi zhong*) originated in our country, it would be illogical to say that we cannot accomplish what they can!”,⁵⁸ thus using the Japanese case to argue that China must have the same potential to rise in the future; this potential only had to be developed properly. And soon Chinese students would go to Japan to study in great numbers, hoping for a convenient “shortcut” to modernity provided by their “Asian neighbour”.⁵⁹

This wave of Chinese students going to Japan, in turn, gave a new twist to the relationship, because the “theoretical” model of Meiji Japan was now counterbalanced by personal experience: where racially discriminatory language towards Japan was common in China before and during the war (“apes”, “dwarfs” etc. – the Japanese obviously doing the same and both heavily influenced by Western stereotypes of the other),⁶⁰ after the war the Japanese looked down on China and the Chinese students (calling them, e.g., with the Japanese equivalent of Western derogatory “Chink”, *chanchan bōzu*, mocking their “monk-like” hairstyle).⁶¹ Through this more intensive personal contact between Chinese and Japanese, the problem of “sameness” or “difference” became more evident: to a certain degree, daily life contrasted with the “theoretical” discourse on “sameness” occasionally put forward by both sides, though with different motives. On the one hand, some Japanese argued for “racial unity” between China and Japan in parallel with a supposed “cultural-scriptural unity” (*dōbun dōshu*), be it out of emotional attachment to Chinese traditional culture engendered by their own educational upbringing, be it to further Japan’s very rational interests on the continent, or be it out of a genuine belief in “(East) Asianness” (Sato 1997). On the other hand, some Chinese argued for “sameness” with Japan to take over methods of reform that had obviously been successful or advocated it out of a genuine belief in Asianness (much rarer, though, in the Chinese case as the grudgingly “receiving” end in a newly adjusted asymmetrical relationship).

⁵⁸ See Liang’s above cited article (1896: 100). Cf. also Tsu (2005: 51), from which I have taken the wording of the sentence translated here. The article was written in 1896, not in 1897, as Tsu suggests.

⁵⁹ The classic study on Chinese students in Japan is Sanetō (1960). See also Huang (1975), Harrell (1992), Gen (1991).

⁶⁰ See Paine (2003) for the Western and Japanese perceptions of this war; for Chinese depictions of war scenes and comments in China, see e.g. the popular *Dianshizhai huabao* (Dianshizhai pictorial) of that period, using the derogatory terms *wo* (dwarfs) and *kou* (pirates) for the Japanese. The official documents also used the term “dwarfs” and “head of dwarfs” for the Tennō and avoided the “normal” term “Japanese” (*Ribenren*). See the material collections on the Sino-Japanese War: Qi (1989–1996) and Shao (2000 [1956]). The Japanese constantly complained about this. For the Chinese views on Japan at the time in general see Chu (1980). For a sample of Japanese depictions of the war see *Japanische Farbholzschnitte II: Kriegsbilder aus der Meiji-Zeit* (1986).

⁶¹ Cf. Keene (1971) and Sanetō (1960). Earlier images tended to be more positive. Friction first arose because of Japanese envy of Chinese trade domination (Kamachi 1980).

This mutual ambivalence continued and was also deeply influenced by the positions of the West: when the Boxer movement arose in China, the West – particularly the German Kaiser as the most influential proponent of the “yellow peril” paradigm – again saw China as the “yellow peril”,⁶² and this in fact was probably *the* historical moment when the term gained real currency in Western politics. The Boxers, seen as a barbaric oriental backward movement, represented brute and blind force against the Allies as bearers of the torch of civilisation. The Japanese in this case openly sided with the Allies, dispatched the biggest contingent of soldiers and took pains to avoid being mixed up with the Chinese. Still, Westerners hesitated to give the “yellow” Japanese full credit for their involvement in the Boxer war (Zachmann 2007: ch. 5).

When the Russo-Japanese war (1904/05) saw Japan victorious, Westerners again identified Japan as the “yellow peril”⁶³ – obviously since the Chinese no longer counted much and because the adversary in this war had been “Western”. In China, the Japanese victory was widely applauded (even though, again, achieved over Chinese soil, i.e. Manchuria, as in the Sino-Japanese War ten years earlier). It was interpreted as demonstrating the ability of “the yellows” and thus could again be used to argue for changes in China, following the Japanese model.⁶⁴ Japan, on the other hand, was averse to “representing the yellows” by her victory and chose to distance herself from the “weak” Chinese who played no role in that war anyway, though it had been fought over her territory.

The problem of “drawing the racial line” went on through history, and very obviously the answer to where that line should be drawn depended much on the agenda of those who argued for or against including the other, reflecting historical power relations. At no time was there an agreed-upon dividing line. When China could “use” Japan as a model or wanted to argue for her own potential, she included Japan. When China suffered from Japanese supremacy or aggression, “racial” difference was underlined. This became most evident during the course of the 20th century. The Second Sino-Japanese War and Japanese war atrocities in China led to a strongly racialised view of the “Japs”: in official remembering of those war atrocities which has played a key role in the government’s own legitimacy rhetoric in the PR China especially in the post-Mao era, i.e. since the 1980s, the “cruelness” of the Japanese character is often stressed: The Japanese are “by nature” bound to do cruel things. They are not portrayed as individuals committing crimes, but as “devils” capable of anything, which serves – in contrast – to underline the “civilised”, meek and victimised good Chinese.⁶⁵ This basically “racist” view of the Japanese

⁶² For the use of the “yellow peril” concept in Western politics see Mehnert (1995).

⁶³ For an illustration of this shift, see also Linhart (2005).

⁶⁴ For Chinese reactions to the Russo-Japanese War see Müller (2007).

⁶⁵ Cf. also the interesting comment of the People’s Liberation Army writer Jin Hui in 1995, cited by Gries, that “other devils” must be further specified, like “Western devils”, “British devils” etc., but the Japanese are just “the devils” (Gries 2004: 93).

is not only transported by the Chinese government via textbooks, official TV, media etc., but is also sustained by popular nationalism which often goes much further in anti-Japanese racism than the government can tolerate for diplomatic reasons.⁶⁶

Conclusion

From the above we may conclude that the Western concept of “race” that was introduced to China in the late 19th century encountered various problems that hampered and coloured its glocalisation. First of all, the term was not easy to coin in Chinese characters, since these always transported connotations that gave the Western term a certain twist, usually in the direction of descent, blending biology and culture. Furthermore, due to the translation work undertaken, the terms were mostly coined in Japan and then taken over into Chinese. In this sense, the concept was doubly “alien” to China. But for the term “race” itself, the question of racial taxonomies in Western race discourse proved to be problematic: how shall we deal with the fact that “they” call “us” “yellow” in the context of a hierarchical assignment of “colours” with “white” at the top? As shown above, there were multiple ways of accepting, remoulding or rejecting this “colour” definition of “yellow”, in all cases reinterpreting it as *not* (or not simply) connoting skin colour, but investing it with some kind of cultural or genealogical meaning, and a general reluctance to use the alternate term “mongoloid” for historical and cultural reasons. In the setting of the time, a purely “scientific” biological categorisation was not of primary relevance, and “science” in any case was clearly no longer an “innocent” enterprise in the context of practiced imperialism around the globe. Thus, the “package” that was received in China was only the combination of “scientific” biology and Social Darwinism that raised the spectre of dire consequences for the survival of “races” in their mutual struggle, interlocking “race” with “cultural-civilizational abilities”. It was therefore only logical that the categories of “race” and “nation” were soon conflated – as they were in the West around the turn of the century.

Furthermore, an uneasiness concerning the racial in- or out-group assigned by the West can be clearly detected in Chinese reactions to the “race” concept. If one accepted the “scientific” contention of mankind being divided into “races”, the question had to be addressed of where the boundaries should be drawn, i.e. who should count as “yellow”? From the Chinese side, this problem revolved around two main issues at the turn of the 20th century: whether or not to include the Manchus (and other minorities) and whether or not to include the Japanese. Here, the main concern was to find a discursive line between “culture” and “race”, which involved the ever present issue of power relations. Thus, China, like Japan, strug-

⁶⁶ Cases in point are anti-Japanese demonstrations, often connected to the last war and the Nanjing massacre 1937, which tend to spin out of government control or are organised privately from the outset, as well as films like “Guizi lai le” (Devils on the Doorstep) in the 1990s that was officially banished for being overly anti-Japanese.

gled with an “unfavourable” foreign concept. But because Japan saw this concept as endangering her rise in the international field, and so being detrimental to her *future*, the Japanese largely avoided applying it to themselves. The Chinese, by contrast, made extensive use of it at times, though twisting it according to their needs. For the concept could be used *both* to explain the reasons for the country’s weakening position in the recent *past*, *and* it could be used to argue the merits of designing one’s own *future*, whether conceived as lying in reform or in revolution. But the addressees of this discursive use of the “race” concept “from below” were inner-Chinese adversaries (if one may for the moment also include the Manchus in this category), *not* “outsiders”. The “foreign concept” thus became a weapon for primarily internal political contests.

In any case, it is obvious that the question of where to draw the “racial” line was never agreed upon and that arguments, for whatever line chosen, were determined by the agenda of the person arguing. The whole “race concept” was manipulated by Chinese intellectuals – on whom the focus has been here – in various ways, often toying with its pseudo-scientificity in the game to win over opponents or at least to argue for one’s own political aims. Thus, the “glocalisers” were active agents and not only “receiving ends” of a Western “hegemonic discourse” on “race”. The answer to the question of being “yellow” or not and of who constitutes “us” was therefore constantly shifting, revealing the crucial importance of linguistic, cultural and above all historical contingency in connection with the specific motivation of individual actors in the “glocalising” process.

Although more than a century has elapsed since the time focused upon here, i.e. around 1900, the basic strategies of handling the “race” concept are still, or rather again, relevant. On the surface of today’s discourse the “outmoded” “race” paradigm is again superseded by the “culture” paradigm, due among other things to globally received concepts like Huntington’s theses which – to a certain extent – have substituted earlier “racial competition” with “civilizational clashes”. Thus the modern Chinese “culture” paradigm is clearly different from the traditional Chinese Confucian one. After Mao and – *a fortiori* – after the Tian’anmen massacre, “race” and “culture” have been consciously blended to bolster a newly defined “Chineseness” with integrative potential vis-à-vis Taiwan and all Overseas Chinese in a hoped-for “rise of China” in the 21st century.⁶⁷ Thus, current Chinese nationalism presents itself under the label of “culture”, but racial elements are integrated (Dikötter 2002: esp. 507) and occasionally resurface, as demonstrated especially by the latent confrontation

⁶⁷ This parallels – and maybe reflects – the Japanese *Nihonjinron* (discourses on Japaneseness) which are an even more outspokenly “racialised” reinterpretation of “Japaneseness”. On the other hand it is interesting to note that at the same time the idea of “East Asianness” came to be propagated via the catch word of a “cultural sphere” of the “common script” (Jap. *Kanji bunkaken*, Chin. *Hanzi wenhuaquan*) or a shared legacy of Confucianism. This again leads to the conclusion that in fact all these constructions are mainly aimed against an “x” which for both countries is still primarily “the West” and only in second place the “Asian neighbour”.

with the “racially-culturally” “different” West⁶⁸ and the “similar” Japanese⁶⁹ as China’s chief competitors on the contemporary global scene.

Glossary

<i>chanchan bōzu</i> チャンチャン坊主	Manzu 滿族
<i>da minzuzhuyi</i> 大民族主義	Menggu 蒙古
<i>dōbun dōshu</i> 同文同種	Miao 苗
<i>dochakuka</i> 土着化	<i>minzu</i> (Jap. <i>minzoku</i>) 民族
Guizi lai le 鬼子來了	<i>minzuzhuyi dawei ren</i> 民族主義大偉人
Han 漢	<i>Nihonjinron</i> 日本人論
Hanzu 漢族	<i>renzhong</i> (Jap. <i>jinshu</i>) 人種
Huangdi 黃帝	<i>Riben zhi zhong</i> 日本之種
<i>Huangshu</i> 黃書	Ribenren 日本人
Hui 回	Song Jiaoren 宋教仁
<i>huangzhong</i> 黃種	Tang Caichang 唐才常
<i>jinrui</i> 人類	<i>Tōyō shiyō</i> 東洋史要
Jinrui Gakkai 人類学会	Wang Fuzhi 王夫之
<i>jinruigaku</i> 人類学	<i>wo</i> 倭
<i>Kanji bunkaken</i> (Chin. <i>Hanzi wenhua-</i> <i>quan</i>) 漢字文化圈	<i>xing</i> 姓
<i>Kokumin shinbun</i> 国民新聞	Yan Fu 嚴複
<i>kou</i> 寇	<i>zhendan</i> 震旦
Kuwabara Jitsuzō 桑原隲藏	<i>zhonglei</i> (Jap. <i>shurui</i>) 種類
Li Hongzhang 李鴻章	<i>zhongzu</i> (Jap. <i>shuzoku</i>) 種族
Li Shizeng 李石曾	<i>zong</i> 宗
	<i>zu</i> 族

⁶⁸ Cf. the Chinese reactions to the NATO Belgrade bombing in which the Chinese embassy was hit (1999), or to the US military “spy” plane incident shortly after, which blended anti-American feeling, a “racial” inferiority complex, alleged historical “victimisation” and global-economic competitiveness against the backdrop of a “containing China” policy advocated in the US. For a recent discussion of these events see Gries (2004).

⁶⁹ Well-known cases include the textbook controversies or the Spratly Islands issue coming up time and again, mixing nationalism, war memories and anti-Japanese feelings with a “racial” overtone, occasionally referring to “common blood” as the distinctive marker of (Greater) “Chineseness”.

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