

Programme of Workshop “Researching Whiteness in a Transnational Pandemic Context”

Date: 1-2 December 2022

Organisers: The ChinaWhite research team (www.china-white.org), Department of Anthropology/AISSR, University of Amsterdam

Critical whiteness studies in Europe and North America have challenged whiteness as a dominant power structure in perpetuating racism and discrimination against ethnic minorities and migrants of colour. With the rise of Asian economies, more and more white westerners are moving to Asia to look for business and job opportunities. This has given rise to a new group of literature examining the transnational circulation of whiteness in East and Southeast Asia. While such scholarship provides fascinating ethnographic case studies on China, Japan, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, there is an urgent need for methodological and theoretical innovations in examining the changing meanings of whiteness in a context of new flows of migration from Euro-America to East and Southeast Asia. The outbreak of Covid-19 in China in early 2020 and its development into a global pandemic not only posed challenges to transnational mobility for various groups of migrants, but significantly restricted onsite research activities. It pushes us to ask new questions addressing the intersection of race, class, gender, nationality, language, and other demarcations of social inequalities, which have been both highlighted and contested by the global spread of Covid-19.

Steven Garner (2007) notes that “whiteness is a phenomenon unthinkable in a context where white does not equal power at some structural level” (51). He also warns against several pitfalls in critical whiteness studies, such as the reification of whiteness as an object of study; the shift from researching whiteness as power structure to researching whiteness as individual identities; and the potential to compromise and even undermine anti-racist research agendas. This international workshop aims to critically engage with Garner’s important yet provocative arguments by considering the pluralization of the meanings of whiteness in the new historical context of the rise of Asian economies, when white migrants no longer enjoy structural domination in Asian-majority societies. We welcome theoretical and empirical studies that address the following questions:

1. What are the theoretical and methodological challenges of researching whiteness in a transnational pandemic context?
2. How to maintain an analytical distinction between whiteness and white people in order to avoid the trap of reifying whiteness as an object of study? What are the methodological challenges and possibilities in maintaining this distinction?

3. How to attend to the tension between the global circulation of white supremacist ideologies and local social, cultural and political contexts in theorizing white racial formation in East and Southeast Asia?
4. What are the pros and cons of using western racial categories in the Asian context, for example, should we use terms such as “whiteness,” “white privilege” uncritically or should we develop new terms and languages to discuss their mutation, reconfiguration, and transformation in a new transnational and cross-cultural context?
5. How to interpret some white migrants’ claim of racism or racial discrimination in Asian societies? How can whiteness studies in Asia serve the political mission of anti-racism without losing sight of the nuances in local people’s agency to strategically engage with whiteness as a power structure?
6. How to address the tension between reifying whiteness studies as a western research paradigm and decolonialization of the western knowledge system, i.e. developing alternative theories on whiteness studies in non-western contexts?
7. Is it possible to develop a critical race studies theory based on the racialization of various groups of white migrants in East and Southeast Asia without running the risk of reifying regional and geopolitical boundaries in an era of the globalization of racism and pandemic politics?

Thursday, 1 December 2022

Panel 1 (10am-12pm): Race, gender, and linguistics in China's ELT industry

Chair: Shanshan Lan

Digital Coordinator: Ke Ma

Discussant: Leon Moosavi, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Sociology, Social Policy and Criminology, the University of Liverpool

Raviv Litman (University of Amsterdam): **'EuroAmerican teachers are our hardware': How private English schools in China maintained their racial ideologies after 2020** [\[online presentation\]](#)

Shuling Wang (University of Cambridge): **Feeling Foreign Teachers as Time Bombs: Feeling Fear, Anger and Exhaustion**

Eric Henry (Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Canada): **The Whiteness of English: Raciolinguistic Chronotopes in Contemporary China**

Registration link: <https://uva-live.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZlqdemsqzwqHdcjPs1ysWANziAN65WpwKww>

Panel 2 (2-4:30 pm): Migration and the boundary of whiteness

Chair: James Farrer

Digital Coordinator: Shanshan Lan

Discussant: Willy Sier

Miloš Debnár (Ryukoku University/University of Vienna): **Locating the complexity of whiteness in the migration context of Japan**

Helena Hof (University of Zurich / Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity): **Disentangling Whiteness in contemporary East and Southeast Asia: A new analytical approach**

Ed Pulford (University of Manchester): **War, pandemic and Eurasian boundaries: Chinese views of the Russia-Ukraine 'conflict'**

Elena Barabantseva (University of Manchester): **Russian wives' perspectives on migration to and married life in China**

Registration link: <https://uva-live.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZEvdud2tqT8oGdG5dVMVgAIgPwHRyDM2kCS0>

Friday, 2 December 2022

Panel 3 (10am-12pm): Race, beauty, technology, and media

Chair: Ed Pulford

Digital Coordinator: Shanshan Lan

Discussant: Ashley Mears, Professor of Sociology, Boston University

Ke Ma (University of Amsterdam): **The fragile beautiful: race-making in China's foreign model industry**

John G. Russell (Gifu University): **Racial Profiling, E-lines, Cosplay, and the Contentious Discourse of Diversity in Japan** [\[online presentation\]](#)

Christina Kefala (University of Amsterdam): **Under the Skin: 'White' artificial intelligence in China's business sector** [\[online presentation\]](#)

Registration link: https://uva-live.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZArceurqDMsHt3CYhxCrj_WkzT82Fbhzd3d

Panel 4 (2-4.30 pm): Rethinking whiteness in the Chinese context

Chair: Eric Henry

Digital Coordinator: Ke Ma

Discussant: Willem van Schendel, Emeritus Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Amsterdam

James Farrer (Sophia University): **A Historical Perspective on Privilege and Exclusion of Elite Migrants in Shanghai**

Aurélia (Baya) M. Ishitsuka (Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales & Université de Genève): **The Ease of the Expat: Whiteness in the Cosmopolitan Enclaves of Shanghai**

Shanshan Lan (University of Amsterdam): **"We are no longer wanted here!": How white European migrants talk about race and Covid-19 in China**

Registration link: <https://uva-live.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZYuf-mrQzovH9OjW853k9cHsrLLVbGWBP39>