Racism in China's English Language Teaching Industry:

English as a Race-Making Technology

Abstract

This article argues that racism is pervasive in China's English language teaching (ELT) industry, yet it is often ignored. It presents that English language education in China should be understood historically in a way that recognizes English as a racializing technology. As a race-making technology, English has continued making modern Chinese subjects while also posing a threat to Chineseness in the 21st century. This intertwining of race and the English language has translated into a massive ELT industry in China that reproduces whiteness, influencing hiring practices and preferences for White English teachers. Additionally, race intersects with gender, nationality, and class, leading to a highly racialized and gendered ELT industry, exemplified in discourses of "foreign experts" and "foreign trash" popular in China's context. The article concludes by asserting that the English language, as a race-making technology, has structured the ELT industry, and discussing its implications for future research and practical changes to challenge intersectional racism in the industry.

Keywords: racism, whiteness, intersectionality, English language teaching, China

1 Introduction

The global spread of English is historically associated with Western imperialism and the power of White people (Appleby, 2014; Phillipson, 2008). Racialization salient in the English language shapes a common sense that English is the property of White native speakers, and that social and cultural superiority comes with speaking English and being proximate to whiteness (Jenks, 2019; Ruecker, 2011; Ruecker & Ives, 2015). China is no exception to this. Over the last two decades, China has become the world's largest ELT market (Sohu, 2019). The intertwining of English and whiteness has translated into a massive demand for foreign teachers, particularly White people from Euro-American countries, to teach English in China, regardless of their professional backgrounds (Henry, 2013; Leonard, 2019; Stanley, 2013). The industry accommodated over 400,000 foreign teachers in 2017, but two-thirds were reported as unqualified who cashed in on their perceived closeness to White native English speakers (Pan, 2019). The racial hegemony in the ELT field formed by linguistic differences marginalizes qualified teachers of Color (Mahboob & Golden, 2013; Motha, 2014) who are stereotyped as "inferior linguistically, economically and culturally due to their non-white skin color" (Wang, 2019).

Race is not the only distinct category in the ELT industry, but also intersects with others, including gender and class. While applying a single lens of race enables us to understand the pervasiveness and pathology of racism in the ELT industry, it actually produces an oversimplified and reductionist perspective of race and racism in English language teaching. Instead, scholars argue to address the gap of decentering racism and exploring how race operates relationally with other social categories in shaping the power dynamics in the ELT industry (Curtis & Romney, 2019; Kubota, 2020; Ruecker, 2011). For example, Von et al. (2020) summarized that female teachers of color in the global ELT academy must constantly negotiate "racial and sexual violence, invisibility, and stereotyping" and "disrespect and challenges to their linguistic, pedagogical, and scholarly legitimacy" (p.15). These racialized and

gendered challenges are similarly experienced by competent female teachers with racially minoritized backgrounds in schools in the United States and Canada (Lee, 2011; Park, 2015; Vitanova, 2016), where they are often delegitimatized, disrespected, and devalued by their students and administrators, and subject to cultural stereotypes, in relation to Caucasian male teachers.

While studies on the politics of ELT and issues of justice and equality in ELT are mainly conducted in English speaking countries such as the United States and Canada, limited literature is available in exploring racism and its intersections in China's ELT context. ELT research in China gives a priority to learning and teaching efficiency and effectiveness, and there is almost no critical examination of race (and other social differences), as is shown in the bibliography of China's English education (Bolton et al., 2015) without a single title on race issues.

I argue in this article that race, racism and whiteness permeate the ELT industry in China. To engage with those issues, I situate China's ELT in its historical, political, social, and economic contexts, and employ Foucault's concept of 'technology' (Foucault, 2012) to conceptualize the English language as a tool that categorizes and ranks human beings, differentiating them from desirable, less desirable and undesirable. This conceptualization is based on Foucault's understanding of technology as encompassing assemblages of knowledge, practices, and discourses (Leonardo & Zembylas, 2013) that produce a disciplinary form of power, through which human beings are shaped, governed, and understood. I argue that English-language has been a technology of race-making in China dating back to its semi-colonial era, and the historical legacies of this English-language production of racialized subjects still felt to this day. By bringing together the relationship between English-language education and racialization in China, this paper highlights that English language education functions to reproduce whiteness, and calls for research and action in the field to dismantle intersectional racism in English language education situated in China and the global ELT industry.

2 Strategic English-language Learning and Race Making Amidst the Legacy of Semi-colonialism in China

Racial formation in China was systematically initiated by the interaction between the local people and foreign colonists throughout the country's semi-colonial history. The colonial system created racial divisions between colonizers and their allies and the native Chinese population for the purposes of oppression and discrimination. The racial schema employed tended to circle around nationality and ethnicity, while language was used as a race-maker that categorized individuals into different groups. Consequently, the colonial racialization process integrated the English language into China as a technology that fundamentally changed how Chinese people perceived themselves and foreigners in the Modern Era.

China's semi-colonial historical period spans the years 1840 and 1945, between the late Qing Empire to the Republican period. During this time, China encountered consistent encroachments onto its territory and challenges to its sovereignty from both Euro-American and Japanese colonizers. Colonial social structures and customs consciously worked to set colonists apart from China's local populations, with racial divisions created to subjugate, discriminate and express imperial domination: extraterritoriality and exemption from Chinese jurisdiction, establishment of their own armed forces, and use of disciplinary tools such as violence, regulation, segregation and exclusion, with racial exclusivity established by permitting only White foreigners access to exceptional spaces (Bickers, 2016; Loy-Wilson, 2017; Marinelli, 2009; Shih, 1996). Despite these limits to its political autonomy, China was not fully occupied by imperialists and has therefore been labelled a "semi-colonial" country by academics (Bickers, 2016). While some argue that the term "semi-colony" downplays the era's colonial realities (Yang, 2019), with some suggesting the region was in fact a "hyper-colony" due to its control by multiple powers (Rogaski, 2014), this article opts for the term semi-colonialism to align with Reinhardt's (2018) view that semi-

colonialism denotes China's particular colonial experience in a historical process enmeshed within Europe's global expansion.

Racial differences were rooted not only in appearance but nationality and ethnicity, with these three dimensions termed as the "fateful triangle" (Hall, 2017) serving imperialism. For example, Bickers (2017) describes how British settlers maintained an imagined Britishness that connoted race (being White), nationality (being British) and ethnicity (practicing British culture). Language was essential to this British identity, with Britons' "refusal, or inability, to learn Chinese" (p.94) stemming from the perceived threat of the Chinese language to "corrupt" their Britishness through its "demeaning or deracinating" character (p.103). English was taught to and used by British children in China while Chinese was outlawed in schools, a reflection of its use as an instrument of racialization.

Colonial structures and daily social practices comprised the process of racialization in China, giving concrete meanings to race as a classification of people and reifying its dominant discourses, ingraining them into modes of knowing (Chung, 2018; Dikötter, 2015; Keevak, 2011). This racialization was successful in having both short- and long-term concrete repercussions: China reinvented its racial classification system, which not only acknowledged the White race as superior (Dikötter, 1997, 2015) but launched a national campaign toward learning from Western settlers, including their languages. As the English language was an essential marker of Britishness, its relationship to Yellowness/Chineseness was inherently complex. While recent studies on China's semi-colonial racialization have emphasized how the Chinese were racialized through physical and national differences, the linguistic dimension of the process has been understudied, but was a significant technology used in race-making.

The English language permeated China through the process of racialization and was used to construct the Chinese nation, influencing how Chinese citizens viewed China's and the world's racial hierarchy. English-language learning was initially imposed by Western missionaries, then actively promoted by the Chinese government

and desired by Chinese citizens. In the mid-19 century, English-speaking missionaries undertook "the White man's burden" of civilizing Chinese people through racialization, opening schools for Chinese children to teach them the English language, culture, and knowledge, solidifying this subject material as belonging to White people. The Chinese government also made strategic decisions for certain Chinese people to learn English as part of the nation's "Self-strengthening" or Westernization Movement (1861-1894), in which China would learn from the West to seek to be strong and prosperous again. While foreigners had previously been despised as barbarians, they were now a source of information, with the guiding principles of Westernization being to learn from the barbarians to conquer them. Still, this learning was only considered to be for instrumental purposes, with "Chinese learning for essence" while "Western learning for instrument" (Fang, 2018, p.19).

In China, it was believed that learning Western economic, industrial, technological, and military knowledge would make the nation strong enough to compete with encroaching Western forces, as well as preserve China's political and cultural authority (Gil & Adamson, 2011). The nation's approach to learning English was framed to keep Chineseness ontologically separate from English, which could therefore be treated simply as an instrument for China to employ strategically in its modernization process. This framing, therefore, clearly alienated the English language from the Chinese people, and has subsequently produced tensions "between a utilitarian perspective of English and the cultural politics of English" (Chowdhury & Le Ha, 2014, p. 7) that persists to this day. More specifically, since this learning campaign, English was no longer been disrespected as a language of foreign barbarians, but a tool for national and ultimately racial survival, as well as modernization and development. That said, it was also regarded as threatening to Chineseness throughout China's modern history and this threat persists today.

When China's history of racialization, semi-colonialism and English-language education are considered in tandem, it is clear that the strategic learning of English

underlays the belief that English is both "a threat to national integrity" and "a conduit for strengthening China's position in the world" (Adamson, 2002, p. 231). This tension is thus embedded in inequitable racial relations, both in China and abroad, due to the influences of colonialism and imperialism, but also in the language itself as a technology of race-making. English was used as a racial marker for Westerners, and therefore marked the Chinese as non-Western, non-White and of a distinct Chinese race. This racialization through the English language has been demonstrated by a constant concern over the English's ability to erode Chineseness. In addition, English has also served to produce and demarcate various categories of humans considered more or less desirable to the Chinese society. Those with English competency, as well as the majority of elite intellectuals, were perceived as desirable and associated with capacities that could save Yellowness from foreign domination and build a strong Chinese nation, restoring China's pre-eminence in the world. This account of racialization and English therefore centers on how English historically produced and translated hegemonic racial power dynamics, revealing that English has been salient in Chinese nationalism and racialization.

3 Colonial Legacies, Rising Nationalism and English in the 21st Century

China's semi-colonial era was not merely a discrete historical period, but a lasting legacy that left psychological, ideological and epistemological marks on Chinese culture. Following its independence from imperial powers, China made an effort to modernize itself, and has renewed its focus on a rejuvenated Chineseness that once again adopts Western learning as a means of making China competitive with the West. But in so doing, China's modernization does not challenge global racial regimes but perpetuates White supremacy, even while openly asserting Chineseness, threatening Western countries and devaluing whiteness. Mass English-language education efforts have been launched to nurture modern Chinese citizens throughout the 21st century, thereby continuing to produce racialized subjects, as English is the

language associated with Western White people. This ideology informs why and for whom Chinese people study English, and how English language is taught in China.

Since the Reform and Opening Up policy in 1978, China has undergone massive shifts toward modernization and development, but in so doing has embedded a colonial modernity (Barlow, 1997) within its modernization processes. As Hevia (2003) observes, justification for violence in semi-imperial China was well served by the knowledge production of racial structures that upheld White supremacy and racialized the colonized as inferiors, placing China and its people firmly within colonial frameworks. Faced with power differentials between the West and China, the Chinese government used Euro-American imperial archives to support their anti-imperialist arguments, with China depicting itself as temporarily weak and inferior but in the process of recovering Chinese greatness. This discourse of regenerating Chineseness has remained dominant through China's modern and contemporary periods, from Chairman Mao Zedong's speech at the founding of the PRC in 1949 stating that China would "no longer be a nation subject to insult and humiliation" (Mao, 1977) to President Xi Jinping's call for building cultural confidence and realizing the Chinese dream of rejuvenating the Chinese nation more recently (Gao, 2022). These discourses reflect the translation of 19th century colonial violence into Chinese "century of national humiliation" (Callahan, 2010), the result of an ephemeral inferiority that can be overcome to achieve an envisioned glorious future where the great Chinese culture and Chinese nation can be restored. While accusing colonial powers of crimes and atrocities against humanity, China started a long journey till today of a self-reflection on the imperial and colonial trauma and comes up with a national warning that "the backward will be beaten" (Wang, 2020). This view further stimulates China's modern development by stirring anxieties that strength is the only method of avoiding submission, further inserting itself into the paradigm of learning from the west to build itself up. China's modernity reflects colonial modernity to aspire to obtain the power of the western whiteness so as to

confront western hegemony which is perceived as the source of China's national insecurity.

Being subject to a global system of White supremacy embedded in power imbalances, China's modernization sees its racialization impacted by colonial legacies. White privilege is still on display in China, and while the unequal rights enjoyed by foreigners in the treaty port era were discarded after World War II, discourses of Chinese individuals as "second-class citizens" periodically resurge in contemporary China. For example, following China's market reforms, Petracca (1990) warned of "the return to second-class citizenship", as China's efforts to attract foreign investment reaffirmed "Western ethnocentrism and latent biases against the Chinese" and "create[d] a variety of institutionalized forms of discrimination against Chinese citizens" (p.82). The term "super-citizen treatment" has been coined in contemporary China to criticize this preferential treatment accorded to White foreigners (Lan, 2017; Wen, 2006), as well as satirize the contrasting status of the Chinese people as "second-class citizens" in their own country. The term *chongyang meiwai* has also resurfaced during recent waves of nationalism and populism, used to criticize the perceived obsessions of some Chinese individuals with foreign, especially Western, goods and people. This ethnonationalist response, which depicts China as a rising power, may be construed as an attempt to challenge the view that it is "on the receiving end of knowledge produced in the West" (Gao, 2012, p. 362), an expression of Chinese confidence.

A telling sign that colonial legacies in China have not been fully addressed is the contemporary notion of the desirable modern Chinese subject as an individual combining the best qualities of both Eastern and Western cultures. While some scholars have argued that the Chinese were put in an in-between rung in the colonial racial hierarchy to buffer potential racial conflicts between White and Black or Indigenous people (Lowe, 2015), Teng (2006) argues that China has never been a passive receiver and learner of this racial position but a creator pursuing a hybrid

"not-White" but "like-White" racial identity (p. 134). This imagined hybrid subject upholds racist colonial norms, disqualifying blackness from the achievement of superior Chineseness in its compromising Western, or White, properties. Meanwhile, the past decade has seen a large number of Chinese students studying abroad in White-dominated English-speaking countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom, where Chinese students account for the largest share of international students (Xu et al., 2021). These overseas returnees are seen as modernized subjects who embody a desirable Chineseness characterized by globality (McPherron & McIntosh, 2020).

In China, the English language remains a compulsory school subject to train modern Chinese citizens, which has resulted in a massive billion-dollar ELT industry. English has been expanded from its initial restrictions to tertiary education for the purpose of learning science and technology to one of the three compulsory subjects included in academic assessments at every educational level, beginning in primary school. Acquiring English is therefore a basic requirement for promoting the overall quality of the Chinese people, building a strong nation, and asserting China on the global stage. As stipulated in the national curriculum standard (MoE, 2011), the "nature" of China's English curriculum in China is as follows:

> Learning and using English plays an important role in absorbing the achievements of human civilization, drawing lessons from advanced foreign science and technology, and enhancing mutual understanding between China and the world. Offering English courses through compulsory education can lay the foundation for improving national literacy for our entire country… and improving its international competitiveness.

English is also described as having "the dual nature of instrumentality and humanism" for students:

As far as instrumentality is concerned, the English curriculum

undertakes the task of cultivating students' basic English literacy and

developing their thinking abilities… As far as humanity is concerned,

the English curriculum undertakes the task of improving students'

comprehensive humanistic quality, that is, students can broaden their

horizons, enrich their life experiences, form cross-cultural

consciousness, enhance their patriotism and develop their innovative

abilities, forming good character and a correct outlook on life and

values through English courses.

English in China therefore seems to embody everything desirable, with material and moral/spiritual advantages that include scientific and technological advancements, national literacy, human civilization, humanity, favorable ways of thinking, good personal character, and even correct values. The Chinese government has consistently stated that English is of great significance to developing both individual citizens and national character, as learning English will allow young people to adapt to economic globalization (MoE, 2011) and help China meet the challenges of "modernization, globalization and future development" (MoE, 2001). Rather than working in a contradictory fashion, as English is defined by its opposition to Chineseness, the language is championed as a strategy for strengthening the Chinese nation, and individuals may seek self-improvement through English and therefore perform their social obligation toward national development (Yu, 2016). Thus, embracing Western knowledge and the English language is seen as ultimately resulting in advocating for China's voice and increasing its cultural influence in the world (Woodward, 2006).

While no single word from the national education documents explicitly refers to whiteness, it follows a similar trope since the semi-colonial history that English as a useful language should be strategically embraced without threatening but strengthening Chineseness. English is regarded as a foreign language, a language that belongs to White people, and a language that must be learned for China and Chinese

people to catch up with the western powers, to have a voice in the global stage, and to exert global dominance. However, this desire to pursue recognition in the global stage through the strategic learning of English means China and Chinese people are subject to a system of meanings based on western hegemony that makes English a powerful language. Colonialism and imperialism has contributed to a hegemony of English as a global language, allowing English to be projected as a panacea for enhancing national power by many non-English speaking countries (Phillipson, 1992), motivating the desire to learn English for social mobility. Learning English thus becomes an aspirational norm that is indexed to whiteness, as revealed by Shahjahan and Edwards (2022). China's nation, institutions and individuals are organized around this norm, despite its clear racial overtones, as subscribing to it allows China to enter the symbolic order of ideologies that may grant them power. The strategic learning of English therefore does not necessarily challenge Western hegemony, as it reproduces English as White property and a language for Western-centric knowledge perceived as modern.

Simultaneously, just as English has been constructed in relation to whiteness, Mandarin, as the state-sanctioned lingua franca, has been instrumental in constructing a singular Chineseness, often at the expense of minority languages and local dialects, derogatively labeled as "土话" or "dirty talk", a term that Henry (2021, p29) notes symbolizes perceived backwardness and rurality. Such linguistic stratification not only enforces a monolithic national identity but also perpetuates the marginalization of speakers of these local tongues. This is particularly true for ethnic minorities and rural migrants, who, in addition to often lacking proficiency in English, are frequently labeled as bearers of low quality (素质, suzhi), signifying inferior cultural capital and positioning them as undesirable Chinese citizens (Han, 2010). Such dynamics underscore the role of language as a race-making technology within China's multilingual context, where English, particularly as spoken by White individuals, is seen as the standard for modernity and mobility whereas standard Mandarin is often used to assert urban Chinese authenticity (Litman & Wang, 2023) .

My approach to the history of English and race in China outlines how the English language has worked as a technology of race making while rooting the intersection of English and whiteness in the semi-colonialism of 19th century China. The racialization process has resulted in a Chinese desire to learn from the West in order to climb the racial ladder and to learn English as a means for the nation to survive and thrive. Learning English has therefore played a crucial role in the self-identification of Chinese citizens while simultaneously posing a threat to erode Chineseness under the White, Western benchmarks, despite China's shift from racial survival in semi-colonial era to modernization and globalization in the 21st century and its ambition to reclaim Great China in recent years.

The subsequent analysis demonstrates how English, as a race-making technology shaped by semi-colonial power relations, continues to exert a significant influence on China's ELT industry. It intersects with gender and class in shaping the nature of the ELT industry, manifest in the commodification of whiteness in English language education, the desirability of White (male) teachers, and institutional practices such as discriminatory hiring practices and pay disparities. These intersections reveal a spectrum wherein foreign educators are variably perceived as idealized figures or objects of xenophobia, thereby illustrating how English language education perpetuates racial demarcations and contributes to the construction of an aspirational Chinese national identity in its global engagements.

4 Race and Its Entanglement with the Bourgeoning English Language Teaching Industry in China

According to Gao (2021), contemporary Chinese society's desired norm is an aspirational internationalism, which itself is defined by idealized Western images. The Chinese people's cosmopolitan aspirations are driven by a desire to acquire and display Western symbolic markers, including English-language learning. Learning English from White instructors in particular has become one way of approaching this aspirational Chineseness, with the fast-growing ELT industry fueling a steady stream

of Western ELT suppliers in the form of private English training and international schools. This industry therefore utilizes entrenched racial differences, as high-fee-charging English schools and middle-class families demand White English-language teachers. English therefore once again functions as a racializing technology, with English belonging to White people from Western countries and Chinese people desiring to learn English, ideally from White people, to strengthen Chineseness.

In China, English language education has experienced rapid expansion, as the country continues to strive for globalization and internationalization. English has become a symbol of modernity, progress and success, and it is believed that mastering the language will help them to achieve these goals. Mass public English education since 2000 has not met people's desire to master the language, as English has been viewed as indispensable to national modernization, development, and globalization (MoE, 2001). Outside of the public education system, English has been commodified for middle-class customers and privatized English language service has been a norm, with English-language international schools and training institutions springing up in cities. By 2022, China has been the country with the largest number of English-speaking international schools in the globe (Cheng, 2020), rising from 843 in 2013 to about 1,400 by 2022 (Sohu, 2022). These schools hire foreign teachers to provide an immersive English environment for students and authentic American and British education, aiming to cultivate English as a quasi-mother tongue among students. Apart from international schools, private training institutions, or tutoring schools, were in every corner of most cities. In 2017 alone, it was estimated that more than 400,000 private training centers sprang up across China in 2017 alone (MoE, 2018). These institutions made up a massive private tutoring industry that worth an estimated $310 billion (Morgan, 2022). Many students receive private tuition in English, and a large number of private training institutions also tried to hire foreign teachers to teach oral English, particularly to young children. This shows that English language teaching industry is complex and makes a huge sector in the education economy, where foreign teachers become a hot commodity.

Accompanied with the commodification of English is the commodification of whiteness: Western education and culture as well as White people (Henry, 2021; Lan, 2022; Stanley, 2013). No matter it is English-medium international schools and training institutions for oral English, these schools tend to promote White Western culture and values as the standard for language proficiency and success. This can be seen in the emphasis on Standard English, with the promotion and perpetuation of American or British English accents that are deemed to be correct or proper. This version of the English language is often associated with White, middle-class, native speakers. Additionally, the portrayal of white, Western-looking teachers in English language program advertisements as the successful and accomplished speakers of the language commodifies whiteness in English language learning to attract students, further reinforcing the idea that whiteness is the norm and ideal in English language education.

The commodification of whiteness in English language education has produced significant impacts, leading to a highly racialized and a huge shadow ELT industry. Studies reveal the prevailing discriminatory hiring practices that hierarchize teachers based on their race upon their entry into the ELT industry. As Lan (2022) reported, the English teaching industry in China prioritizes White appearance over qualifications, resulting in a thriving underground market for White individuals to easily find work in English teaching. While some qualified foreign teachers join the profession, the industry is filled with a large number of unqualified foreign teachers who are predominantly White (Pieke, 2012), including those from Russia and Ukraine (Sohu 2019), to take advantage of their perceived closeness to White native English speakers. In addition, the privileging of somatic whiteness in China's ELT market also results in pay disparities based on race (Lan, 2022). These discriminatory employment practices reinforce whiteness, privileging White people in the English teaching profession and marginalizing qualified teachers of Color, placing them in a subordinate and disadvantaged position when seeking employment. By creating and

maintaining divisions of English teachers based on race and accents, these practices create hierarchies of value and worth among English teachers.

When the ELT industry commodifies whiteness, a considerable number of White people tap on their racial privilege to get a teaching job. However, they have to perform whiteness predicated on China's constructions of the typical Western Other (Stanley 2013). In the ELT industry, foreign teachers are supposed to possess visual, auditory, and personal signifiers of whiteness. Visually, recruiters particularly looked for young and White candidates with blond hair (Wang 2019); auditorily, most job posts expect teacher candidates to speak Standard English, which means American, British or Australia English; personally, as Stanley (2013) observed, foreign teachers had to perform stereotypical personality of "foreignness" in classroom to act like "a foreign monkey" (p138) to entertain students. He concluded that there is a vicious circle in the ELT industry of "imagination, representation, performance, and reification" (p156).

Untangling the relationship between whiteness and English reveals that race is a key factor in shaping the ELT industry. However, race does not operate alone but intersects with gender, nationality, and class, leading to a highly racialized and gendered ELT industry, exemplified in discourses of "foreign experts" and "foreign trash".

5 An intersectional Perspective: Foreign Teachers as Foreign Experts or Foreign Tash

With the considerable ELT industry, teaching English has been the default job for White people in China (Mathews et al., 2017). White teachers' mere presence invokes various symbolic associations with whiteness: presumed English language proficiency, advanced western culture, and cosmopolitanism (Debnár, 2016; Henry, 2013), all of which Chinese teachers are not supposed to obtain. As in China's immigration category of "foreign expert", White teachers, whether qualified or not,

receive immediate respect, popularity, and preferential treatments in schools both in financial benefits (J. Liu, 2018) and social privileges (X. Liu, 2018).

The ELT industry is also a highly racialized, gendered, and sexualized field. While there are no statistics of the demographics of foreign teachers in China, it was revealed that 60 percent foreigners in China are males (Zhang [张] et al., 2015). This ratio of males could be higher among foreign teachers based on Stanley's study (2013) and my experience in the industry. Despite the feminization of the ELT industry, there is an overrepresentation of White Western men in English language teaching, and this group of teachers enjoy particular privileges from social, cultural, economic, and sexual domains because of their assumed masculinity, Westerness/whiteness and heterosexuality (Appleby, 2016). Stanley (2012) gives a particular focus on examining White male foreign English teachers in mainland China. The seven English teachers working in a Chinese university reported that they were treated like "superheroes" by Chinese women in the sexual field. They portrayed themselves as being thought to be successful sexually, financially, and romantically. Stanley (2013) found the participants highlighted prevalent problematic behaviors among White men teachers that may not have been socially acceptable in their own societies, such as sexual promiscuity, participating in unethical and exploitative sexual interactions with college-level students. This is consistent with Farrer (2010)'s finding that White Western men interviewed found Shanghai a social and sexual refuge where they could still find willing sex partners despite their advanced age and modest incomes. Henry (2021) found "White teachers exist as a romantic foil for their female Chinese interlocutors, acting as libidinal commentary on transnational capitalism itself" (p.150). This sex power dynamics between White teachers and Chinese women should be understood in racial and linguistic terms, as the power of whiteness and English can subject White males into a game of sexual conquests and create sexual desire among women in East Asia (Appleby, 2014; Kubota, 2011; Lan, 2011; Takahashi, 2012), including China.

While White foreign teachers tend to be celebrated, the term "foreign trash" suggests Chinese people's rising hostility towards foreign teachers. With increasing mainstream media reports on illegal White teachers being arrested, detained, and deported because they worked without an appropriate visa, took drugs, were criminal fugitives (Keeling, 2018), or engaged in sexual assault of students (Zou, 2019), an awareness and moral denouncement have been raised that not all whites are desirable. These illegal White teachers are called "foreign trash" (Sohu, 2019). This term is similar to "white trash" used in the west to describe the undeserving poor and the culturally deprived. "Foreign trash" is used as a slur to describe foreign teachers as low-quality foreigners and economic and sexual refugees in China (Farrer, 2010). Foreign trash thus depicts foreign teachers as "bad white people," a group of lower-class White people who do not live up to the middle-class moral exemplar and comportment (Sullivan, 2014, p. 30) that Chinese expect of an English-speaking White person.

While the majority of foreign teachers are White, the minority of teachers of Color, particularly Black teachers, bear the brunt of being called foreign trash. Blatant racism in the industry has already made it very difficult for Black teachers to obtain a teaching job in China, but coupled with the overarching discourse in China that constitutes Black people as poor, hypersexual and potential criminals, Black males, including English teachers, are usually the target foreign trash and constructed as aggressors who pose a threat to Chinese women's chastity and to the purity of the Chinese blood and race (Haugen, 2019).

Terms, such as "foreign experts" and "foreign trash", are circulating in everyday conversation and in the medias. They point to the interplay of race, gender and class in this industry. Foreign teachers have to perform traits of whiteness expected by Chinese people, which include a "right" image, a "right" nationality, proper class dispositions, and proper gender and sexual performances. If failing to meet such expectations, foreign teachers are likely to encounter disrespect, suspicion, hostility,

harassment, and even xenophobia. Foreign teachers can be positioned by Chinese people as "superstars" or "devils" (Leonard,2019), as "token foreigners" (Henry, 2021), and as "white monkey" (Stanley, 2013) but educators. The desire for White foreign teachers can be a desire for modernity, but also for the making of Chineseness, as the failing of foreigners was used to rearticulate "the values and qualities of their own Chineseness" (Henry, 2021).

6 Discussion and Conclusion

In this paper, I argue that racism is a central yet ignored challenge in China's ELT industry that should be understood historically. I approach the history of China's English language education in a way that recognizes English as a racializing technology, as the language has contributed to categorizing, shaping, and producing humans as more or less desirable to the Chinese society. I then reveal how race continues to structure the ELT industry and shape everyday practices of desiring, recruiting and consuming White English teachers, which reinforces and reproduces whiteness. Race, intersecting with other vectors such as gender and class, has significantly shaped very different professional lives of English teachers, as revealed by the discourses of foreign experts and foreign trash.

While I center race in examining China's ELT industry, I could locate dearth of literature on the field. Among this limited literature, they were mostly conducted by White scholars and focused on examining the experiences of White teachers, particularly White male teachers. However, I regard this kind of research inadequate, despite being valuable, because it tends to reproduce whiteness as a norm in the industry, by restating the privileges enjoyed by White people and exposing their "precariousness" (Chan, 2021; Lan, 2022) when they are structurally advantaged in the field. These studies are limited in terms of their blind spots on how whiteness impacts students and teachers of Color, who are marginalized in the industry.

Having been a woman teacher of English in China for three years, I experience how whiteness can negatively impact my professional life, as well as my health and wellbeing. By the sides of White foreign teachers, there are always Chinese teachers of English language who work as their teaching assistants. Being nonnative English speakers, nonwhite, female, and without a foreign passport, Chinese women teachers, while being well-trained and highly qualified, are not seen as valuable or authoritative teachers, and thus receive very differential treatments from school managers, students, parents, and foreign teachers. Chinese women teachers are frequently subject to exploitation, marginalization, and neglect, and are often rendered invisible in patriarchal systems of power that are shaped by both race and gender. This same dilemma also happens to other teachers of Color. A Black colleague of mine at the University of Cambridge, with TESOL certificate and many years of English teaching, was rejected multiple times to be an English teacher in China, simply because he is Black. Filipino teachers have been hired as second choice and paid much lower than White teachers since the tight immigration control in China due to the pandemic (Litman, 2022). Race, intersecting with gender, class and nationality, plays a significant role in determining opportunities, treatment, and success in the industry. The voices of teachers of Color in China's ELT industry are not heard. Their accounts are significant in providing counternarratives to challenge, disrupt and dismantle whiteness and intersectional racism in the industry.

I understand that there can be difficulties and risks in discussing race issues in China, even in a nice field of English education. Unlike the US where racism has been an issue discussed in everyday life, Cheng (2019), a historian researching race in China, argues that there was limited space to discuss race in China for three reasons:

1. the official discourse from the party-state that anti-foreigner racism does not exist in China;

2. race and racism as a blind spot in the research of modern history;

3. misunderstanding of racism among the general public as a highly political concept that has no root in Chinese society.

However, I am moving against the grain of the dominant discourse concerning the denial of race in China and argue that race plays a vital role in shaping China's ELT industry, a stance that aligns with the growing academic focus on the interplay between race and language learning in the global ELT industry. English classroom is perhaps the only place where most students in China have chances to frequently interact with foreigners and learn about racial differences/diversity. Therefore, it is why I think ELT should be the forefront field to talk about race, to disrupt the racial learning of whiteness, and to promote racial equality, diversity and inclusion. I thus expect this article to open academic conversations on race and English teaching in China, and call for more research that foregrounds local stakeholders' experiences, including teachers, students, parents, and school leaders, to reveal and challenge structural, institutional, epistemological and individual racism in the industry (Kubota, 2020) that take into intersectional perspectives. This call to contextualizing the examination of race in education contributes to the broader global academic discussions in ethnic and race studies, education, and critical pedagogy.

As this article argues, the crucial first step in transforming China's ELT industry is to address the dual challenge of recognizing the role of English in race-making while simultaneously striving to delink English from its racialized legacy. This requires a critical engagement with the local and global colonial history of the language's dominance, historically intertwined with White, Western supremacy. Simultaneously, delinking English from this racialized legacy can begin with curricular and pedagogical changes that challenge the fixed boundary that English is inherently linked to whiteness and is excluded from Chineseness. An example is a creative and fluid use of English. Li (2022) explores linguistic features unique to regional English variations, often encapsulated by the term "Chinglish", which has been reclaimed from its origins as a pidgin trade language to describe a variety of English in China

without any negative connotations of inferiority to Standard English. By integrating English with Chinese cultural and linguistic characteristic, this approach to English requires a departure from traditional models that elevate native speaker norms and instead celebrates its creative uses that transcend national and racial boundaries, effectively delinking English from being exclusively a property of White native speakers and repositioning English as a medium for linguistic and cultural exchange. Practically, this means developing curricula that incorporate local forms of English and pedagogies that reflect a globally inclusive English. Such an approach not only challenges the status quo but also validates and elevates the expertise of local teachers, affirming their legitimacy as qualified educators on par with their White counterparts.

The decoupling process also involves critically examining the commodification of English and challenging the systems that perpetuate racial hierarchies within the language education industry. Key steps include altering discriminatory hiring practices to prioritize candidates' qualifications and skills over race, gender, or nationality, implementing equitable pay structures, providing professional development opportunities for all, and acknowledging the expertise of teachers of Color- common demands among industry professionals. These institutional changes will foster a more inclusive teaching workforce, enabling ELT institutions to dismantle racism and sexism. However, these steps are not enough on their own. Following critical scholars' stance on linguistic entrepreneurship (De Costa et al., 2016; Kubota, 2021), it is imperative to address systemic inequalities and challenge neoliberal ideologies that shape and limit people's desire to learn English solely for economic gains. As Spivak (2004) suggests, there's a need to "rearrange desires non-coercively" (p. 532) in order to identify and sever the colonial, racist, sexist, and capitalist strings manipulating the ELT market (Gerald, 2020).

The success of these bottom-up efforts at addressing intersectional racism relies on structural changes within the ELT industry. Currently, state policies mandating that

foreign English-language teachers be native speakers from English-speaking nations (FUWU, 2017) inadvertently encourage ELT institutions to favor White candidates from inner-circle countries, a practice that needs to be discontinued. Additionally, the binary categories of foreign and Chinese teachers, especially prevalent in China, should be abolished, as they perpetuate essentialized differences about English teachers, allowing ELT institutions to hierarchize teachers based on race, nationality, language and other "foreign" differences, thus exploiting and capitalizing on these disparities. Institutionalizing these legal and regulatory changes is vital for promoting more diverse, inclusive, and equitable ELT, where qualified English teachers from varied backgrounds are recognized and valued equally.

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