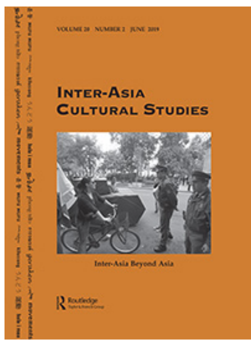

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Han Chinese racism and Malaysian contexts: cosmopolitan racial formations in Tan Twan Eng's *The Garden of Evening Mists*

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ABSTRACT
This essay explores what it means to theorize Han racism in Malaysian contexts, where ethnic Chinese constitute a minority. Given the history of Malay political dominance and recent intensification of Malay-Muslim ethno-nationalism as part of a backlash against the historic change of government in 2018, theorizing Han racism might seem like a move to downplay these factors and minimize the various forms of racialized violence directed at Chinese identified bodies. To the contrary, I show that doing so involves tracking the transnational process of racial production, which requires understanding how racist and capitalist modes of hierarchy operate in tandem, and how racial discourses are used by the state to manage domestic political exigencies and global economic forces to facilitate ongoing capitalist accumulation. I then turn to consider the arena of world Anglophone literature, which has emerged as a transnational site for narrating Chinese Malaysian experiences, by considering an exemplary text, a 2012 novel by Tan Twan Eng, *The Garden of Evening Mists*. In examining the material and ideological conditions of the global literary marketplace in shaping the novel, I consider how the cosmopolitan nature of global Anglophone literary production can obscure the racial underpinnings of its cultural productions as in the case of Tan's novel.

KEYWORDS
Chineseness; cosmopolitanism; Han Chinese racism; Malaysian literature in English; world literature; global Anglophone novel

Theorizing Han Chinese racism

In the epilogue of his influential book, *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization*, Chen (2010, 4, 266) underscores the need for a more rigorous theorization of what he terms, "Han Chinese racism" and calls upon "Chinese living in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, and mainland China … to work together to think through the issue of racism in comparative terms." In many ways, Ong's (1999) work, particularly her book, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*, published eleven years earlier, establishes important groundwork for this urgent task and offers a few correctives to the premise he lays out for doing so. That the subject of racism in Chen's book arises as an afterthought rather than as a central feature of de-imperialization implies the presupposition that racism is an epiphenomenon of China's recent rise as a global economic superpower. However, Ong argues that masculinist, racialized discourses of Chineseness have played an instrumental role – and is not simply a byproduct – in the rapid development of Asian Pacific economies in the late twentieth century. These discourses articulate conflicting notions of Chineseness as referring to "a territorially bounded moral entity" on one hand and "deterritorialized moral economic force" on the other; nevertheless, they converge on the notion of a shared racial consciousness (Chineseness

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based on kinship and blood ties) buttressed by neo-Confucian thought, thereby laying claim to an "alternative modernity" based on so-called Asian values to contest Western dominance in the global economy (Ong 1999, 55–56, 80).[1] While Chen may be right in noting that "Han racism existed long before China's encounter with the West" and that its very logic constitutes the "epistemological foundation of the Chinese empire" (Chen 2010, 260, 264), Ong persuasively demonstrates that contemporary racializations of Chineseness are not solely directed by mainland Chinese state actors or its intellectual class, but co-produced with Chinese overseas, Singapore being one prominent example (1999, 52–83). While the racialist premise of these discourses of Chineseness may be shared by both mainland and overseas Chinese parties promoting them, Ong also notes that the meanings generated from these discourses and their ramifications in their respective contexts are hardly uniform.

The careful work that Ong performs in mapping out the "situated practices" of the "transnational process" of Chinese racial discourse underscores the need to track the histories of racial subject formation before one can theorize Han racism (Ong 1999, 17). While the association of Chineseness with capitalism can certainly be used as a means of asserting cultural dominance over non-Chinese others, not all persons with whom the label, "Chinese," is identified stand to gain from such ideological discourses. Indeed, these discourses contribute to obscuring the ways in which capitalist modes of accumulation often rely on exploitative practices that especially target women and low-wage workers (Nonini 1997; Ong 1999). In Southeast Asian countries where ethnic Han Chinese constitute a minority, the racialization of Chineseness in economic terms goes back to the period of European colonial rule and has historically generated ambivalent effects. For instance, compared to other ethnic groups, Chinese business-owning classes have benefited from the racialized management of the colonial mercantile economy, serving as "essential coadjutors" of European rule and the "middleman minority […] between ruler and ruled" in trade and commerce (Kuhn 2008, 3; Reid 2009, 56). In the twenty-first century, Chinese businesses are uniquely positioned to reap financial gains via economic opportunities fostered through guanxi networks with China. At the same time, this has also contributed to emphasizing the outsider status of Chinese, thereby undermining their claims to national belonging; in times of economic downturn, the Chinese can become racialized targets of violence, serving as political scapegoats who are blamed for hardships caused by systemic crises (Cheah 2000, 9–10). The challenge of theorizing Han racism thus lies in the fact that "Chinese" is a volatile or unstable signifier, not only in the sense that the term encompasses a range of heterogeneous populations scattered across different locations, but also that its meanings can produce different political ramifications for the Chinese-identified subject depending on the moment in time.

This essay explores what it means to theorize Han racism in Malaysia, where ethnic Chinese constitute a minority, in light of transnational processes of racial production. To do so would first require interrogating the idea that racism is a form of domination by a majority power over minoritized groups, which I tackle by examining the limits of racial privilege as a critical concept. This conception of racism arguably derives from white settler colonial contexts and while majoritarian power is a significant factor in reinforcing racial dominance, this point can obscure rather than explain the workings of Chinese racism in a context like Malaysia. Accomplishing the latter, as I will demonstrate, requires understanding how the historical process of Chinese racial formation is shaped by transnational forces of capital and domestic political exigencies. Formulated by the American sociologists Michael Omi and Howard Winant, the notion of racial formation is useful for my analysis because it understands race not as an ontological given, but as "sociohistorical process," one that "[occurs] through a linkage between structure *and* signification" (Omi and Winant 2015, 109, 124, emphasis added). Such an approach operates on the premise that racial significations in and

of themselves cannot be evaluated as being racist or otherwise unless they are considered in relation to the institutional structures in which they reside. Given that the signifier, "Chinese," can generate multiple, even contradictory meanings depending on occasion and context, the notion of racial formation then allows for a more incisive analysis of under what conditions and for what purpose a racial term is mobilized.

I then consider the arena of world Anglophone literature, yet another transnational site of Chinese Malaysian cultural production, by examining an emblematic example, Tan Twan Eng's 2012 novel, *The Garden of Evening Mists*. Whereas the transnational discourses of Chineseness that dovetail with the political narrative of rising Asia are overtly cast in racialist terms, the cosmopolitan nature of global Anglophone literary production can render the racial implications of its cultural productions more covertly. As I demonstrate, Tan's novel can simultaneously be read as a conscious effort to transcend imperial and postcolonial nationalist racialism by seeking recourse through transnational aesthetic and literary discourses; in its efforts to do so, however, the novel does not so much succeed in transcending race than it does in demonstrating – if, inadvertently – that the process of cosmopolitan subject formation remains entangled within processes of racialization. My point in doing so is not simply to point out that the text can be read as an anti-racist expression in one interpretive context while revealing its unconscious racism in another. Rather, it is to provide a sense of the protean nature of race as it operates in a variety of transnational contexts.

The limits of Chinese privilege as critical concept

It is somewhat striking to see Malaysia included in a list of countries in which Han Chinese racism occurs given the existence of Malay political hegemony since the postcolonial nation-state's founding in 1957. Ethnic Han Chinese constitute a numerical minority, albeit the largest, and its status as such is the consequence of deliberate political engineering, when Singapore due to Cold War exigencies sought to join the Federation of Malaya in its transition to formal independence. Given that such an arrangement risked the Chinese becoming the majority of the national population, the British colonies of Sarawak and British North Borneo (now known as Sabah) were included in the merger to form Malaysia in 1963 on the basis that their indigenous populations would shore up the numbers of *bumiputera* (i.e. autochthonous) citizens to help maintain Malay hegemony. The 13 May 1969 incident – an outbreak of deadly violence in Kuala Lumpur initiated by Malay groups targeting the Chinese following a narrower electoral margin of victory by the ruling coalition – remains to this day a politically contentious subject in public memory. In the wake of that watershed moment, the New Economic Policy of 1971 was implemented, putting in place widespread affirmative action policies favouring *bumiputera* citizens; significantly, policies designed to increase *bumiputera* equity ownership and corporate power resulted in fostering a culture of corruption and political patronage. While the Pakatan Harapan alliance, which ran on the platform of instituting reforms to bring about a more transparent and equitable environment for its multi-racial citizenry, successfully ousted the incumbent Barisan Nasional coalition in 2018, Malay political dominance continues to play a major factor in power-sharing negotiations within the newly elected government; Malay-Muslim nationalism has also arguably intensified at the grassroots level as part of a political backlash (Ooi 2018).

This cursory historical overview suggests that Chinese Malaysians are more likely to be viewed as victims of racial discrimination rather than as agents of racism, especially if racism is understood as a phenomenon that benefits a dominant majority group at the expense of a minority population. This popular understanding of racism forms the underlying premise of the notion of racial privilege,

which was first articulated in 1988 by the women's studies scholar Peggy McIntosh to highlight white dominance in the United States and subsequently adapted by others to analyze other national contexts. In Singapore, for example, the activist Sangeetha Thanapal uses the concept of Chinese privilege to highlight the structural and extra-institutional advantages afforded to the ethnic majority, which are made invisible and thus normalized by the city-state's official policy of multiracialism that claims to recognize the parity of different racial groups (Dierkes-Thrun 2015).[2] Although recognizing that the historical and social conditions in the United States substantially differ from Singapore, Thanapal nonetheless suggests that the concept of privilege can be used "by analogy" given that in both countries, the dominance of one racial group over others lies in its constituting the majority of the population (Dierkes-Thrun 2015).

The concept can be useful as a consciousness raising tool, specifically in dispelling the myth of a level-playing social field and in highlighting the violence of structural and everyday racism faced by minorities as a result of racial modes of governmentality. However, I find the term's critical purchase to be limited in analysing the dynamic, constantly mutating nature of race and the varied ends towards which it is mobilized. Although race is recognized as a social construction rather than an innate condition, its function as an analytic category tends to be reified when the concept of privilege is mobilized. Hence, proponents of the concept may use it not only in relation to race, but also to gender, class, sexual orientation, and so on, and advocate for an intersectional analysis of power relations in the sense of accounting for the sum total of privilege accrued across different segments of difference (i.e. the higher one ranks in the hierarchies of race + gender + class, etc., the more privilege one has and vice versa). However, this model of social power cannot explain how processes of racialization rely on class disparity and gender/sexual difference to produce stratification. To illustrate, going by the logic of Chinese privilege in Singapore, ethnic Han low-wage migrant workers from China would gain structural advantages compared to other ethnic groups in similar positions. However, the manner in which Singapore authorities have responded to any form of protest made by migrant workers, Chinese or not, about their working conditions by criminalizing such activity suggests otherwise (Bal 2017). This categorical racialization of low-wage migrant workers of different ethnicities does not, of course, negate the fact that racial hierarchies do exist in Singapore and that they generate inequalities; nevertheless, it does suggest that class and race cannot be analysed as distinct categories that generate a combined effect, but are thoroughly enmeshed with one another in lived experience.

That the situation of migrant workers in Singapore reveals the analytical limits of privilege as a concept underscores the problem of understanding racism as the domination of minorities by a majority group. This point is even more pronounced in a context like Malaysia, where Malay privilege constitutes the equivalent of white privilege in the United States and Chinese privilege in Singapore. Yet, unlike in Singapore or the United States where structural inequalities benefitting the racial majority are rendered invisible, the defense of racial hierarchy as norm is made overtly rather than covertly. A case in point is the success of the 2018 mass protests organized by Malay ethnonationalist groups in getting the government to rescind its pledge to ratify ICERD, the United Nations's International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. It is also worth noting that the argument for Malay dominance is not based on a claim to innate or civilizational superiority, as is the case for white or Chinese dominance, but rather on native rights, a precedent established by British rule. Moreover, the pro-*bumiputera* policies passed in the 1970s were legitimized by the fact that socioeconomic disparities were distributed along racial lines with Malays being the most adversely affected, also a consequence of colonial rule. Hence, when the Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad laments that such entitlements have cultivated indolence

amongst Malays, he is reviving a negative colonial stereotype of the lazy native to underscore the structural advantages offered to the majority.

The utility of privilege as concept to reveal what is obscured is not only rendered moot in the Malaysian context; its premise of racism as a majority vs. minority antagonism, which is delimited by nation-state boundaries, renders it unable to account for how racial discourse can be used to manage domestic political exigencies in relation to global economic forces. The case of how China's financial investments into the nation's economy have been framed in national political discourse is particularly instructive in this regard. In the campaigning period leading up to the historic 2018 General Elections, the incumbent coalition Barisan Nasional had resorted to fearmongering tactics amongst the Malay voter bloc, warning that a vote for their political opponents would result in Chinese Malaysians taking over the country. To counter this narrative, the Mahathir-led Pakatan Harapan alliance re-directed these voters' internal racial anxieties to an external power, China, arguing that the incumbent Prime Minister Najib Razak's lopsided economic deals with the Chinese government, allegedly brokered to mitigate the effects of the 1MDB corruption scandal, had put the nation's sovereignty at risk (Malhi 2018). While the Pakatan Harapan campaign narrative, which effectively portrayed China as a new colonial power, had led foreign policy observers to speculate whether a Mahathir-led government would adopt an anti-China Belt and Road Initiative stance, the subsequent affirmation of diplomatic ties between the two countries and ongoing economic negotiations suggest otherwise (Malhi 2018). Furthermore, Mahathir's appointment of the Malaysian Chinese Hong Kong-based billionaire tycoon, Robert Kuok, to the Council of Eminent Persons, an economic advisory board to the government, underscores the state's recognition of the strategic role ethnic Chinese in Malaysia play in forging economic ties with China. What this case reveals is the sophisticated manner in which racial discourse can be deployed to manage domestic political exigencies and global economic forces.

In this light, we might read the revival of colonial racial tropes in the postcolonial era – the lazy Malay and the entrepreneurial Chinese – does not necessarily speak of a colonized mindset, but suggests that these old tools of making meaning have been repurposed for new conditions. For example, when Mahathir describes Malays as lazy while speaking to his Malay constituency, he is not necessarily in favour of dismantling of pro-*bumiputera* policies (an unpopular position amongst his support base), but an admonition to stay competitive in a globalized economy so as to not risk getting left behind. However, amongst Chinese Malaysians, hearing such a pronouncement made against Malays by one of their own can have the effect of appeasing the resentment generated by such preferential treatment whilst encouraging a sense of civilizational superiority, which finds confirmation in a figure like Robert Kuok, who is seen as able to achieve economic success despite structural disadvantage. The point here is not only that a racial trope can signify differently to separate audiences, but that these distinct meanings work in concert to reinforce capitalist modes of accumulation as the norm.

It is often argued that social inequalities in Malaysia ought to be analysed primarily in terms of class rather than race in order to more clearly discern the ramifications of capitalism. Yet, to do so would be to overlook how racial discourse is a key instrument in managing the political effects of social inequality generated by a capitalist economy. At the same time, should the impact of racial discourse be analysed through the concept of Malay privilege, not only would Chinese Malaysians be cast solely as victims of national institutional discrimination and Malays as its beneficiaries; the concept would also provide an alibi that conceals how these racial discourses can also work in favour of the wealthier echelons of Chinese Malaysians that can be used against non-Chinese others (the exploitation of migrant workers by Chinese Malaysian-owned companies being a case in point).

Yet, as noted earlier, the racialization of Chinese subjects can have volatile effects – when politically expedient, the positive figure of the cosmopolitan Chinese entrepreneur can also be read negatively as an exploitative foreigner of its host country, a situation often resulting in ethnic Chinese of lower income groups bearing the harsher effects of racial violence.

While majoritarian power is a significant factor that can result in the marginalization of minorities, understanding racism solely in these terms would mean overlooking how the interplay of national and transnational material forces in shaping racial power dynamics. Therefore, in order to discern the workings of Han Chinese racism in the Malaysian context, racism must be analysed in concert with capitalism and not as though they were distinct modes of hierarchy production that operated in isolation from one another. By recognizing how racism and capitalism operate in mutual support of one another (i.e. racial capitalism), one would be able to account for the interplay of historical forces at the local, national, and transnational levels in shaping racial power dynamics and the ambivalent effects it generates on Chinese-identified subjects. Moreover, given that theorizing racism first requires understanding the sociohistorical process of racial formation, one that is not solely determined by a single nation-state, but by multiple forces within and beyond national borders, then the cause of Han Chinese racism cannot be solely attributed to the imperial roots of China or even its present-day ambitions for global dominance. As many scholars have noted, overseas Chinese identities are not necessarily constructed with China as its primary referent but are shaped by a myriad of local cultures and historical influences. While the rise of China is certainly an increasingly powerful historical factor in shaping the racialization of Chinese subjects around the world, there are also alternative transnational arenas of representation for Chinese cultural production, where China is not the primary driving force. I now turn to consider one such sphere: global Anglophone literature.

The world Anglophone novel and cosmopolitan racial formations

Although Malaysian novels written in English have been published for many decades, it is only in the past decade or so that they began to receive growing international attention and acclaim. The literary scholar Holden (2012, 48) notes that these recent works tend to be what he calls "global Malaysian novels," works which are published in the U.S. or the U.K. and mainly written by diasporic Malaysians who are based overseas but whose fiction nonetheless is set in their country of origin. While there is a sense of national pride about these writers' global success, as evidenced by the tone of local English-language press coverage on such news, there is also an underlying suspicion or disdain of their works. An example of the latter can be found in the manifesto of Fixi Novo, the English-language imprint of a popular independent trade publisher in Malaysia: "We publish stories about the urban reality of Malaysia. If you want to share your grandmother's World War 2 stories, send 'em elsewhere and you might even win the Booker Prize" (BukuFixi 2012). The latter part of the statement makes a not-so-subtle gibe at Tan Twan Eng, whose first and second novels, both of which explore the history of the Japanese Occupation in Malaya, were in the running for the prestigious Man Booker Prize in 2007 and 2013 respectively.[3]

While the manifesto's underlying critique of works like Tan's is that they are written for audiences unfamiliar with Malaysia and thus pander to the latter's demand for nostalgic exotica, it also alludes to the current conditions of the global literary marketplace that have enabled writers who have published in recent years to gain a greater degree of recognition than their literary predecessors. The corporatization of the literary publishing industry, an effect of the monopoly of the global mass media industry by a handful of conglomerates in the Western world (the U.S., Europe, and

Australia), has resulted in the centralization of gatekeeping functions to a few metropolitan centres in the U.S. and, decreasingly, the U.K., which are increasingly driven by commercial interests (Brouillette 2007, 58). Yet, the concentration of power in the literary publishing industry and its control of a large share of the global market, a fact enabled by English's current status as the world dominant language of knowledge and commerce, has actually resulted in the ability to cater to a greater diversity of reading publics and marketing niches (Brouillette 2007, 52). It is these conditions that have enabled minority ethnic and postcolonial writers to find their market share of "globalized middle class" readers (Brouillette 2007, 56–58; Nadiminti 2018, 386). Notably, it is work in the form of the Anglophone novel and its content reflecting "the politics of Third World nations" and "a broadly anti-imperialist political liberalism" that has acquired literary and market value (Brouillette 2007, 60). These market conditions are supported through the literary prize system, which functions as a mechanism for the conferral of cultural prestige and boosts the global visibility of an author's work (English 2009).

Seeing as the global Malaysian novel predominantly reflects ethnic Chinese experiences written by such authors, the world Anglophone novel has therefore become an important arena of representation for articulating Chinese identity and subjectivity. Literary scholars have tended to conceive of the world Anglophone novel in cosmopolitan terms not only in the sense that its conditions of production and circulation tend to exceed the territorial bounds of the nation-state. Given that, for postcolonial writers in particular, the cultural form has largely become a vehicle of critical, political engagement with discourses of imperialism and nationalism, the world Anglophone novel might be said to express a "literary cosmopolitical" sensibility (Gui 2013). Yet, in light of U.S. dominance in the literary publishing industry outlined above, various scholars have noted that the cosmopolitanism expressed in the world Anglophone novel aligns with global American multiculturalism. While postcolonial writers inevitably work within these constraints, this by no means suggests that they operate as unthinking mouthpieces of these ideological systems. The task before literary scholars then is to consider how such cultural productions engage with political discursive contexts that lie beyond this arena while examining how their engagements are shaped by the material and ideological conditions of the global literary marketplace.

With this in mind, I turn to Tan Twan Eng's *The Garden of Evening Mists*, a novel that bears the characteristics of the world Anglophone novel described above. The novel follows the story of its protagonist, Teoh Yun Ling, an esteemed Malaysian Federal Court judge taking early retirement due to a medical condition resulting in the gradual loss of memory. Her health condition compels her to revisit her past as the sole survivor of a labour camp in which she and her sister, Yun Hong, were interned during the Japanese Occupation of Malaya (1941–1945). To fulfil her sister's final wish of having a Japanese garden created in her memory, Yun Ling begrudgingly takes up an apprenticeship with a gardener, Aritomo, with whom she eventually falls in love, only to abandon her efforts when he mysteriously disappears. Moving back and forth between the present of the 1990s and the past of the 1950s during the height of the Malayan Emergency, the counter-insurgency that the British fought against the communist guerrilla army in the waning years of Empire, the novel is ostensibly about the politics of memory and forgetting in terms of how the history of Japanese imperialism shaped Chinese Malaysian identity amidst the transition from British colony to postcolonial nation. Along with its central trope of the Japanese garden, the novel extensively details a range of Japanese aesthetic forms and Chinese cultural practices as the narrative unfolds against the backdrop of Malaysia's multiracial landscape.

The novel's intricate elaboration of multiple cultural aesthetic traditions is an effort to construct a Chinese Malaysian subjectivity with a cosmopolitan sensibility that transcend the racialist modalities

of being delimited by imperialist and nationalist ideologies. Significantly, the novel does so by leveraging English's significance as a cosmopolitan language, which derives not only from its current status as the global lingua franca. The notion that the postcolonial Anglophone novel constitutes a vehicle through which writers from ex-colonies re-appropriate the master's language, once used as an instrument of cultural domination, to write back to Empire conveys the idea that the English can no longer lay sole cultural claim to English. Its global spread through the process of imperial expansion has made it a language for all. This cosmopolitan or culturally neutral significance of English is what makes it an ideal medium for cosmopolitan subject-making seeing as it can contain a multitude of aesthetic cultural influences, much in the same way that the Anglophone novel has become a means for accessing literary knowledge about different cultures.

Despite the novel's intentions to transcend racial logics, its formation of the cosmopolitan subject is underpinned by narratives of racial victimhood and reconciliation that ultimately reinforce rather than interrogate a hierarchical social political order. The racialized nature of these tropes is obscured by the novel's cosmopolitan aesthetic, but alluded to via its incorporation of two Afrikaner characters from South Africa, both of which serve as points of reference that enable the cosmopolitan construction of the Chinese Malaysian subject. The African continent rarely features in the Malaysian literary imaginary and the presence of South Africa in the novel is another indication of its global conditions of production given that its author splits his time between Penang and Cape Town.[4] This practice of juxtaposition might be described as a form of what Lionnet and Shih (2005, 11) call minor transnationalism, "the horizontal approach of bringing together postcolonial minor cultural formations across national boundaries into productive comparison." It is this inter-referencing with the South African white settler subject that enables the novel to yield insights relevant to theorizing Han racism in relation to Chinese Malaysian cultural productions in the global Anglophone literary sphere.

Imperial histories and the cosmopolitan aesthetic imagination

"The world is not made up of only English history, you know … " (Tan 2012, 51). This gentle rebuke is served by Magnus to Yun Ling as he tells the story of how an Afrikaner like him, who grew up in the Transvaal province of South Africa in the late nineteenth-century, came to settle down as a tea planter in British Malaya. Sent to a POW camp in Ceylon for fighting the British in the Second Anglo-Boer War, Magnus later returns home to find his family's farming livelihood destroyed and his loved ones brutally killed. In a bid to rebuild his life after this horrific tragedy, he sets sail to Batavia and en route, stumbles upon the gravestone of Jan van Riebeeck, the seventeenth-century Dutch founder of Cape Town, in Malacca. Feeling a special connection to Malaya as a result of that encounter, Magnus abandons his plans to head to the Dutch East Indies and decides to stay, eventually setting up a tea plantation in the Cameron Highlands and marrying locally. It is Yun Ling's blank look upon hearing the historical figure's name that provokes his admonition, one that nonetheless extends a gesture of empathy. Yun Ling too is the sole survivor of the camp in which she and her sister, Yun Hong, were interned during the Japanese Occupation in Malaya. Having devoted herself to finding evidence to prosecute the Japanese for their war crimes, Yun Ling is disillusioned in her attempts to seek justice after the British sign the Japan Peace Treaty, effectively nullifying efforts by war victims to seek legal reparations. If, as the cliché goes, history is written by the victors, then Magnus's words underscore the fact that in order to remember the stories of the vanquished, one cannot see the world only through the lens of national and imperial history seeing as nations – in Magnus's view, the British, in particular – all too readily omit aspects of the past that cast them in unflattering light.

Magnus's admonition also highlights the Anglo-centric worldview of the English-educated Straits Chinese community, who describe themselves as the "King's Chinese" (Tan 2012, 202), drawing attention to the role English plays in shaping racial identity. Spanning the historical period from the 1930s to the late twentieth century, the novel maps out the European and Asian imperial genealogies that shape the shifting formations of the English-speaking Chinese Malay(si)an subject throughout the decades primarily through the character of Yun Ling's father, Teoh Boon Hau. Born into a wealthy family in the British Crown Colony of Penang, educated in a Christian missionary school, and unable to speak or read Mandarin, Teoh Boon Hau epitomizes the loyal British subject who did not think it important for his children "to know any language other than English […] because the British would rule forever" (Tan 2012, 259). Anglophiles like Teoh Boon Hau were viewed with disdain by non-English speaking Chinese in Malaya, who saw people like him as "eaters of Europeans' shit," an insult that the Straits Chinese easily took in stride because English granted them the socioeconomic upward mobility and respectability denied to those without the language (Tan 2012, 259). If language and class differences undermined any sense of a unified Chinese Malayan identity, then the Second Sino-Japanese War in China fanned Chinese nationalist sentiment amongst its diaspora in Malaya and fashioned a shared sense of being. For Teoh Boon Hau, the war not only leads him to lay claim to his Chinese identity, but also compels him to question the superiority of the British, who failed to address the atrocities of the Japanese against civilians in China. His belief in British invincibility is completely shattered when Japan takes over Malaya; given that neither the wealthy nor the poor are spared from racist violence, the Japanese Occupation contributes to affirming a coherent sense of Chinese identity through racial victimhood.

The tumultuous years after the Pacific War leading up to national independence in 1957, during which the British declare emergency rule, leading a counter-insurgency against the Communist Party of Malaya guerrilla army, further instigate another shift in Chinese Malaysian subjectivity. Whereas being Chinese was linked closely to events unfolding in China during the pre-war years, during the Emergency and in the wake of the Communist Party's rise in China, it was expedient that Chinese identified as Malayans rather than express loyalty to their ancestral motherland. Facing the inevitability of independence, Teoh Boon Hau leverages his wealth and English skills to present himself as the ideal negotiator between the British and the Chinese Malayan community to ensure the latter's interests are protected amidst the rising tide of Malay ethno-nationalism (Tan 2012, 135). In order to do so, he picks up Mandarin to prove his Chineseness and in a speech at the Chinese Chamber of Commerce proclaims, "I am no longer a banana […] yellow outside, white inside" (Tan 2012, 136). It is against this modality of race- and ethnic-based national subjectivity that the novel articulates a cosmopolitan subject. Teoh Boon Hau's invocation of the "banana" subject as a foil to his reformed Chinese Malaysian identity affirms the idea of an authentic Chineseness, one that relies on the assumption that English is a Western language, which casts the Anglicized Chinese subject as a cultural traitor. Rather than reject English on the grounds that it dilutes Chineseness, the novel embraces it as a means for fashioning the Chinese Malaysian as a cosmopolitan subject.

The novel accomplishes the above by consciously situating itself in relation to the genealogies of the English literary canon, particularly the aesthetic traditions of British Romanticism and Euro-American Modernism. Such intertextual referencing is commonplace amongst postcolonial writers working in former imperial languages and is usually read as a means of writing back to Empire, a demand from the ex-colony to the metropole to reckon with its legacies. While this is certainly the case with Tan's novel to an extent, the author is also deliberately using the tools derived from the British colonial masters to encode the history of Japanese imperialism. In other words, the novel's re-appropriation of literary discourse is both a self-conscious effort to frame itself as a work of world

literature by situating itself as the progeny of a Western literary canon and to re-position that literary genealogy by using aesthetic devices derived from it to explore inter-Asian imperial histories.

The fashioning of Chinese Malaysian subjectivity as diasporic cosmopolitan is developed through Yun Ling. In the immediate years after the Japanese Occupation, Yun Ling pursues an apprenticeship with Aritomo, a gardener who once served the Emperor of Japan and subsequently moved to Cameron Highlands. Her sister, Yun Hong had been conscripted to serve as a "comfort woman," the epithet used to describe women forced into providing sexual services for the Japanese Imperial Army; during her internment, Yun Hong coped by fantasizing about creating Japanese gardens, which she had loved and admired since discovering them in books as a child and even more so after a family visit to Japan before the war. In serving as a memorial to a victim of racialized and sexual violence, the novel's central trope of the Japanese garden lends itself to being read as a means for countering nationalist and imperialist modes of historical remembrance and forgetting. Yun Ling's efforts to fulfil her sister's final wishes entails defying her father, who sees his older daughter's sexual violation by the Japanese as a source of family shame that ought to remain hidden. Although the novel leaves unexplored how the shame imposed on victims of sexual violence is linked to nationalist discourse, efforts in Malaysia to surface the history of Japanese military sexual violence against women are worth mentioning to underscore this point. The novel's 1990s setting is particularly significant in light of the fact that it was during those years that the issue of highlighting the history of the Japanese Imperial Army's conscription of women for sexual slavery gained international attention, following efforts by activists and survivors in Korea. In Malaysia, efforts led by government officials to surface these histories were curtailed following intervention from the Japanese and Malaysian governments, presumably on the grounds of maintaining good economic relations. This period coincided with Mahathir's implementation of the Look East policy, introduced in 1981, following shortly after his campaign to boycott British products in favour of building ties with the rising economic powers of East Asia, in particular Japan. As another Malaysian writer, Aw (2012) notes, the very policies designed to achieve a much-desired economic progress also contain within them unexpected memory triggers of the historical trauma of the Japanese Occupation of Malaya, drawing unwitting parallels between the development-oriented Asian values discourse and Japan's imperial propaganda of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.

While this historical context goes unremarked upon in the novel, the writer Tan Twan Eng more explicitly presents the Japanese garden as a means for reconciliation and overcoming political enmity in the wake of racial violence. Despite the suffering inflicted on her by the Imperial Army, Yun Hong's continued appreciation of Japanese gardens and her means of psychological endurance by escaping into the world of make-believe hints at the productive potential of the aesthetic imagination as a resource for engaging with the history of violence without replicating its antagonistic relations of war. Significantly, the novel's figuration of the garden as a trope of the aesthetic imagination constitutes an engagement with English literary canonical genealogies. Alluding to British Romanticism's belief in art's capacity to facilitate the regeneration of the human spirit otherwise deadened by the Industrial Revolution, the Japanese garden functions as the means through which a sense of shared humanity can be forged to overcome the historical enmity between the Chinese and Japanese. The reference to British Romanticism is made more explicit in the following series of interactions involving the naming of a pavilion in the Japanese garden, which eventually serves as the memorial site for Yun Ling's sister. When asked by Aritomo to propose a name, Yun Ling suggests, "The Pavilion of Heaven," a line from the English Romantic poet, Shelley's (1820) "The Cloud," a favourite poem of her sister's. Aritomo first dismisses the suggestion – "That is the sort of phrase ignorant Europeans actually come up with when they think of … the East" (Tan 2012, 148) – though he later acquiesces

when he learns of its true provenance. His initial if false impression is ironically affirmed when Lady Templer, the wife of the famed Malayan Emergency general, who during her visit to the garden marvels at the pavilion's "Oriental" name (Tan 2012, 209). Aritomo and Lady Templer's error, mistaking the lines of an English poem as an appellation of the East, presents the Orientalist gaze as a failure of self-recognition, an inability to see that one's image of the cultural Other is actually a projection of one's own inverted self-perception. However, that this error is staged twice in the novel and left uncorrected the second time not only facilitates an inside joke, but also registers the fact that English has indeed become an Oriental language.

The novel's presentation of the aesthetic imagination as an ideal means of reconciliation is further elaborated through another character, the art history professor, Tatsuji, who seeks out Yun Ling in her latter years in order to study Aritomo's ukiyo-e works, which are in her keeping. A former pilot for the Japanese navy air force during the Second World War, Tatsuji's interest in Aritomo's work is motivated by the fact that his past lover, his military flight instructor, Teruzen, had owned one of his woodprints. Significantly, Tatsuji's love for Teruzen is emblematized not so much by the Japanese gardener's work, but by a poem by another literary canonical figure, Yeats's (1919) "An Irish Airman Foresees His Death." An elegy voiced from the perspective of a colonial subject serving in the British Royal Air Force during World War I, the poem laments the pointlessness of his life and inevitable death in combat seeing as the war would make no difference to "[his] countrymen Kiltartan's poor" (Yeats 1919). Yeats's poem renders a critical indictment of the conscription of colonial subjects to serve British military endeavours, one that could have been but is not extended to comment upon Frederik's service in the British counter-insurgency in Malaya. In keeping with its literary re-inscriptions, the novel employs the poem to register Japan's ill-fated imperial efforts and a personal tragedy for the art history professor. The poem is a favourite of Teruzen, who took Tatsuji's place in a suicide mission carried out on the very same day that the U.S. dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. In addition to mobilizing its lament of war's wasting of lives to underscore this tragic timing, the novel also recasts the poem as an emblem of queer sacrificial love, one that is indifferent to war's demand for blind loyalty to country.

The novel's re-inscription of the work of Yeats, a prominent Irish writer in the early twentieth century, to encode the legacy of Japanese imperialism also constitutes an extended engagement with European and Anglo-American aesthetic modernism. A key feature of the Modernist movement was the influence of Japanese art forms into European works as a means of injecting newness into Western aesthetic traditions. Imagism, the Anglo-American Modernist movement in which visual images are used to express an idea, is arguably present in the novel, as evidenced in the following passage, which describes a display of fireworks during Chinese New Year: "Yellow and red and white dandelions lit up the sky, pinned there for a few seconds before dribbling away, only to be followed by a blue agapanthus blooming here, a red starfish flaring there" (Tan 2012, 169). The poem is reminiscent of Pound's (1911) quintessential Imagist poem, "In a Station of the Metro," which adapts the Japanese haiku form in its use of three lines and juxtaposition of two distinct images: "the apparition of faces" when passengers disembark from a train on a Parisian metro station platform with "petals on a wet black bough," the latter image influenced by an ukiyo-e print that Pound viewed at the British Library. Like the European and Anglo-American modernists, the novel also heavily features Japanese art forms of gardening, ukiyo-e, archery, and tattooing, all of which Aritomo practiced. However, in addition to engaging with Euro-American literary traditions, the novel's incorporation of Japanese art forms is situated in dialogue with Chinese cultural and aesthetic forms. For instance, Aritomo's archery practice is juxtaposed alongside the legend of Hou Yi and Chang Er, the archer who saves the world from being scorched by the heat of suns and his beloved, who

becomes the goddess of the moon, a story recounted in the novel as part of the Chinese Mid-Autumn Festival; moreover, as part of the celebrations, Aritomo creates Chinese lanterns using his woodblock print designs and recites a haiku by Ikaru Saikaku to commemorate the occasion (Tan 2012, 140–146). Another example is found in Aritomo's discussion of the ukiyo-e illustrations that were published in the *Suikoden*, a work that informs his tattooing practice, which were inspired by the Chinese classic text, *Sui Hu Chuan* or *The Legend of the Water Margin* (Tan 2012, 158–159). The recurring images of the cosmos or celestial elements – cloud, mists, sun, moon – in the myriad British, Japanese, and Chinese cultural references above effectively serve as an Imagist device to express the cosmopolitan or worldly sensibility of the aesthetic imagination.

It is precisely its inherent cosmopolitanism, the novel suggests, that enables the aesthetic imagination to serve as the ideal vehicle for overcoming racialized historical enmity. If artistic forms are generally viewed as an expression of cultural identity, then one must also recognize that culture is also a form of artifice, a point driven home by the novel's central trope of the aesthetic imagination, the garden. Because the plants in Yugiri have been transplanted from Japan's temperate, seasonal climate to the perpetually cool and rainy weather of Cameron Highlands in Malaya, their internal rhythms have necessarily adjusted to their new environment. Thus, instead of effecting a pure natural state, the garden is a hybridized composite, made up of plants brought in from the outside, which must then acclimatize to survive in its new environment. The aesthetic philosophy of Japanese gardening, as Aritomo explains, is essentially "a form of deception," designed to produce illusory effects that compel its viewer to see beyond how things appear and recognize their encoded meanings (Tan 2012, 150). If culture is expressed through means of artifice, then the point is to recognize that notions of cultural purity or fixity ultimately cannot be sustained given the multiple historical influences that shape its production.

This theme of artifice or deception is not only explored in formalist or aesthetic terms, but further pursued at an ethical, interpersonal level. In order to fulfil her sister's final wish, Yun Ling is required to set aside her grievances against the Japanese and undertake an apprenticeship with Aritomo. Her relationship with him, one that eventually blossoms into romance, exemplifies collaboration in the two senses of the term, to work jointly in order to create something, and, to cooperate traitorously with an enemy, thus to work by means of deception. The latter meaning is fleshed out through the Japanese art form of the horimono or the full body tattoos featuring designs influenced by woodblock prints. Upon completing work in the garden, Aritomo tattoos a horimono on Yun Ling's back, only to mysteriously vanish into the jungle, never to return. Aritomo's disappearance leads Yun Ling to abandon Yugiri and resume her legal career. It is only decades later, with the help of Tatsuji's expertise, that Yun Ling learns that the tattoo, when read in relation to the layout of the garden, may serve as a map to the labour camp in which she and her sister were imprisoned; significantly, the camp also served as a hidden storage site for the gold and other spoils of war the Imperial Army had amassed (Tan 2012, 342). The revelation of this knowledge bears two conflicting implications for Yun Ling. On one hand, the affirmation that Aritomo was indeed involved in the Imperial Army's covert operations renders him complicit in Magnus's death (Tan 2012, 303). When confronted by communist guerrillas about Yamashita's gold, Aritomo denies knowledge of its existence, resulting in Magnus suffering their deadly wrath (Tan 2012, 301–304). On the other hand, Aritomo's exclusive disclosure of the camp location to Yun Ling, while withholding it from his compatriots, who wished to smuggle the loot back to Japan, demonstrates his abandonment of his mission. Moreover, Yun Ling learns, through a visit in the latter years of her life from a former "comfort woman" who has since become a Buddhist nun at a nearby temple, that Aritomo was instrumental in closing down a "comfort station" in Cameron Highlands during the war (Tan 2012, 311). The nun's visit

serves as a reminder of Aritomo and Yun Ling's visit decades earlier to that very same temple, during which he relays a parable about the Buddha who shows mercy to a murderer for having committed one good deed by providing him an escape route from hell; however, upon realizing that others are trying to escape along with him, the murderer squanders the opportunity for everyone, including himself, out of selfishness (Tan 2012, 255–256). This story takes on particular significance in light of the fact that the tattoo surfaces Yun Ling's memory of complicity with Japanese military officials during her internment. While being tattooed by Aritomo, Yun Ling confesses to supplying information about her fellow prisoners, collaborating with the enemy in order to survive (Tan 2012, 294, 299).

Despite the tattoo containing information she had long sought after, Yun Ling ultimately decides to conceal its existence. Her decision not only marks a departure from her dogged pursuit for retributive justice, but also demonstrates that she has learnt the lesson of the Buddhist parable above. Namely, in view of the fact that no one who survived the war is blameless, mercy towards one another is the only way out of the hellish circumstances and consequences of one's actions; as such, the selfish pursuit of personal retribution ought to give way to the greater good of reconciliation. In signalling that the act of forgetting is essential for facilitating reconciliation between warring sides, the novel casts the destruction of the tattoo as an act of transcending racial enmity. A common physical marker worn by male criminals, the tattoo is presented as a mark of racialization – when Tatsuji learns of Yun Ling's tattoo, he is shocked less by the fact that Aritomo also engages in this "taboo art" than by the realization that his most elaborate piece of work was performed "on the skin of a Chinese woman no less" (Tan 2012, 313). As revealing the information incised on her body would re-open old wounds, Yun Ling's insistence that the tattoo must be destroyed upon her death thus suggests that holding onto racial grievance only reinforces a sense of enmity that perpetuates rather than resolves conflict. Foregoing her quest for retributive justice, Yun Ling attains a sense of closure and in so doing, honours the belief that lies at the core of her sister's final wish: that the aesthetic imagination can serve as a means of both acknowledging the violence of imperial history without perpetuating political enmity. "It is right that Yun Hong will be remembered," Yun Ling concludes, "as I gradually forget and, in time, become forgotten" (Tan 2012, 347).

The subtexts of silence[5]

Today, the Japanese government continues to deny the existence of a military system of forced prostitution during World War II in the face of historical evidence. Contemporary news coverage on this issue generally foregrounds the diplomatic tensions that emerge between Japan and its international trading partners, subtly reinforcing the impression that demands for reparations by survivors are simply a refusal to let go of the past rather than a reminder of the fact that sexual violence against women remains a widely used systemic weapon of war in military conflict zones around the world today. In light of this reality, the novel's ending – that forgetting is as important as remembering in facilitating reconciliation between warring sides – arguably contributes towards turning a blind eye to ongoing histories of violence despite seemingly gesturing towards their remembrance. For literary critics like Poon (2016), the novel's celebration of cultural hybridity contributes towards an aestheticization of violence, one that ultimately undermines its own claim of recuperating repressed pasts and addressing the politics of historical memory.

It is at this juncture that the novel's incorporation of South Africa is particularly illuminating. As noted earlier, the two Afrikaner characters, Magnus and Frederik, highlight the often overlooked historical interconnections between South Africa and Malaysia. Magnus's departure from South Africa

may have been the result of the defeat of Dutch Boers by the British, but his decision to head towards Southeast Asia was driven by the fact that there, the Dutch remained a colonial power. A few short decades later, his nephew, Frederik's arrival to Malaya is occasioned by his service in the Rhodesia African Rifles, a regiment in the British Commonwealth forces conscripted to fight the colonial counter-insurgency against the communists (Tan 2012, 104). When Frederik notices similarities in certain words in his native Afrikaans tongue and the Malay spoken in Malaya, the novel highlights the history that enabled this philological contact – the trade and transportation of slaves from the Southeast Asian archipelago by the Dutch to South Africa from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries (Tan 2012, 67).

Beyond registering the Afro-Asian historical relation, the presence of Magnus and Frederik also facilitate Yun Ling's character development by serving as interlocutors for what constitutes cosmopolitan subjectivity. Similarities are drawn between the Afrikaners and Straits Chinese subjects. Magnus is a contemporary and business competitor of Teoh Boon Hau, and it is Yun Ling's conversations with Frederik, who inherits his uncle's tea estate, about gardening that serve as ruminations about the settler colonial subject's relationship to place in Malaysia. Whereas Frederik is preoccupied with "indigenous gardening," the restoration of native plants to "let them grow the way they would have done in the wild," Magnus transplanted the flora of his South African homeland to his Cameron Highlands estate as a reminder of his cultural roots (Tan 2012, 22–23). Of the two, Magnus arguably embodies the exemplary cosmopolitan subject; moreover, unlike Frederik who fights in the British Commonwealth Army during the Emergency, Magnus remains true to his anti-British Afrikaner loyalties, while simultaneously loving beyond kin and kind in his adopted country, as evidenced by his willingness to sacrifice his life to protect his wife and friends from the communist guerrillas (Tan 2012, 303).

In serving as a point of reference for fashioning the cosmopolitan Chinese Malaysian, the novel's Afrikaner characters ought to be considered not only in terms of their position as diasporic subjects in Malaya, but as white colonial settlers in South Africa as well. For readers familiar with South African history, Magnus's Afrikaner nationalism – most evident in his flying of the Transvaal Vierkleur in defiance of British laws forbidding the raising of foreign national flags during the Malayan Emergency (Tan 2012, 42) – ought to evoke the concurrent rise of the Afrikaner-led National Party to power in South Africa and the implementation of apartheid laws in 1948. Otherwise meticulously attentive to historical detail, the novel curiously deflects attention from this contemporaneous historical moment in Magnus's homeland. What is emphasized instead is Magnus's status as a survivor of atrocities committed by the British during the Anglo-Boer war and his anti-Empire stance, expressed in his tirade on the Opium Wars in China during the British High Commissioner's visit to his tea plantation (Tan 2012, 204).

When asked about Magnus, the author Tan Twan Eng explains that he was interested in imagining how "this very traditional, conservative South African Boer" might evolve when taken out of his "comfort zone" (Jaggi 2014, 6). The literary critic McKay (2015, 51) notes that by situating Magnus in a transnational context, the Afrikaner subject is delinked from the ethnocentric tendencies associated with apartheid. Magnus's marriage to Emily, a Straits Chinese woman, does well to drive home this point given that such a union would have been criminalized under the 1949 Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act, one of the first laws to be passed under apartheid. Even so, intentionally or otherwise, their inter-racial coupling incorporates a subtle reminder of apartheid: Magnus's favourite poem, "Winter," – one that holds romantic significance for him and his wife (Tan 2012, 133–134) – is written by the Afrikaans poet, scholar, and apartheid apologist, N. P. van Wyk Louw.[6] Moreover, his library is filled with history books on the Second Anglo-Boer war and the Great Trek, the forced

migration of early Dutch settlers on the Cape into the interiors in the wake of British settlement; also included are novels and poetry by C. Louis Leipoldt, C. J. Langenhoven, Eugene Marais, N. P. Van Wyk Louw, major literary writers in the early twentieth century who were instrumental in developing Afrikaans as a literary language in conjunction with promoting Afrikaner nationalism. Thus, even if the historical link of Afrikaner nationalism to apartheid goes unmentioned, the novel's attentiveness to historical detail allows readers to note its absent presence.

Given the novel's themes of memory and forgetting, the subtexts encoded in its silence on South African apartheid require further elucidation. This silence is consistent with the aesthetic principles of Yun Ling's tattoo, which consists of a section deliberately left "empty," a feature that allows for the tattoo and garden to form an interlocking design representing a map to the secret labour camp (Tan 2012, 327, 337). As with the tattoo, the novel's silence on apartheid registers complicity with wrongdoing; given Yun Ling's ultimate decision to destroy the tattoo and forego any possibility of seeking legal justice on behalf of her sister, the silence also implicitly condones forgetting regrettable aspects of the past in order to move forward. Significantly, the novel's ending can be read in light of South Africa's attempts at addressing the legacy of apartheid. As McKay (2015, 54) notes, Magnus's role in urging Yun Ling to pursue reconciliation rather than retribution in coming to terms with her past is subtly reminiscent of the model of transitional justice pursued by South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the wake of apartheid.

If the novel's resolution is indeed modelled after an understanding of South Africa's post-apartheid efforts in addressing racial enmity, a reading that I find plausible, then it needs to be noted that the idea of forgetting as a way of moving forward without any material form of redress invariably works to the advantage of beneficiaries of oppressive racial structures. The absence of any direct acknowledgment of apartheid in the novel further implies a desire to rehabilitate the image of the white Afrikaner nationalist from racist villain to model of multiracial coexistence, rather than any genuine acknowledgment of complicity with oppression and attempt to remedy structural inequality. Given that the large wealth distribution gap in South Africa continues to be demarcated along racial lines today, presenting the above notion of racial reconciliation as a model to be emulated reproduces rather than remedies racialized power hierarchies.

The implication of the novel's framing of racial reconciliation for the present-day South African context – one not acknowledged by McKay – is helpful in illuminating its problematic nature for the Chinese Malaysian context. Whereas the novel calls for and indeed engages in the remembrance of the history of Japanese military sexual servitude inflicted on women, its endorsement of forgetting effectively suggests that remembrance without seeking material redress is the way forward for resolving racial conflict. Such an approach would mean that victims and survivors of systemic acts of racialized sexual violence bear yet another form of violence, that of having stories like theirs being used as content for literary commerce without any form of recompense, financial or otherwise. In so doing, the novel presents the realm of cultural production and aesthetic/literary representation as a site of remembrance of violent history, but its representation as such is for the purposes of the reader's educational or emotionally cathartic consumption (in the novel, the art historian, Tatsuji arguably embodies this position as the researcher of Aritomo's woodprints, whose role as such serves the purpose of generating scholarly knowledge and of grieving his dead lover). The issue here is not only that the novel fails to take on a more progressive stance on addressing the history of violence, but that in so doing, it approaches the arena of literary representation as a marketplace that can serve no other function beyond its purpose as such. Hence, if the novel intends to serve as an articulation of a Chinese cosmopolitan subjectivity that can rise above racial modes of being, then it needs to be

recognized that it does so at the expense of victims and survivors of the Japanese military "comfort woman" system.

What remains valuable about the novel is that the Afro-Asian historical interconnection it explores makes visible the fact that discursive constructions of a post-racial cosmopolitan subjectivity – one that an Anglo-American controlled global literary marketplace implicitly condones – remain entangled within racialized hierarchies. The significance of this point is underscored by a film adaptation of the novel currently in production, a transnational collaboration between U.S. and Malaysian companies involving cast and crew members from Britain, Japan, Malaysia, Taiwan, and the United States. It has been reported that for the film, the characters of Magnus and Frederik will be re-written as British nationals, thereby foreclosing the lines of thought opened up by the novel's focus on the seldom explored connections between South Africa and Malaysia (Chaw 2018). Cultural productions like the latter would once again reinforce the global image of Chinese Malaysian subjects as victims of racialised violence rather than point to, as the novel inadvertently does, their volatile position within racial capitalism, one that can render them as beneficiaries of inequality in one moment and targets of violence the next, or even both all at once.

Notes

1. In this regard, Ong's work contributes towards understanding the historical development of what Robinson (2000, 2) calls racial capitalism, the understanding that social structures produced by capitalism are shaped by the material force of racialism given that the racism it engenders generates the conditions of inequality required by capitalist modes of accumulation. Given that scholarship on racial capitalism, as Jodi Melamad notes, has largely focused on "white supremacist capitalist development," Ong's work not only adds to the scholarship by contributing a perspective from the Asia Pacific, but intervenes by demonstrating how racialized non-Western subjects use strategies of racialization to their own advantage within a globalized capitalist economy (Melamed 2015, 77).
2. Thanapal attributes the work of feminist writer bell hooks as a source of inspiration for her concept (Dierkes-Thrun 2015).
3. Tan's first novel, *The Gift of Rain* (2008) was long-listed for the Man Booker Prize in 2007. In 2012, his second novel, *The Garden of Evening Mists*, made it to the short list; it eventually won the Man Asian Literary Prize, awarded to novels written by Asian writers, and the Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction.
4. Another contemporary cultural production of which I am aware that explores historical connections between South Africa and Malaysia is "From Table Mountain to Teluk Intan," a play written by Charmaine (Shahimah) Idris with Ann Lee about a "coloured" woman who leaves Cape Town for Australia to escape apartheid and subsequently moves to Malaysia, where an attack leaves her paralyzed from waist down (Lee 2011). The play, which "[presents] a strong critique of the specific forms and similarities of racism in South Africa, Australia, and Malaysia," was first staged in 2000 in Kuala Lumpur by the production company, Kualiworks (Lo 2004, 169). It would be interesting to compare the different insights on race and racism in Malaysia that emerge from the South African perspective presented in Idris's work with that of Tan's.
5. My thanks to David Kim for suggesting the evocative phrase, "the subtexts of silence."
6. For a discussion on N. P. van wyk Louw's position on apartheid, see Chapter 2 of Sanders (2002).

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