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Race, Slavery, and the Re-evaluation of the T'ang Canon

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**Volume 16 Issue 6 (December 2014) Article 8**

**Gregory E. Rutledge,**

**"Race, Slavery, and the Re-evaluation of the T'ang Canon"**

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**Abstract:** In his article "Race, Slavery, and the Reevaluation of the T'ang Canon" Gregory E. Rutledge re-evaluates—from the purview of African Diaspora literary studies—historiography that considers the place of East African slave lore in T'ang Dynasty fiction. Julie Wilensky's "The Magical Kunlun and 'Devil Slaves': Chinese Perceptions of Dark-skinned People and Africa before 1500" (2002), a revision of Chang Hsing-lang's "The Importation of Negro Slaves to China Under the T'ang Dynasty (A.D. 618-907)" (1930), is pivotal since it occupies the nexus between European-American, East-Asian, and African-Diaspora canons and policies. Rutledge situates Wilensky's and Chang's works in the context of Edward W. Said's *Orientalism*, an essential heuristic for understanding Western subjugation of the "Orient." However, in light of Wilensky's and Chang's non-engagement with the vast body of Western research on slavery, Rutledge argues that an older Afro-Orientalist frame is needed to establish an heuristic sensitive to the ancient East African culture and exceptionalism immanent in the stories Wilensky and Chang treat.

## Gregory E. RUTLEDGE

### Race, Slavery, and the Re-evaluation of the T'ang Canon

The Orient has long existed as a place constructed by the Western imaginary, most famously canvassed by Edward W. Said. Likewise, since the nineteenth century Afro-Orientalism has been a nineteenth- and twentieth-century socio-cultural strategy and informal alliance deployed against Western imperialism, but it is perhaps telling that the ancient middle ground between the two—the Afro-Orient—occupies a null space. Because of the deep racial construct that informs Western canons of academic and lay thought, the question "What is the Afro-Orient?" would be as much, if not more, a recoil-reflex than an objective inquiry. For example, presidential parody, satire, and threats have reached heights not seen since, mostly likely, the Confederate South's venom toward Abraham Lincoln: all because President Obama was elected and he, for many, is an Afro-Oriental who is both East African/Kenyan and, they zealously believe, Muslim.

The problem is not the threat such an Afro-Asian alliance proposes in fact or the existence of an Orient well before the height of ancient Greece, although "the shadow of a mighty Negro past flits through the tale of Ethiopia the Shadowy and of Egypt the Sphinx" (Du Bois 11), contemporary Africa is in no position to give much substance to the idea. Symbolically and incidentally, however, Afro-Asian solidarity does exist by virtue of two momentous events that occurred in late 2008: China's August 8th opening ceremony of the Beijing Summer Olympics stunned the Western world and on November 4th, Barack H. Obama won the popular vote and electoral college against John McCain. Because of the unique role of the U.S. president—not just Chief Executive, but as Commander-in-Chief, a *de facto* epic hero whose political genealogy stretches back to George Washington—an Afro-Oriental Commander-in-Chief symbolically lays siege to the deep recesses of White (House) supremacy and the sacrosanct marrow of its imagined white body-politic. Moreover, centuries of American imperial policy toward and aesthetic Othering of China—predicated on racial superiority and Christian exceptionalism because the "Western perspective oriented around China helps establish the centrality of the West to the history it writes" (Hayot, *The Hypothetical* 11-12)—changed dramatically from 2000 to 2007, inclusive of the meteoric rise of Obama as a state senator, U.S. Senator, and presidential candidate. In this regard, President Obama's symbolic import and the rise of China as an East Asian economic goliath—recognized by Jeffrey A. Bader's *Obama and China's Rise: An Insider's Account of America's Asia Strategy*—merge together. Separately, the high-profile 2008 Beijing Olympics and Obama's election created great cognitive dissonance in, the imaginaries that had supported global narratives of racial supremacy for the last five hundred years. Together they imply an Afro-Oriental scale enlargement, one that has remarkable implications for the rapidly unfolding hyper-modernity in East Asia, and the canonical ideal of the heroic self that have undergirded the founding myths of the nation.

Indeed, the return of East Asia—China in particular—offers a unique chance for its literature scholars to construct a storytelling canon built not upon romantic and pseudo-scientific notions of racial purity but upon the commons of modern humans. E.J. Michael Witzel, drawing upon mythology, anthropology, and modern genetic science, situates a "common origin" for our world myths in East Africa: "Anatomically modern humans" are "*homo narrans* or *homo fabulans*, a narrating and fabulating being," whose deepest roots lie in the myths of the "African Eve." In *The Origins of the World's Mythologies* (2012), Witzel traces modern human storytelling back to the two major "Out of Africa" migrations, the older toward India, the second toward Eurasia (6-8, 15, 203, 216-17). While the East African origin of modern humans prevails among evolutionary biologists and Africanists, the Western literary canon privileges the rise of modern literature and its much shorter temporality. In racial/ethnic terms, this short-time frame not only foregrounds the forced migration of West Africans into chattel slavery, the slave being the anti-self to Western (heroic) subjectivity, but still largely excludes, attenuates, or marginalizes all non-Western storytelling cultures.

Because China's rising economic clout and (re)emergence in East Asia happen in real time, the foundations of its new storytelling canons are yet to be concretized. An article published by Yale University's Julie Wilensky, "The Magical Kunlun and 'Devil Slaves': Chinese Perceptions of Dark-skinned People and Africa before 1500" (2002), a revision of a 1930 study, is absolutely pivotal since it occupies the nexus between European American, East Asian, and African diaspora canons and policies.

Wilensky's article appears at the beginning of George W. Bush's "War on Terror" and renewed projections of the "American heroic"; Bush's policy, ironically, led to (inter)national public distrust of, and shame and outrage about, the Republican Party's militarism and torture policies that propelled Barack Obama into office on a platform of "Change." It also falls safely within the period in which China emerged as a global economic power that began to invest heavily in Africa and as a cultural power that could produce Hollywood epics. Notable here is Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), a cinematic blockbuster which featured a female epic heroine who simultaneously captivated male viewers and rewrote gender boundaries. These events, along with 1998 genetic research concluding that "southern populations in East Asia may be derived from the populations in Southeast Asia that originally migrated from Africa" (Chu, Huang, Kuang, Wang, Xu, Chu, Yang, Lin, Li, Wu, Geng, Tan, Du, Jin 11767), threatened to change China's perceptions of its racial heritage relative to Africa and shift global racial hierarchies.

An undergraduate's work is rarely cited and scholarly work itself is rarely subjected to a close reading. Nevertheless, Wilensky's successful publication of her Yale University undergraduate thesis (which won two of Yale's writing awards), a reading of China's lore pertaining to East Africa which received "extensive feedback" and "substantial revisions" by experts in Chinese history (Yale) and East Asian studies (University of Pennsylvania), respectively, belie its author's status (indeed, Wilensky, in her acknowledgement note on page 1, credits her advisor and the "many editorial suggestions" from the editor of journal in which her essay appeared. Subsequent references to Wilensky should be understood to include her two China experts). Although a historical essay, "The Magical Kunlun" concerns literature because it is based on interpretation of fictionalized lore, particularly that which reflects East African cultural influences. Notwithstanding its importance and availability on the internet, its literary significance remains overlooked because it is relegated to the history of African slaves in China.

Formally focused on reconstructing Chinese perceptions of African slaves who were imported into China by virtue of the Arab Slave trade, Wilensky's method is etymological. Specifically, she fixes her critical gaze on the etymology of *kunlun*, a word now associated with dark-skinned slaves, and the "magical, superhuman" (2) connotations associated with it found in fictionalized lore. The translations and initial readings contained in Wilensky's article—largely taken from original work by Hsing-lang Chang in "The Importation of Negro Slaves to China Under the T'ang Dynasty (A.D. 618-907)" (1930)—are vital for a full mapping of East Asian storytelling. These stories potentially serve as a record of slavery-inspired epic lore related to the East African Diaspora that began in the T'ang Dynasty: most notable among these is "The Kunlun Slave," the famous story that documents China's fascination with and high regard for the flying African leitmotif (Toni Morrison's 1977 novel *The Song of Solomon* centers this West African leitmotif, brought to the U.S.—roughly a thousand years later—by enslaved West Africans, and, more generally, their exceptional descendants). Given the uniqueness of Wilensky's "The Magical Kunlun," the politics of its critical methodology deserves keen attention since it deploys a peculiar Orientalist technique, one that entirely omits a slavery-attuned perspective. Consequently, proper interpretation of such lore would, at minimum, include close readings sensitive to key issues elided by Chang and Wilensky: African epic traditions and the unique place of the exceptional Other, sexuality and gender politics, labor and the culture of the slave trade, and the question of religion and the psycho-social consequences of chattel slavery.

Because its cultural comparison (T'ang Dynasty, Arab empire, and East African kingdoms and cultures) focuses on ancient stories of slave-heroes, "The Magical Kunlun" apprehends a comparative temporality. Indexed to ancient East African and Asian temporalities largely unknown to Western scholars, Wilensky's study is challenged by a most critical methodological question: given its tempero-spatial magnitude, how expansive should one's database of knowledge be if this folkloric fiction is to be properly read? This question is perhaps the defining question confronted by literary scholars in East Asia. For example, at the annual English Language and Literature Association of Korea International Conference held in November 2013 at Sookmyung Women's University in Seoul, Eric Hayot delivered a keynote entitled "Scale, Data, and World Literature" addressed to the conference's topic of "Micro versus Macro Literatures in English." Hayot attended to literary critics' methodology—traditionally at odds with interrogations of methodological assumptions, biases, and research questions—in light of Franco Moretti's critique of literary scholars' canonized method of close reading and the sudden rise of the

digital humanities and world literature. "The Magical *Kunlun*" anticipated questions of this nature in East Asia, for the "ontology" of the literary object Hayot suggested, not only denotes the formal components of the text, but also identity politics. Wilensky's interest and Hayot's expertise in East Asian Studies highlight the rising importance of East Asian "ontology" to Western literary scholars. In a globalized world in which East Asia—with or without China as a superpower—will play a central role in emergent world literature canons, issues of identity are paramount. Significantly, *kunlun* etymology speaks to the place East Africa held, and holds, in ancient and modern China at a time when its relationship to Africa legitimately raises questions about cultural exchange and neo-colonialism. The racial hostility Wilensky documents among a "mob of more than 3000 Chinese students" toward the African "black devils" in 1988, in significant part because of interracial dating (43-44), seems to parallel much of the African American experience. Her implicit question—Was *kunlun* in Chinese culture equivalent to *nigger* in the U.S., and is it the source or correlative of racial hostility to Africans among contemporary Chinese today?—goes right to the heart of complex issues regarding racial oppression, aesthetics, and culture as globalization unfolds. Wilensky makes this clear as she delineates her research focus, questions, and methodology:

The first chapter section of this paper seeks to explain how Chinese people perceived these black slaves by analyzing representations of people with dark skin in fictional and nonfiction sources from the fifth century through the Song dynasty, tracing the evolution of the meanings and connotations of the term *kunlun* 崑崙. This mysterious and poorly understood word first applied to dark-skinned Chinese and then expanded over time to encompass multiple meanings, all connoting dark skin. This chapter examines the meaning of the term *kunlun* in nonfiction before and during the Tang; fictional tales about magical, superhuman *kunlun* slaves from the Tang fiction compendium *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 (Extensive Gleanings of the Reign of Great Tranquility); and finally, representations of the *kunlun* from a nonfiction writer from the Song, Zhu Yu 朱彧 ... Were these Tang and Song images of the *kunlun* based on direct contact between Chinese and African peoples? When did the Chinese make a conceptual link between the *kunlun* slaves in China and the countries and peoples of East Africa? (2)

Wilensky's study is a watershed unlike the studies concerned with historicizing the enslavement of East Africans in China and the etymological focus of the study extends from nonfiction to include her interpretation of race in fiction, a "valuable source because its popularity reveals widespread cultural perceptions of people with dark skin" (2). Although Wilensky foregrounds historical and nonfiction accounts in her study, on grounds of reliability her article is, *a priori*, aligned with methodology fundamental to literary critique. At its core, Wilensky's study raises a philological question central to the method used by literary scholars: what does the etymology of a word reveal about writers' authorial intent and readers' understanding that we can use to interpret a text and its context? For English literature scholars, the *Oxford English Dictionary* is considered authoritative both for its exhaustive inclusion of multiple senses of a given word and for its etymology. The close reading method developed in recent decades often turns upon critical insights into denotations, connotations, and etymologies of words comprising a key passage from a literary text. While "scale jumping" is possible even within one sentence, as Hayot suggested, textual close reading is often criticized as an apolitical micro-logical exercise based on the critic's privileging interpretations of one or a few texts without regard for the macro-logical context (history, politics, and class), or even the author's intent. The battle over whether politics and aesthetics should mix is, of course, old and entrenched.

But Wilensky's *kunlun* etymology constitutes an altogether different species of interpretation that might be called a "closed" reading of literary texts. In other words, while tracing the racial meaning of *kunlun*—from "the Tang dynasty, [when] Arab traders brought a number of East African slaves to China" (1)—provides the *raison d'être* for Wilensky's investigation, the semantic content and literary strategies evident in the stories are "closed" to interpretation. The method is the message, for Wilensky's construction of *kunlun* etymology associated with East Africans, even of the most exceptional slaves, confines and defines their status as *kunlun* chattel. Far too little attention is given by her to considering whether the stories might contradict literal constructions that simply equate *kunlun* and slave. While Wilensky rhetorically foregrounds "fictional tales about magical *kunlun* slaves from the *Taiping guangji* ... a massive Song period collection of Tang and earlier tales" (5), this is misleading. Although in keeping with her earlier identification of these tales as a "valuable source," her core methodological superstructure relies upon a fiction-nonfiction divide that maps onto another: while noting that "these fictional tales were widely read at the time of their publication, revealing common images

of the *kunlun* that reflect popular perceptions of people with dark skin," Wilensky privileges the objective, scholarly viewpoints—found in "a nonfiction source from the Song"—that ultimately treat East Africans as "foreign 'devil slaves'" (5). "Perceptions" are the soft power of Wilensky's methodology, which initially valorizes but ultimately negates the "common" and "popular perceptions"—valorizes their existence as a reflection of how the masses think, but negates their substance as an aspect of human culture meriting attention in its own rights—in favor of nonfiction, which is more reliable for its authors' knowledge and facts. Chinese culture and literature were already considered "heathen" by late-nineteenth-century US-Americans, (Lutz 9-21), but US-American Orientalist policy filled the power vacuum WWII created, with a critical difference: while centuries of Western European Orientalism, Said argues, depended on a "broad catholic" approach, for the U.S. it was "but an administrative one, a matter for policy" (290). Said speaks here with reference to the Middle or Near East, Islam in particular, but his analysis is relevant insofar as it reflects the advent of US-American East Asian academic culture and policy that predated and, more importantly, dominated after World War II:

One of the striking aspects of the new American social-science attention to the Orient is its singular avoidance of literature. You can read through reams of expert writing on the modern Near East and never encounter a single reference to literature. What seems to matter far more to the regional expert are "facts," of which a literary text is perhaps a disturber. The net effect of this remarkable omission in modern American awareness of the Arab or Islamic Orient is to keep the region and its people conceptually emasculated, reduced to "attitudes," "trends," statistics: in short, dehumanized. Since an Arab poet or novelist—and there are many—writes of his experiences, of his values, of his humanity (however strange that may be), he effectively disrupts the various patterns (images, clichés, abstractions) by which the Orient is represented. A literary text speaks more or less directly of a living reality ... The non-philological study of esoteric Oriental languages is useful for obvious rudimentary strategic reasons; but it is also useful for giving a cachet of authority, almost a mystique, to the "expert" who appears able to deal with hopelessly obscure material with firsthand skill. In the social-science order of things, language study is a mere tool for higher aims, certainly not for reading literary texts. (Said 290-91)

In like manner, Wilensky's treatment of storytelling proceeds through an "administrative policy" that empties out the possibility of Afro-Oriental mutuality between East Africa and China. She does so not only by using the fiction-nonfiction divide to privilege racist depictions of East Africans, but also negates the human value of China's "popular" fiction, and thus empties the *Taiping guangji* of its value as well. She makes this clear after discussing the *kunlun* tales from the *Taiping guangji* and finding that these stories—obviously associated with East Africans—often portray their exceptional abilities and "good will." Because these reflect "perceptions," Wilensky finds them of questionable value: "Unlike the histories and nonfiction Buddhist accounts from the Tang, the *Taiping guangji* does not depict the *kunlun* as threatening or mention anything uncivilized about the *kunlun*'s languages and behavior" (17), suggesting the sharp limits of fiction to reflect reality. The two explanations for this divide, and the faulty reality of fiction, are recognized and iterated by Wilensky: "Perhaps the difference between the fictional and nonfiction depictions is because the stories of the *Taiping guangji* were written by people with less knowledge of foreign countries and peoples than were the histories and Buddhist accounts. On the other hand, the contrasting images of people with dark skin might only suggest a difference between genres" (17). This last recognition, an important one, suggests Wilensky possesses, at a minimum, a critical, objective awareness of whether nonfiction "genres" escape these limits (Isn't history written by the conqueror?). A metacritical examination may be too much to expect, but it and critical awareness evaporate with the beginning of the very next section, which immediately follows the passage above. Subtitled "Nonfiction from the Song: Zhu Yu's *Pingzhou ketan*," this links the nonfictional accounts in the T'ang and Song dynasties. It also closes the superstructure of the chapter, for Wilensky deploys her introduction and first section (subtitled "Nonfiction from the Fifth Century through the Tang") as the nonfiction bookend that precedes her lengthy discussion of the perceptually important but factually unreliable *Taiping guangji* fiction.

Wilensky's nonfiction-fiction-nonfiction superstructure begins with a historicization of *kunlun* etymology based on an "anecdote from a history of the Liu Song dynasty (420-479 CE)," which constitutes the first known description of someone as a "*kunlun* slave." This slave of the emperor, named Bai Zhu, exercises exceptional authority, for he even administers corporeal punishment to "ministers and officials." The nonfiction status of this historical anecdote lends it unique credibility in Wilensky's argument, particularly because, she notes, it "is the only depiction of a *kunlun* person surnamed *Bai*, which means 'white'." It may strike readers as contradictory that here Wilensky suggests the nonfic-

tion writer may have (creatively) exercised an "attempt at humor since the term *kunlun* had a connotation to dark skin" (5), but the levity seemingly disarms and yet reinforces her observation that: "The name *Bai* was also a common surname for non-Chinese people from a region of present-day Xinjiang, however, so perhaps it merely reflects that the slave was not Chinese. This early depiction of a *kunlun* indicates the slave's imposing power, with his proximity to the emperor and ability to punish even the highest officials. The description of Bai's physical power may presage later tales about the superhuman strength of the *kunlun*" (5-6). Wilensky immediately qualifies this by pointing out that *kunlun* may have been inserted into the anecdote when it was recorded later by T'ang Dynasty scholars. Notwithstanding the qualification, Wilensky has introduced effectively the following impression, for the historical record, at the outset of her etymological odyssey: the "superhuman" *kunlun* archetype is neither African nor Chinese in origin, but a "white" foreigner, presumably a Western European. The exceptional *kunlun* found in the *Taiping guangji* are then, at best, but shadows of this "white" original that most likely represent popular misconceptions about East Africans.

Returning to the closing section of chapter 1 with this in mind, Wilensky's nonfiction-fiction-nonfiction, fact-perception-fact structure maps onto a common racial structure in that it posits a white "superhuman" *kunlun* as a historical account, relegates to mere unreliable fiction (myth) the possibility of an East African counterpart, and, in the closing section, historically reduces the East Africans to slave stereotypes common to the fear-driven imaginary associated with chattel slavery of antebellum America. The centerpiece for this section is a lengthy quote from Zhu's *Pingzhou ketan* (*Notes on Pingzhou* [1119]), what Wilensky describes as an "account of foreign trade" (17). Wilensky begins this section with Zhu's observation: "Many of the wealthy households in Guangzhou [modern-day Canton, a major trade port that had many East African slaves] raise devil slaves" (18). Obviously an important piece to Wilensky's argument because of her article's title, this passage raises critical issues. Not only does the descriptive term "devil slaves" invoke some of the worst racial stereotypes, but this passage documents the domestication of newly arrived East African slaves in a manner that never receives attention from Wilensky. Because of its obvious importance, Wilensky did not rely upon her sources, but took pains to translate this "devil slaves" passage herself, as she indicates in footnote 58: "I use my own translation except where underlined, which is from Chang, 'The Importation of Negro Slaves'" (18). Chang's 1930 article is, in fact, the critical foundation for Wilensky's study, in significant part because he, one of the few reliable translators, "gathered the most Chinese sources in his comprehensive record of the Chinese relationship with East Africa" (Shen viii). In fact, Chang's treatment of this corpus—largely, lengthy translations of passages punctuated with short commentary—provides the methodological blueprint Wilensky adopts. But she also adapts it, for while Chang is an "Oriental" who reflects the anti-Black racism of the 1930s modern intellectual, in the form of commentary that repeatedly iterates Marco Polo as the authority on the "ugliness" of the "Negro" (see Chang 43, 45, 59), his article contains an internal inconsistency in terms of its racial ideology: the existence of exceptional *kunlun* remains substantially intact, and Chang concludes, relying largely on Polo, "we have the strongest reasons for identifying K'unlun with Africa" (43). It is this inconsistency which Wilensky targets, particularly Chang's back-to-Africa *kunlun* etymology, when she writes (in footnote 57), "Schafer comments on Chang's translation, arguing that Chang's claim that all instances of the word *kunlun* applied to black Africans from its earliest uses is not necessarily true, since the Chinese used the word to apply to all people darker than themselves" (18; Wilensky's reference is to Edward H. Schafer, *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand*). Wilensky's rhetorical logistics in and around the "devil slaves" passage are vexed, the Schafer reference calling attention to itself since the most proper place for it would seem to be during her discussion of the nonfictional Bai Zhu, the "white" *kunlun*. The positive invocation of Schafer, of course, calls attention to Wilensky's critical ambivalence toward Chang.

To fully understand the nuanced yet highly charged adopt-adapt method Wilensky wields, it is important to recall that Chang is a twentieth-century nonfiction critic and translator of the fiction corpus. Indeed, the nonfiction-fiction divide would seem to establish Chang as an unimpeachable resource. At the time he published "The Importation of Negro Slaves," Chang was a professor of history at the Catholic University of Peking, approved by the Holy See and founded in 1925 by Benedictine monks from Latrobe, Pennsylvania, with a \$100,000 grant from a US-American. Chang seems to be an exception to the rule in which the increase of Chinese students interested in "Western subjects" offered by "Christian schools" was generally attributed to "those who could not afford the classical Chinese

training or who were not considered bright enough to pass the civil service examinations." Born in 1887, Chang received some of his early education in Soochow, a place well known for the English-language "preparatory" or "feeder schools" that directed students to Christian colleges. One of the key functions of these colleges at the end of the nineteenth century, when Chang came of age, was "preparation for study in the United States and England" ("Chang Hsing-lang" 10; see also Lutz 76-77, 113; 495-512). Although China was patently hostile to Westerners and their missionaries, a reality contributing to US-American "soft-power" strategies via higher education, Chang was apparently one of the early Chinese students who sought to Westernize himself by virtue of acquiring English and an education in engineering and science. A student of mining engineering at Peiyang University in Tientsin (location of a hospital and medical college founded by Dr. John K. MacKenzie of the London Missionary Society), Chang apparently left for the USA in the early twentieth century, and entered Harvard, graduating with a B.Sc. in chemistry in 1909. He studied in Berlin before returning to China, where he held a number of critical posts, including civil engineer in Nanking (a place, like Soochow and Tientsin, known for hiring English-speaking Chinese), professor of chemistry, special history correspondent for the Chinese National History Compiling Bureau, and dean of the Sinological Institute at Amoy University. Among his notable publications, according to *Who's Who in China* (1932), are the six-volume *Materials for a History of the Intercourse between China and the Western Countries* (1930) and two volumes (six planned) of a Chinese edition of the *Travels of Marco Polo* (see Bertelsen 118-19; "Chang Hsing-lang"; Lutz 36, 42, 143).

Because of, and yet notwithstanding, Chang's Western credentials, ultimately a two-fold logic emerges from Wilensky's treatment of his nonfiction article, exemplified by her re-translation of the "devil slaves" passage. Her strategy pivots on a critical ambivalence to Chang, a pro-Western, Harvard-educated chemist by training. Ideologically situated as a Chinese Occidental (Eurocentric Chinese leaders educated in the West [Mullen xxxiii, 159]), Chang deploys "history"—Polo's reiteration of "Negro ugliness"—as the authoritative frame into which all the *kunlun* imported into China fit. Wilensky uses the adopt-adapt method to appropriate Chang's Chinese-over-African racial hierarchy even as she negates his fundamental premise—"we have the strongest reasons for identifying K'unlun with Africa"—in favor of her own East Asian Studies one. In sum, although she does not treat Polo, Wilensky dissolves the joint Sino-European authority Chang himself establishes by virtue of repeatedly invoking Polo, and then superimposes an Orientalist, West-over-East hierarchy on Chang's. Wilensky's omission of Polo is both logical and necessary, for Chang writes, "The extraordinary physical strength of these K'un-lun (Negro) slaves is adverted to not only by Chinese authors, but also by foreign writers such as Marco Polo" (53). Moreover, in the lore Mo Kunlun is an exceptional slave because—not in spite—of his ugly skin (the Mo surname means "inky"), which is his signature deformity (see Chang 45; Wilensky 10-11, for her treatment of the same). Between Wilensky's "devil slaves" and exceptional *kunlun*, then, an impassable (racial) gulf emerges as the nonfiction metric for the critical canon of Sino-East African literature she helps to inaugurate.

Although Wilensky's work appeared in the early 2000s, its impassable racial gulf heuristic is a by-product of antebellum US-American culture and nineteenth-century U.S. *fin de siècle*, an important era for the nation's literary and Orientalist canons. The 1820s and 1890s are pivotal: because of the immense wealth from the slave trade, which made the South one of the richest areas on the earth, US-American culture flourished as a Golden Age for literary production and law began in the 1820s. Although the 1820s US-American (literary) Renaissance reflects this, along with the founding of the American Oriental Society in 1842, it was not until the mid-1890s, the Gilded Age of industrial monopolies, that US-American literature entered its colleges as a formal canon (see Pattee 209-19). This coincided with other important US-American developments: the rise of Orientalism in the form of East Asian missions and imperialism—in 1889, thanks to support from "prominent financial leaders," US-American missionaries to China "increased rapidly" (see Lutz 98-99, 80-129 generally, and Wong 99, 97-113 generally); the US-American annexation of the Philippines in 1898; the advent of formal Orientalist studies (e.g., Yale in 1878, Harvard in 1879); the rapid growth of public schools and colleges; and, the post-bellum formalizing of racial segregation that was canonized as the supreme law in 1896. *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) established "separate but equal" as the national law. When the U.S. Supreme Court reversed its application to public schools, in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), it specifically acknowledged that "In the South, the movement toward free common schools . . . had not yet

taken hold" in 1868 (490-91). This 1820s/1890s frame for the formal beginnings of US-American literature and Orientalism, extending as it does from centuries of Western European culture and now enjoying its superpower status, raises fundamental questions. Since the 1820s/1890s canon stems from both essential notions of pure, superior, and separate racial blood, *and* its antithesis, the essential dynamism of whiteness (see Rutledge 110-12), can it be deconstructed by canons of Enlightenment ideology? What are the conceptual bricks upon which a critical paradigm of Africa in the "The East" should be constructed by East Asian scholars if their (re)emergent canons are to be truly global?

While Said's *Orientalism* is essential in this discussion, it is insufficient because it critiques Western Orientalism and yet privileges an Islamic Middle East indexed to the modern West. In other words, assaying Western temporality, racial perspectives, and cartographies of the Middle East, without more, obscures the fact that an Afro-Oriental East existed in a very different frame. Africa as East, and particularly its East-to-North cultural corridor, cedes territory when Said centers the Middle East and Far East. By elevating Westerners' Orient as *topia* and passing over Egypt's Northeast African geography, Said not only advances a critical geographical oversimplification, but he makes Orientalism a temporality that seals off the full meaning of an African provenance, which Black Power/Arts Movement leaders of the previous decade literally fought and died to unveil (indeed, Said quotes and overlooks Jean-Baptiste-Joseph Fourier's comment in the *préface historique* of the *Description de l'Égypte* [1809-1828] that "Egypt occupies the center of the ancient continent" [5, 84]). Although not as problematic as Wilensky's reduction of East African "superhuman *kunlun*" to fictional fantasy, Said's appropriation of Egypt for the Middle East and erasure of Ethiopia deterritorializes the ancient place where, and time when, exceptional East Africans existed. Concomitant with his location of Egypt in the Orient—thus symbolically removing its history and culture from northeast Africa—Ethiopia, the Far East of Africa geographically, culturally, and most importantly, temporally, does not register. Homer and his association with Egypt are repeatedly invoked by Said and the Orientalists he critiques (e.g., 11, 20, 56, 84-85), but the older East African, Ethiopian claims to Egypt—the Greek gods, in Book I of the *Iliad*, are attending a "feasts of Aethiopia's blameless race" (99)—vanish in Said's articulation of Egypt's critical import. Said's troublingly terse methodological disclaimer, that he recognizes the "brute reality" of the specific cultures but is not treating them (5), is insufficient when he uncritically de-Africanizes Egypt, critiquing the Orientalists but accepting their tempero-spatial mapping, and situates it in his *Orientalism*.

Bill V. Mullen, relying on the long history of African American anti-imperial solidarity with the East, posits "Afro-Orientalism" as a concept that is, by its very nature, considerably more expansive than Said's "Orientalism"—as a fair response to global imperialism must be. Mullen, for example, begins by quoting Richard Wright's blues poetry, which voices a desire to be Chinese not, contra Said, for "converting the Orient from something into something else," but coalition-building to remap the world from the grassroots up (xi-xiii; qtd. in Said 67). Most critically, Mullen articulates the racial import of Egypt, the genealogy supporting its African identity, while Said foregrounds its importance for the Orient. Mullen's explicit critique of the canonical myopia of the African American canon applies equally to Said's *Orientalism*: the former proceeds from an American provincialism, and the latter from a Middle-Eastern provincialism, that dismissed the international materiality of Afro-Orientalism (xxxii-ii, xl-xli). But as expansive as it is, Mullen's "Afro-Orientalism" falls short since it, indexed to Marxist theory, overlooks the common origins of humanity—in East Africa. That modern humans are "of one blood" should be the most fundamental critical model and trope for the Humanities, or at least one of them. However, the modern literature canon's greatest irony is the negative content it harbors in this regard, despite claims to universality. An African American novelist—one of the "early Afrocentrists," a group which constituted part of the Afro-Oriental spectrum, according to Mullen (xxxiii)—who centers both an Eastern Afro-Orient and the concept "of one blood," in opposition to a hegemonic West, is Pauline Hopkins, author of *Of One Blood; Or, the Hidden Self* (1902-1903). A slim text whose generic complexity—part fantasy and historical novel, epic/myth, ancient history lecture, spiritual soundtrack, US-American cultural study and critique—transforms its literary allegory into a performance, Hopkins' *Of One Blood* assaults the underpinnings of the Western canon. It does so, in part, by recovering Ethiopia as the "cradle of civilization" and the most ancient East, older than the Egypt-centered Orientalism Said addresses.

In inverse proportion to the trouble it presents for the US-American-centered African American literary canon, largely because it apprehends ancient African storytelling traditions, *Of One Blood* offers a paradigm for Afro-Oriental canons. Its double-motif plot combines the "separated at birth" attack on pure-blood white supremacy with a "back to Africa"/"return of the king" pilgrimage to recover African dignity the former motif cannot. Hopkins's novel opens with and features Dr. Reuel Briggs, the Harvard University medical school genius who has a "hidden self": "His head was that of an athlete, with close-set ears, and covered with an abundance of black hair, straight and closely cut, thick and smooth; the nose was the aristocratic feature, although nearly spoiled by broad nostrils, of this remarkable young man; his skin was white, but of a tint suggesting olive, an almost sallow color which is a mark of strong, melancholic temperaments. His large mouth concealed powerful long white teeth which gleamed through lips even and narrow ... His eyes were a very bright and piercing gray, courageous, keen and shrewd. Briggs was not a man to be despised—physically or mentally" (3-4).

The Harvard setting puts the 1890s canon-making before readers. *Of One Blood* challenges Harvard and ethnologists' polygenesis argument in favor of separate racial creations. Harvard was "one of the nerve centers" of this belief because Harvard's Louis Agassiz was "one of the leading spokesmen for polygenesis" (McDowell ix-x). In a move that sounds the depths of the past and yet speaks to contemporary cinema, Hopkins allegorizes classic adventure literature and popular culture with her masked odyssey. In Hopkins' nod toward and past Homer, the lotus-lily birthmark Briggs shares with his two "separated at birth" siblings marks his Ethiopian, East African epic pedigree: geographically placed in Lybia by Herodotus (*Histories*, volume IV), retold in *Ulysses* (Book IX) as the Lotus-Eaters, the story originates from ancient Egypt and the "Tree of Life," symbolized by three lotus-lilies. Although Deborah McDowell situates the "fire and romance" of Hopkins' oeuvre as a response to American Thomas Dixon's "rabidly racist novels," or "voluminous *nonfictional* quest romances" in which civilization is brought to the "Dark Continent" (viii, xix), Imperial Britain's colonial footprint and H. Rider Haggard's fiction are critical. Haggard's exceptionally popular Lost World literature—most famously, *King Solomon's Mines* (1885)—provides essential context because Hopkins values the epic-based mythology beneath what McDowell deems "fantasy" (xx). Coinciding with the Scramble for Africa, Western Europe's rapid colonization of the continent beginning in the 1880s, "Haggard's romances, in particular," according to Wendy Roberta Katz, "illustrate a total mentality, a philosophy of life, an idea of humankind completely in harmony with the imperial ideology" (4). Haggard's African experience, sense of history, swashbuckling adventures, and storytelling prowess made him an imperial canon-maker and "celebrity" who motivated scores of British youths to act on the imperial imaginary he narrated (Katz 1-4). He did the same across the Atlantic, by virtue of influencing Americans like Edgar Rice Burroughs and Robert E. Howard, creators of Tarzan and Conan, respectively.

It is understandable, then, that *Of One Blood* is a unique narrative, and canon-challenging visual and auditory force that is most timely. It is also before its time, for its epic-attuned narrative is audiovisually rich in a manner anticipating George Lucas's and Steven Spielberg's *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), inspired by Haggard's Alan Quatermain. No airplanes existed to map his journey as it did for *Raiders'* Dr. Indiana Jones, but Dr. Briggs, one of the treasure-seeking raiders of the lost Meroe, initially follows a similar course. However, his route ultimately doubles as a palimpsest unveiled that *starts* with Hopkins' critique of Orientalism: the raiders' Boston-to-New York departure to Liverpool, England, and to Tripoli, Libya, presents, to their Western gaze, an "Orient" that looks exotic "at a distance." This distance obscures "decay" because, Hopkins writes, "Tripoli is the natural road by which Africa has been attacked by many illustrious explorers" (75-79). *Raiders* stops here, as does Said, in the Middle East. The same is true of McDowell who judges "Ethiopianism" to be "mainly an empty symbol" actuating Hopkins' "phantasmagoric imagination" (xx). But Hopkins continues to seek on behalf of readers deprived of such knowledge the older East of Ethiopia/Meroe. It is, after all, the route of humanity out of East Africa 64,000 years earlier, a fact vindicated by ancient mythology, an antebellum slave spiritual, and contemporary DNA science. In this regard, Briggs's journey is a response to the coded spiritual call Hopkins reiterates through the slave spiritual, "Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt's land." The "weird contralto, veiled as it were" in the song performed by Briggs's sister (their relationship as yet unknown), instructs him to, indeed "go ... way down in Egypt's land" to Ethiopia (14, 67); her contralto, reflecting the lowest African vocal frequency, is also heard by the entire audience since its members, too, are of one blood. Briggs, who complicates the tragic mulatto topos be-

cause he has returned to Ethiopia as a king and remarried happily, watches "with serious apprehension, the advance of mighty nations penetrating the dark, mysterious forests of his native land" (193). His concern, as the lights dim on the plot, does not focus the reader on his individuality, whether personal happiness or tragedy, but on the international actors and acts playing out in the global theater. Now known as King Ergamenes, Briggs's final, questioning thought engages Europe's colonialism and continued modernization and the rapid expansion of the European/US-American bourgeoisie at the expense of East (and West) Africa: "'Where will it stop?' he sadly questions. 'What will the end be?'" (193).

More than a century later, Ergamenes's "What will the end be?" melancholic question is still just as valid. Afro-Orientalism, symbolized principally by President Obama and China's rise, occurs with Africa in the same scrambled-for position. The Chang-Wilensky treatment of *kunlun* fiction, arguably a folkloric byproduct of exceptional East African slaves, represents the existing critical canon. Nevertheless, the changing global politics in East Asia, and DNA evidence that the Chinese—like everyone else—descend from East Africa, present a hope for new canons that do not marginalize texts like *Of One Blood*. Hopkins' last line is critical, for it is a timely, dispositive reminder that we are all "Of one blood": "But who shall judge the handiwork of God, the Great Craftsman! Caste prejudice, race pride, boundless wealth, scintillating intellects refined by all the arts of the intellectual world, are but puppets in His hand, for His promises stand, and He will prove His words, 'Of one blood have I made all races of men'" (193). The title being thus brought full circle and exposed retrospectively as a critical frame, Hopkins's "Of One Blood" refrain organically opens and closes her novel. This rhetorical strategy works doubly, allowing her to invoke the Afro-Judeo-Christian common/sense the West-educated Ergamenes may proudly claim as an essential part of his East African inheritance and enabling Hopkins to suggest this common/sense beginning and ending as our only salvation. Although her Afro-Judeo-Christian narrative-judgment has been relegated to the literary and epistemological margins, Hopkins's "Of one blood" refrain is a critical model for "scale enlarging" and restructuring the canon, and fashioning a new, truly universal, Humanities. Indeed, Hopkins's refrain was echoed in 2012 by Witzel speaking to phenotype relative to regional climate in *The Origins of the World's Mythologies*. It is this "Of one blood" principle, myth- and DNA-supported, that guides Witzel in his quest to provide a genealogy for the world's mythologies and that leads him to look past skin color and embrace the East African blood in us all: "In other words, we are all 'African under the skin,' but we look quite different from each other now" (203).

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