Michael Keevak, *Becoming Yellow: A Short History of Racial Thinking*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011. Pp. ix+219. ISBN 978-0-691-14301-5. £24.95 (hardback).

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operations of mounting or dismounting a horse, or induce you to look at ice skating as a metaphor for the boundary between death and life.

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The work under review focuses on historical transformations in European as well as American colourization of Chinese and Japanese. It contributes therefore to the interrogation of racialist thought in the Western tradition exemplified by Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze's *Race and the Enlightenment: A Reader* (1997) and *Postcolonial African Philosophy: A Critical Reader* (1997), and Londa Schiebinger's arguments in favour of Joseph Needham's thesis that Linnaeus was the progenitor of 'Europocentrism', or 'linguistic imperialism'.

It is well known that, prior to the nineteenth century, Chinese and Japanese were often classified as 'white'. Furthermore, many pre-nineteenth-century authors considered the Chinese in particular as models to be emulated, without regard to the colour of their skin: these thinkers included the likes of Leibniz, Voltaire and Quesnay, although in the work under review the sinophilia of Voltaire and other *philosophes* does not, alas, rate a mention.

In a compact and compelling 144 pages, Michael Keevak sets out to show when and in what ways 'white' East Asians became the 'yellow peril' by examining the colour terms applied to them since the Middle Ages. He paints a vivid picture of the evolution of the Western view of Asians as 'yellow' by examining a large range of sources in Dutch, French, German, Italian, Latin, Portuguese and Spanish, among other languages. These include travel accounts, dictionaries, medical and anthropological literature and even botanical texts.

The virtue of this work is its thorough examination of the nuances and usages of specific colour terms over time. Keevak argues that it was more challenging to assign a colour to peoples who were seen as neither black nor white, but as something in between. Asia remained an in-between place for Europeans for a long time, as revealed by Jaucourt's complaint in the *Encyclopédie* that the term 'Indies' was used indiscriminately to describe a vast array of peoples and regions. Linnaeus was typical in confusing China with India in his designations of plant habitat; this makes one wonder if Linnaeus actually had 'rigid geographical boundaries' (p. 59). The problem of who came from the 'Indies' is hinted at, but the contours of this slippery category are crucial to unpacking how East Asians became yellow.

The author identifies a key transformation in the colourization of '*Homo asiaticus*' (admittedly not specifically East Asian) in the tenth edition of Linnaeus's two-volume *Systema naturae* (1758–1759). In the first nine editions of the *Systema naturae*, first published in 1735, Linnaeus had characterized *H. asiaticus* as *fuscus* – meaning 'dark'; in the tenth edition he switched to terming Asians *luridus*, an unappetizing yellow associated with jaundice in humans as well as with sickly and poisonous plants. Unfortunately, the reproductions here of the key texts from the first and tenth editions of the *Systema naturae* are far too small to read. This shift in descriptive nomenclature was perhaps very significant due to Linnaeus's influence on Immanuel Kant, who gave seventy-two courses in the nascent fields of anthropology and physical geography over the course of his career, more than he gave in any other subject.

The work is less satisfying in accounting for *why* these colour terms evolved the way they did; while the book's subtitle states that this work concerns racial *thought*, it focuses more on the colour labelling of peoples than on the theoretical underpinnings for why those labels were applied. For example, the temperaments thought to accompany the four humours of ancient

Greek medicine were frequently used to assign attributes to races. Arguably, this thinking persists in some form to this day.

While Keevak acknowledges that '[h]umoral theory was invoked' (p. 44), he dismisses as increasingly irrelevant the traditional humoral framework within which Linnaeus and others considered human groupings. Yet Linnaeus's four human races are clearly aligned with the four humours via the temperaments: *choleric* Americans, *sanguine* Europeans, *melancholic* Asians and *phlegmatic* Africans. Ignoring these correspondences, the author suggests that one reason Asians came to be seen as yellow was their being associated with yellow bile (p. 52). This claim misidentifies the temperament corresponding to yellow bile in the humoral system, which is 'choleric', rather than 'melancholic', the temperament Linnaeus assigned to *Homo asiaticus*. In fact, the humour corresponding to the melancholic Asian temperament is *black*, not yellow, bile. Following Linnaeus, Kant also identified four races – white, black, American and Indian – although he substituted 'Indian' for *H. asiaticus*. He assigned them attributes readily traceable to humoral theory and to possibly older theories found in the Hippocratic text *Airs, Waters and Places*.

This work argues that a fundamental shift in the colourization of East Asians occurred in the eighteenth century. Yet, as the author concedes, racial stereotyping dates back to antiquity. He correctly points out that earlier racialist thought left colour out of the equation. Be that as it may, the distinctions among peoples on climatic and cultural grounds made by Hippocratic authors in *Airs, Waters and Places* and by Aristotle in *Politics* VII.7 map closely onto later racial categories, e.g. the notion of Greeks alone as capable of independent self-government and the exercise of reason, barbarians as warlike and passionate, and Asians as slave-like – Linnaeus seems to refer to a slavish Asian character in the tenth edition of the *System naturae*: *H. Asiaticus* is '*Regitur* opinionibus [*ruled* by opinions]' (p.21). Hegel likewise capitalized on the alleged passivity of Asians in his lectures on the philosophy of history. Thus characteristics adumbrated in the ancient tripartite racial division continued to populate the racial definitions adopted in the later Enlightenment. Some of these definitions certainly survived the eighteenth-century shift of racial classification from a climatic to a hereditary basis.

This work does not address the classificatory impulse underlying racial categorization. What forces govern this impulse and continue to sustain it down to the present? Consider the furore aroused by Charles Murray and Richard Herrnstein's *The Bell Curve* (1994), which attributed differing levels of intelligence to different races. At this juncture it might be reasonable to ask how important colour, a relative latecomer, is to the long-running discourse about race.

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Dan Ch. Christensen, **Hans Christian Ørsted: Reading Nature's Mind**. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. Pp. xix + 743. ISBN 978-0-19-966926-4. £39.99 (hardback).
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Outside Denmark, Hans Christian Ørsted (1777–1851) is primarily known for his discovery of electromagnetism in 1820. Within his native land, Ørsted is also remembered for his active involvement in the cultural and political life of the nation, and as a driving force behind the establishment of a Polytechnic Institute and the Faculty of Science at Copenhagen University. Today, the building that houses the Departments of Mathematics, Chemistry and part of Physics at Copenhagen University carries his name. With *Reading Nature's Mind*, Dan Christensen has written an impressive biography of an important thinker. First published in Danish in 2009, it is a most welcome addition to the growing body of Danish history-of-science literature published in English, and it is a significant contribution to the research field.