



# From China Virus to Africa Virus in Guangzhou:

Sino-African Paradoxes in the Context of COVID-19

*Image credit: Joshua Fernandez / Unsplash*

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The COVID-19 pandemic, which began in the city of Wuhan, Hubei, China, in December 2019, has led to an increase in acts of Sinophobia as well as prejudice, xenophobia, discrimination, violence and racism against people of East Asian, North Asian and South Asian descent and appearance around the world. This includes the verbal invective of former U.S. President Donald Trump, who referred to the virus as the “China virus.” The upsurge of anti-Chinese sentiment, Sinophobia (from the Latin *Sinae* “China” and the Greek *phobos*, “fear”), against the backdrop of the suspicion of the spread of Covid-19, manifesting itself in feelings such as hatred or fear of China (and related countries), its people, its diaspora or its culture, has been accompanied by a wave of sympathy — a compassion among many people to denounce the injustice inflicted on an entire people without distinction and differentiation.

Paradoxically, in Guangzhou — a busy port city just northwest of Hong Kong — invectives and accusations by city authorities appear most-directed against Africans of sub-Saharan origin in particular, as warnings of a second wave of the pandemic were raised in April 2020.

### ***What happened in Guangzhou in April 2020?***

On April 12, 2020, in an announcement entitled “Guangdong Provincial Public Security Department: foreigners in Guangdong should be investigated and isolated and other prevention and control measures,”<sup>1</sup> Rihua Yang, deputy executive director of the Guangdong Provincial Department of Public Security, said that according to the “Law of the People’s Republic of China on the Prevention and Control of Infectious Diseases,” during the period of prevention and control of the epidemic, foreigners in Guangdong would be investigated, inspected, sampled, isolated and so on for the prevention of coronavirus. If a foreigner were to refuse to cooperate with the investigation, were to refuse to cooperate with the implementation of centralized medical observation of isolation and isolation treatment, or were to obstruct the performance of duties, Rihua Yang said, “the public security agency will issue warnings, fines, detention and other penalties following Article 50 of the Public Security Management Penalty Law.”

One Chinese online newspaper, [cj.sina.com.cn/](http://cj.sina.com.cn/), carried the March 15, 2020, announcement by Wen Guohui, mayor of Guangzhou, that 119 cases of Covid-19 had been imported into his city from abroad. Wen also listed the leading countries of origin of the imports: 30 cases from the United Kingdom, 19 cases from the United States, 13 cases from the Philippines, 9 cases from Nigeria, and 7 cases from France. One would have expected that the “strict controls” announced

**Some Africans reported that police and local authorities had harassed them in other cities in China, and that hospitals and restaurants had refused them entry.**

<sup>1</sup> Yang, Rihua. “Law of the People’s Republic of China on the Prevention and Control of Infectious Diseases.” Sina. 12 Mar. 2020. [www.cj.sina.com.cn](http://www.cj.sina.com.cn). Web. <https://cj.sina.com.cn/articles/view/1664176597/633151d501900tdv>.

would apply to all nationals of these countries without distinction. In practice, the Guangzhou authorities targeted Africans, who were forced to undergo screening and isolation.

The May 2020 Human Rights Watch report, “China: Discrimination Against Africans in the Context of Covid-19,”<sup>2</sup> revealed that forced quarantines, deportations and denial of services had occurred in Guangzhou. The NGO noted that Chinese authorities had visited the homes of African residents, screened them on the spot or asked them to take a test at the hospital. Some had been ordered to stay in their homes, with surveillance cameras or alarms installed outside their apartments.

**There is a need to turn such statements into concrete actions that end the horrific dehumanization of Africans in China.**

“There is no scientific basis for such a policy. Most of the imported Covid-19 cases in the province were Chinese nationals returning from abroad,” the report stated. “Many Africans had already tested negative for the coronavirus, had not traveled recently, or had (not) been in contact with known carriers.”

Some Africans reported that police and local authorities had harassed them in other cities in China, and that hospitals and restaurants had refused them entry.

In its April 21, 2020, editorial, *Africa Briefing Magazine*<sup>3</sup> reported that more than 300 human rights organizations and nearly 1,800 activists in Africa had sent an open letter to Moussa Faki, chairperson of the African Union, calling for immediate corrective action on the “xenophobic, racist and inhumane treatment of Africans in China.”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> “China: Covid-19 Discrimination Against Africans. Forced Quarantines, Evictions, Refused Services in Guangzhou.” Human Rights Watch. May 2020. [www.hrw.org](https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/05/china-covid-19-discrimination-against-africans). Web. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/05/china-covid-19-discrimination-against-africans>.

<sup>3</sup> “African human rights defenders call for action over Chinese abuse.” *Africa Briefing Magazine*. 21 Apr. 2020. [www.africabriefing.org](https://africabriefing.org/2020/04/african-human-rights-defenders-call-for-action-over-chinese-abuse/). Web. <https://africabriefing.org/2020/04/african-human-rights-defenders-call-for-action-over-chinese-abuse/>.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

The signatories represented a wide range of African civil society organizations and individuals on the continent, as well as people living in Europe and the United States. Also included were groups representing women, workers, students, lawyers, academics, businesspeople, clergy, artists and journalists.

The letter stated:

**“...we want to express our most profound concern and strongly condemn the recent acts of discrimination, xenophobia, and racism against Africans in China. We welcome the statements of the group of African ambassadors in Beijing and the reactions of various African governments, as well as your good offices...”**

There is a need to turn such statements into concrete actions that end the horrific dehumanization of Africans in China.

The petitioners added: “Pointing fingers at ... Africans is xenophobic and racist ... It is inhumane and goes against all the principles of dignity and shared humanity that should ideally guide Sino-African relations.” The letter also noted that “recurring complaints about the illicit activities of Chinese companies in Africa” and states that future cooperation between African countries and China must “establish clear standards of mutual accountability.”

### ***The reaction of the Chinese government***

Faced with these accusations, the Chinese government reacted. In an announcement<sup>5</sup> aired on China’s national television — China Global Television Network (CGTN) — on April 14, 2020, the Chinese government denied discriminating against Africans in Guangzhou, stating it “rejects differential treatment” and has “zero tolerance for discrimination.”

“China’s deputy foreign minister Chen Xiaodong,” the media outlet reported, “met with diplomats from more than 20 African countries about the reported mistreatment of African people in the southern Chinese city of Guangzhou and

<sup>5</sup> “Chinese government denies discrimination against Africans in Guangzhou.” China Global Television Network (CGTN). 14 Apr. 2020. [www.news.cgtn.com](https://news.cgtn.com/news/2020-04-13/China-denies-discrimination-against-Africans-in-Guangzhou-PEPqwgJ8qY/index.html). Web. <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2020-04-13/China-denies-discrimination-against-Africans-in-Guangzhou-PEPqwgJ8qY/index.html>.



Image credit: Nick Fewings / Unsplash

assured that all foreigners are treated equally under China’s virus prevention rules.”

Chen added, “The Chinese government attaches great importance to the health and safety of foreign nationals in China, treats them equally and rejects any discriminatory measures in the fight against the coronavirus outbreak.”

Recently, there have been reports that Africans living in Guangzhou have been evicted from their rented apartments and turned away from hotels because of suspicions of coronavirus cases among Nigerians.

However, Chen told ambassadors and representatives of African countries in Beijing that the Chinese government is paying close attention to these issues, and Guangdong province has applied “non-differential” measures to Chinese and foreign travelers. Under local regulations, health authorities would immediately begin lifting restrictions on African people who were not confirmed Covid-19 patients or had been in close contact with them (including suspected cases), he added.

Chen reiterated that China treats all foreign nationals equally and would ensure that Africans were treated equally, fairly and in a friendly manner. He also asked the diplomats to tell an accurate and complete story of the Chinese government’s prevention and control measures. Guangdong is a province at the forefront of China’s opening up; it faces enormous pressure to prevent a resurgence of Covid-19, Chen added.

For their part, African diplomats<sup>6</sup> expressed concern about the treatment of Africans in Guangzhou but said they appreciated the new measures taken by the local government and would write immediate and comprehensive reports back home. “China and Africa are good brothers and partners, and the current problem in Guangdong province is a matter for China and Africa, and can be solved through

<sup>6</sup> York, Geoffrey. April, 2020. “African diplomats protest alleged racism and inhumane treatment of migrants in China.” *The Globe and Mail*. 12 Apr. 2020. [www.theglobeandmail.com/world/article-african-diplomats-protest-alleged-racism-and-inhumane-treatment-of/](https://www.theglobeandmail.com/world/article-african-diplomats-protest-alleged-racism-and-inhumane-treatment-of/).

negotiation. No outside force can undermine the friendship between Africa and China,”<sup>7</sup> added their Chinese counterparts, alluding to an eventual western instrumentalization of the incident.

Other Chinese state media have also published articles seeking to refute criticism that Chinese authorities have mistreated African nationals, accusing Western media of “causing problems between China and African countries.”

In addition, foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian announced on April 12, 2020, “Guangdong’s anti-epidemic measures for African citizens in China.”<sup>8</sup> “China and Africa are good friends, partners and brothers,” the spokesman said. “Our friendship has been forged based on joint efforts to achieve national independence, liberation, economic development and better living conditions over the past decades. This tried and tested friendship is a treasure for the Chinese and African peoples. Humanity shines through the darkness of the epidemic.”

Added Zhao:

**“After the outbreak of Ebola epidemics in three West African countries in 2014, the Chinese government assisted as early as possible and fought side by side with African countries and peoples. Now, in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic, China and Africa are once again overcoming difficulties hand in hand, and our friendship is rising again. We will not forget Africa's support in the most challenging times. While overcoming challenges at home, we also give love and care to all African citizens in China, especially African students. As the situation in Africa worsens, the Chinese government and people have been urgently delivering lots of supplies to the continent.”**

Zhao also recalled China’s assistance to Africa:

**“Our assistance, which reflects our deep friendship for our African brothers and sisters, is a testimony to our fine tradition of mutual assistance and support, and has been very well received by African countries and**

<sup>7</sup> “China denies discrimination against Africans in Guangzhou.” China Global Television Network (CGTN). 13 Apr. 2020. [www.news.cgtn.com](https://news.cgtn.com/news/2020-04-13/China-denies-discrimination-against-Africans-in-Guangzhou-PEPqwJ8qY/index.html). Web. <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2020-04-13/China-denies-discrimination-against-Africans-in-Guangzhou-PEPqwJ8qY/index.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Lijian, Zhao. “Guangdong’s Anti-epidemic Measures for African Citizens in China.” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China. April 2020. [www.fmprc.gov.cn](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn). Web. [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/xwfw\\_665399/s2510\\_665401/t1768779.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/t1768779.shtml).

the African Union. While ardently fighting the virus at home, China has donated large quantities of test kits, masks, protective suits, goggles, face masks, forehead thermometers, medical gloves, shoe covers, fans and other supplies to the African Union and African countries. We will continue to assist our African brothers to the best of our ability.” (Lijian 2020)<sup>9</sup>

Finally, the foreign ministry spokesman reported China’s policy of “zero tolerance” for discrimination in these words:

“During our fight against the coronavirus, the Chinese government has placed great importance on the lives and health of foreign nationals in China. All foreigners are treated equally. We reject differential treatment and have zero tolerance for discrimination.”<sup>10</sup>

### ***Understanding anti-Black racism in China***

China is not the only country with a racism problem. It is a global scourge, and it seems no one is immune. In every society, there are those who act and believe in a highly racist manner and those who do not. China, like most places, is full of both types.

What makes the problem different in China is the ease with which one can encounter racist behavior and beliefs. It can be strongly argued that it is not because the Chinese, as a people, are more or less racist than any other nationality. Racist sentiment may seem prevalent simply because it is so blatantly and concretely expressed when and where it exists.

There is a wealth of documents, articles, books and commentaries tracing Chinese racism from the 1960s to the 1990s.

One of the first books to document Chinese racism against Africans in post-1949 China is Emmanuel Hevi’s “An African Student in China,”<sup>11</sup> published in London in

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>11</sup> Hevi, Emmanuel. “An African Student in China.” London: Pall Mall Press. 1963. 220.

1963. In his book, Hevi reports his experience with the arrests of Chinese girls for their friendships with Africans, and in particular, Chinese feelings of racial superiority over Blacks.

In “Anti-Black Racism in Post-Mao China,” Barry Sautman (2009)<sup>12</sup> reveals the manifestations of anti-Black sentiment on Chinese students since the end of the 1970s. Anti-Black racism in China is rooted in Han-minzu racial ideologies, which perceive Blacks as occupying the bottom of the “racial ladder.”<sup>13</sup>



Unlike the observations of researchers such as Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1994),<sup>14</sup> who have advanced the theory that racial or even racist projects have only European origins, the reality under other skies, particularly in China, reveals a different story. The term often used by the Chinese state to describe ethnicity and nationality is the concept of “minzu,” which is essentially defined by the homogeneity of a given group of people who share a common history, culture and ancestral lineage. Sun Yat-sen, the provisional first president of the Republic of China and is referred to today as “Father of the Nation,” advanced this belief by self-endowing the Han majority with superior racial qualities, stating, “... the greatest strength is common blood. The Chinese belong to the yellow race because they come from the blood of the yellow race. The blood of the ancestors is passed down through the race by heredity, which makes blood kinship a powerful force.”<sup>15</sup>

This racist concept of group difference has been used by previous empires up to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in the contemporary context to racially assimilate all officially recognized ethnic minorities toward a Han racial and

<sup>12</sup> Sautman, Barry. “Anti-Black Racism in Post-Mao China.” Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>13</sup> Dikötter, Frank. “The Discourse on Race in Modern China.” London: Hurst. 1992. 38–39, 49.

<sup>14</sup> Omi, Michael, and Howard Winant. “Racial formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s.” London: Routledge. 1994.

<sup>15</sup> Dikötter, Frank. “The construction of racial identities in China and Japan.” Hong Kong: Honkong University Press. 1997. 4.

ethnic identity.<sup>16</sup> According to Anwar Ouassini, Mostafa Amini, Nabil Ouassini (2021),<sup>17</sup> the emphasis on the supremacy of Han Chinese culture and race is part of the categorization of non-Han and non-European communities as barbarians in need of civilization based on their “history, blood, ancestry, culture, land and minzu characters.”<sup>18</sup> Even Chairman Mao criticized this ideological framework as “Han chauvinism” to describe the blatant racism and discrimination against other ethnic minorities, of which Blacks are one of the most targeted. For Buckley and Ramzy (2020)<sup>19</sup>, Finnegan (2020)<sup>20</sup>, and Roberts (2020),<sup>21</sup> the racial, ideological projection of Han superiority can also be seen as the foundation of the CCP’s current genocidal campaigns against Uyghurs in Xinjiang province to cleanse Uyghur culture and identity and forcibly assimilate the Uyghur minzu as second-class citizens.

Speaking specifically of Blacks, in “From Campus Racism to Cyber Racism: Discourse of Race and Chinese Nationalism,” Yinghong Cheng (2011)<sup>22</sup> reports that some Chinese internet users use “extremely racist language”<sup>23</sup> in denouncing the presence of Africans in Guangzhou, pointing out these examples: “This is a racial invasion!”;<sup>24</sup> “Public safety is gone!”<sup>25</sup>; “Are they becoming the 57th ethnic group?”; “China is not a refugee camp, our resources are already limited. They

<sup>16</sup> Joniak-Lüthi Agnieszka. “The Han: China’s Diverse Majority.” Seattle: University of Washington Press. 2015.

<sup>17</sup> Ouassini, Anwar, et al. “#ChinaMustexplain: Global Tweets, Covid-19, and Anti-Black Racism in China.” *The Review of Black Political Economy*. 3 Mar. 202. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0034644621992687>.

<sup>18</sup> Joniak-Lüthi, Agnieszka. “The Han: China’s Diverse Majority.” Seattle: University of Washington Press. 2015. 121.

<sup>19</sup> Buckley, Chris, and Austin Ramzy. “China is erasing mosques and precious shrines in Xinjiang,” *The New York Times*. 25 Sep. 2020. [www.nytimes.com. Web. https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/09/25/world/asia/xin-jiang-china-religious-site.html](https://www.nytimes.com/web/https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/09/25/world/asia/xin-jiang-china-religious-site.html).

<sup>20</sup> Finnegan, Ciara “The Uyghur Minority in China: A Case Study of Cultural Genocide, Minority Rights and the Insufficiency of the International Legal Framework in Preventing State-Imposed Extinction,” *Laws* 9 (1). 2020. <https://doi.org/10.3390/laws9010001>.

<sup>21</sup> Roberts, Sean. “The War on the Uyghurs: China’s Internal Campaign against a Muslim Minority.” (Oxford, UK: Princeton University Press. 2020.

<sup>22</sup> Cheng, Yinghong. “From Campus Racism to Cyber Racism: Discourse of Race and Chinese Nationalism.” *The China Quarterly*. 2011. 207, 561-579.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

don't respect law and order, it's in their nature, not to mention their body odor.”; “Go home, African dogs! You are only here to share our businesses and women!”<sup>26</sup>

### ***Olfactory stereotypes against Black people are among those shared by some Chinese***



*Image credit: Clem Onojeghwo / Unsplash*

Some Chinese women in romantic relationships with Africans have been humiliated by Chinese men who believe they have been manipulated by a racial cliché that exaggerates the virility of Black men at the expense of Chinese men. This has led some internet users to attack Chinese women in relationships with Black men in obscene language and written from a nationalist perspective, posting that such women were shaming “our country” and “our ancestors” by sleeping with “ugly and smelly” Black men.<sup>27</sup>

The widespread belief in black olfactory stereotypes was echoed by Shanshan Lan (2017)<sup>28</sup> in her book “Mapping the New African Diaspora in China: Race and the Cultural Politics of Belonging”: “Many of our African interlocutors reported unpleasant experiences on bus journeys when some Chinese covered their noses at the sight of Africans or avoided sitting next to them.”<sup>29</sup>

Furthermore, several authors agree that the current Covid-19 context has amplified social and racial inequalities. As per Anwar Ouassini, Mostafa Amini,

<sup>26</sup> Cheng, Yinghong. “From Campus Racism to Cyber Racism: Discourse of Race and Chinese Nationalism”. *The China Quarterly*. 2011. 567.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Lan, Shanshan. “Mapping the New African Diaspora in China Race and the Cultural Politics of Belonging.” Oxfordshire: Routledge. 2017.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

Nabil Ouassini (2021)<sup>30</sup> in their article, “#ChinaMustexplain: Global Tweets, Covid-19, and Anti-Black Racism in China,” the Black community in China has been the target of a racial projection that has aimed to categorize their bodies as sick and their physical presence as a threat to the viability and security of the Han majority. The resulting actions have led to large-scale bans on Blacks entering restaurants, engaging in business transactions, seeking treatment in hospitals and renting apartments. Additionally, Blacks have been forced into government-sanctioned quarantines, says Jenni Marsh (2020).<sup>31</sup>

Although previous studies on racism in China are many, they generally do not address the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. Even the above-referenced article by Ouassini, Amini, Ouassini, which focuses on anti-Black racism in China, is limited to exploring how Twitter has been used to raise awareness of anti-Black racism in China. The analysis seeks to address the realities of Africans in China, especially the consequences of Covid-19 on their relationship with the Chinese.

### ***Understanding Sino-African relations through the lens of Afro-pessimism***

During and after the events in Guangzhou, some commentators have argued that anti-Black prejudice is at the root of Sino-African student conflicts. Anti-Black bias can, in turn, be seen in the context of a resurgence of elitist values that link and denigrate those who are dark with those who are poor. Traditional Chinese culture idealized light skin and, at least among the elite, associated it with intellectual endeavor. The most attractive man was a “white-faced scholar”<sup>32</sup>

The Chinese government believes that “issues of race and racism exist only in Western countries and that there are no racial problems in China.”

<sup>30</sup> Ouassini, Anwar, et al. “#ChinaMustexplain: Global Tweets, Covid-19, and Anti-Black Racism in China.” *The Review of Black Political Economy*. 3 Mar. 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0034644621992687>.

<sup>31</sup> Marsh, Jenni. “China says it has a ‘zero-tolerance policy’ for racism, but discrimination towards Africans goes back decades.” CNN. 25 May 2020. [www.cnn.com](http://www.cnn.com). Web. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/05/25/asia/china-anti-afri-can-attacks-history-hnk-intl/index.html>.

<sup>32</sup> Sautman, Barry. “Anti-Black Racism in Post-Mao China.” Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. 2009. 428.

(*baimian shusheng*) whose lack of manual labor implied high status, a potentially affluent life and a fair complexion. Fair skin continues to be a standard of female beauty. Many urban Chinese women try to avoid the sun, and some use whitening creams. Chinese lexicon, like other vocabularies or languages, associates the word “black” with negative qualities, as in *heixin* (black heart), *heiren* (black person, but also one without a residence permit), *heishi* (black market), *heishehui* (gangster organization) and *heihua* (bandit slang). Urban Chinese have long associated the dark skin of manual laborers, especially peasants, with inferior economic and cultural status.

**When Western intrusion began in the mid-19th century, Chinese writers propagated racial typologies treating all foreigners as inferior.**

Racial stereotypes in China have a long history, ably documented in the studies of Frank Dikötter, a Dutch historian who specializes in modern China. When Western intrusion began in the mid-19th century, Chinese writers propagated racial typologies treating all foreigners as inferior. The image of Blacks, however, was significantly worse than that of other groups. Africans were portrayed as natural slaves from the most backward of continents.

Prominent intellectuals in Republican China disseminated Black intellectual and aesthetic inferiority notions while equating Blacks with China’s subaltern classes. Also, according to Gong, a Chinese character to whom Dikötter (1992) refers in his book, “The Discourse on Race in Modern China,” Blacks are racially inferior with limited intelligence, and as civilized as the “stupid peasants”<sup>33</sup> (*yunong*). “Gong further remarked that Africans and Australian aborigines had ‘small brains’ and had attained the level of civilisation of ‘dumb peasants’ (*yunong*) in China”<sup>34</sup>

Proponents of eugenics have transposed the idea of a biological hierarchy to the classes: intellectuals were the first elements of a race; the intellectually and morally incompetent were at the lower levels.

<sup>33</sup> Ouassini, Anwar, et al. “#ChinaMustexplain: Global Tweets, Covid-19, and Anti-Black Racism in China.” *The Review of Black Political Economy*. 3 Mar. 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0034644621992687>.

<sup>34</sup> Dikötter, Frank. “The Discourse on Race in Modern China. London: Hurst. 1992. 116.

The coming to power of the Communists in 1949 brought about a break with racial hierarchies and the supposed link between race and class. An ideological inversion marked class relations. The moral and political qualities of the poor peasants are exalted and externalized in the theories that Asia, Africa and Latin America constitute a revolutionary country that will encircle and end the domination of the developed world. Universalist ideals are illustrated by posters of Third World revolutions and a famous photo of Mao surrounded by exchange students of all races. But the promotion of international solidarity and the pre-eminence of the poor quickly faded in the 1980s, replaced by official national interest, individual enrichment and social recovery; in short, hard-core capitalism. This political shift, coupled with outside influences, led to a rejection of egalitarianism among students.

Frank Wilderson (2020)<sup>35</sup> asserts that Blacks are constitutively excluded — their power to enact or establish stripped from them — from the category of the autonomous, rights-bearing human being of modernity. He further postulates that Blacks do not function as political subjects; instead, he says, “Our flesh and energies are instrumentalized for postcolonial, immigrant, feminist, LGBT, and labor agendas.”<sup>36</sup> His contentions can be glaringly observed in China. The assertion that humanity is made legible by the irreconcilable distinction between humans and “Blackness” is one of the first tenets of Afro-pessimism. For Afro-pessimists, the Black person is positioned, *a priori*, as a slave. The definition of slave is taken from Orlando Patterson (2018),<sup>37</sup> who theorizes slavery as a relational dynamic between “social death” (the slave) and “social life” (the human).

<sup>35</sup> Wilderson, Frank B. III. “Afro-pessimism.” New York: Liveright. 2020.

<sup>36</sup> Wilderson, Frank B. III. “The Argument of ‘Afropessimism.’” *The New Yorker*. 20 July 2020. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/07/20/the-argument-of-afropessimism>.

<sup>37</sup> Patterson, Orlando. “Slavery and Social Death.” Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press. 2018.

## Conclusion

Most of the existing literature on the African diaspora focuses on the experiences of Blacks in Europe and North America. This is due in part to the historical legacy of the trans-Atlantic slave trade.<sup>38</sup> In addition, race is a problematic topic in China because it is not part of the official discourse. The Chinese government believes that “issues of race and racism exist only in Western countries and that there are no racial problems in China”.<sup>39</sup> As a result of this official propaganda, the general Chinese public still believes that racial discrimination is a purely Western phenomenon. Another difficulty is the lack of studies by Chinese intellectuals on the topic. “In the Chinese language, there is no single word for race.”<sup>40</sup> Perhaps the closest equivalent is *Zhong Zu* (*zhong* means seed, race, species and type; *zu* means lineage, nationality and ethnicity). The paucity of race studies among Chinese scholars (both in mainland China and Taiwan) may be attributed to the political sensitivity of the topic, translation issues and difficulties in comparing the distinct historical trajectories and cultural contexts between China and Western countries, Shanshan (2017) suggests.

However, recent studies have begun to challenge this homogenization of the African diaspora by drawing attention to comparative studies of Black diaspora experiences in different parts of the world.<sup>41,42</sup> China offers a compelling case study for the African diaspora in East Asia because of its unique position as a historical ally of many African countries in their anti-colonial and anti-racist struggles and its recent transformation into a global economic power.

<sup>38</sup> Gilroy, Paul. “The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness.” London: Verso Books. 1995.

<sup>39</sup> Lan, Shanshan. “Mapping the New African Diaspora in China Race and the Cultural Politics of Belonging.” Oxfordshire, UK: Routledge. 2017. 14.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Patterson, Tiffany and Robin Kelley. “Unfinished Migrations: Reflections on the African Diaspora and the Making of the Modern World,” *African Studies Review*. Vol. 43, No. 1, Special Issue on the Diaspora (Apr., 2000), 11-45.

<sup>42</sup> Zeleza, Paul. “African Diasporas: Toward a Global History,” *African Studies Review*. Vol. 53, (Oct.2013), 1-19.

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