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## Racialization of Foreigners and Self in the Chinese Immigration Project

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# **Racialization of Foreigners and Self in the Chinese Immigration Project**

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## **Abstract**

With the Western invasion and colonization during the 20th Century, China began its internalization of the Western Enlightenment values, leading the country to an identity crisis that paved the way for its race to modernity. Attempting to understand the world and itself, China developed a new racial order largely shaped by the Western discourse and distinctly different from its ancient understanding. Based on 18 semi-structured interviews, this study explores contemporary racialization in China and its application in the racial project of immigration. I found that racial understanding in China is based on a racial/cultural hierarchy. The hierarchal top, Whites/Europeans, represents development and modernity. The hierarchal bottom, Blacks/Africans, symbolize backwardness, poverty, and cultural threats. In radicalizing the foreigners, the Chinese itself is simultaneously racialized by being located in the middle of the hierarchy, in a constant quest to seek validation from the West. Nevertheless, China's cultural/racial understanding is an unfinished project, shaped by the diverse discourse of natives and subject to the consequence of the social remittance of foreign-socialized individuals.

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## I. Introduction

The 19th-20th Century in China is characterized by warfare and invasion. Starting from the First Opium War in 1839, which resulted in the establishment of five treaty ports and the ceding of Hong Kong to the British empire, the Century of Humiliation (*bainian guochi*) lasted until 1949. During the 110 years, China was invaded and subjugated by Western Powers, Russia, and Japan, resulting in substantial loss of lives, significant destruction of landmarks, and the loss of a third of the territory to foreign powers (Kaufman 2010). *Guafen* (being cut up like a melon) is a term often invoked to describe the state of Chinese territories and resources, evoking the painful memory where China, powerless and helpless like a melon, awaits the loss of its territory and resources but is unable to do anything to prevent it (Wagner 2017).

Facing the aftermath of a destroyed nation following Western invasion and colonization, China didn't see much of a future: What went so wrong that the Central Empire, once the greatest civilization on Earth, became the semi-colonial country it is today – Its ancient treasures stolen, its territory carved up like a melon (*guafen*), while its people addicted to opioids and laid around all day. In their search for answers to save the nation, the intellectuals turned to the Western discourse. The introduction of Enlightenment values not only provided the intellectuals hope for the future – a future where China becomes a democratic nation-state built upon science and technological advancement – but also an explanation for its catastrophe: its fundamentally backward and inferior culture.

To modernize China, China had to abandon its culture, and with it, China lost its identity. An urgent question thus faced the intellectuals: *Who are we, and where are we located in the order of the globalized world?* Western bioscience provided a framework for understanding itself and the world: race. With the rise of the nation-state, such a framework would later replace the Chinese concept of lineage (*zu*) and facilitate the development of its own understanding of the racial global order.

The following 100 years mark the century of globalization. China has increasingly become a destination country for immigrants around the world, with 1 million foreigners living in China in 2020 (United Nations 2020). Racial understanding is increasingly important as a tool to understand these foreigners with distinctively different corporeal features and cultural backgrounds. Indeed, China is no stranger to the issue of xenophobia and racism. In the late 20th Century, numerous large-scale anti-African student protests against the government's internationalist policies occurred throughout China (Cheng 2019). In 2021, following the Chinese government's proposal of easing the requirement for obtaining permanent residency in China, xenophobic attacks and nationalistic remarks exploded on Chinese social media. The past and the current thereby intertwine to illustrate the Chinese nation-building project of immigration in the context of a "post-Humiliation" and "Enlightened" China. As we shall see in the study, foreigners are highly racialized in China, therefore race (as defined in the next section) becomes an integral part of the project.

However, race and immigration remain an understudied discipline in China. Mainstream interest in the topic remains low: A 2008 East Asian Barometer survey shows no respondent believed that immigration was an important question that the government should address (Han 2017). Most studies in the discipline are preoccupied with China's role as an immigrant-sending country, and overlooking its role as a destination country <sup>1</sup>. Building on literature reviews of the few research on the development of racial discourse in China (e.g. Dikötter 1997, Cheng 2019), and with the help of the lens of postcolonial studies, I conducted 18 semi-structured interviews to answer the following question: In the context of a "post-Enlightenment" China, how do the Chinese people racialize foreigners and themselves, and how does the racialization affect the national-building project of immigration?

This essay is divided into several sections to answer this question: Section II provides an overview of the necessary theoretical frameworks employed in the essay. Section III, the methodology section, extends Pugh's semi-structural interview framework (2013) and proposes a *schematic tree*, a new method for interpreting interview data. Section IV discusses the interconnection of race, *minzu* (people-lineage), and immigration, essential for conducting and understanding the study. The results are then analyzed in the following sections. Section V discusses how participants racialize foreigners consciously or subconsciously. Section VI then discusses the meanings that participants associate with each race, which forms the basis for the contemporary racial/cultural hierarchy in China. Finally, section VII explores how such hierarchy is manifested and reproduced in the national project of immigration through a mechanism I called the *bifurcated immigration discourse*.

## II. Theoretical Framework

One of the main goals of this study is to examine the role of race in shaping Chinese people's understanding of immigration. To assist with this analysis, I employ the theory of racial formation by Omi and Winant (2014). Although situated in the United States, the work provides a critical framework to examine the functioning of race in societies. The theory consists of four aspects, *racialization*, *racial projects*, *racism*, and *racial policies*. This study focuses on the first two aspects. First, *racialization* refers to the process by which the meaning of the corporal dimension of the human bodies is acquired, which I further divide into two subprocesses: *racial categorization* (how racial categories are constructed and defined) and *racial meaning-making* (the meaning associated with the category), which are addressed in section V and VI respectively. Second, racial meanings become connected to societal structures and everyday experiences through *racial projects*. The projects may compete or overlap with each other, but every project attempts to "reproduce, extend,

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<sup>1</sup> A quick Google Scholar search with term "China immigration" returned studies mostly on China's immigration to territories/countries like Canada and Hong Kong.

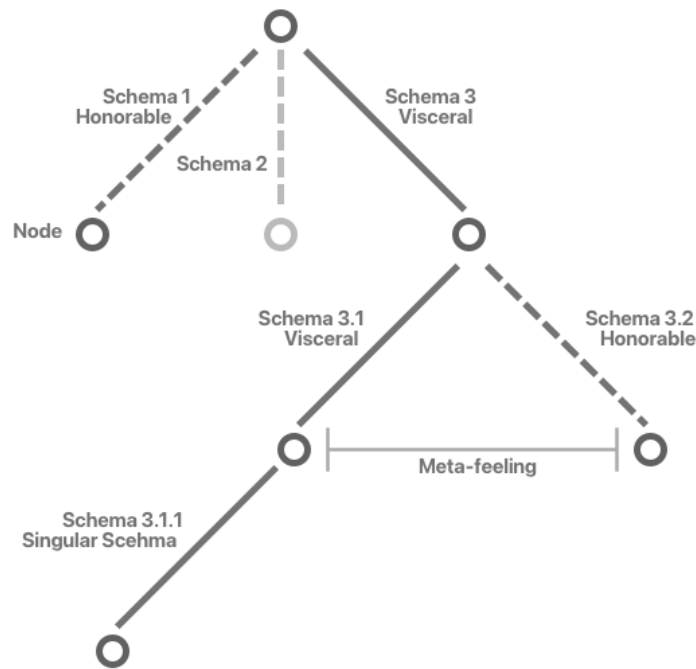
subvert, or challenge the system (p.125).” This essay applies the racialization process to the Chinese people’s racial project of immigration, which is an integral part of the nation-building project.

As shown in the introduction, China’s modern history is marked by the colonization of the West, which led to the nation’s abandonment of its culture and loss of its self-identity. Instead of recognizing the role of colonial power in its crisis, China, like most colonized countries, turned internally to explain the nation’s troubles. Barmé’s orientalist piece (1995) attributed this observation to China’s “modern tradition of self-loathing (p.222).” Instead, we should turn to the Foucault’s notion of power/knowledge (1990) and Gramsci’s concept of hegemony (Bates 1975): The West exercised military and political power in China through knowledge, while bringing the Western Enlightenment values to China, and constructing such as universal and progressive. Such an attempt was a great success, as it established the basis for the New Cultural movement which would shape the world view of the generations of Chinese to come. As we shall see in this paper, Western values play a fundamental role in the contemporary racialization of foreigners by the Chinese public.

### III. Methods

In its critique of cultural sociology, Pugh (2013) argues that cognitive culturalists often dismiss the usefulness of interviewing as a research methodology. In interpreting human behaviors, culturalists argue that there is a bifurcated consciousness (Giddens 1984), which is best demonstrated through a metaphor by Haidt (2006) of a rider on an elephant. The ‘rider’ refers to the surface level of consciousness, while the ‘elephant’ is a deeper, more powerful consciousness. The ‘rider’ mistakenly thinks he is in control, but it is the ‘elephant’ that ultimately drives human behaviors. However, cognitive culturalists maintain that, when studying a culture, interviews can only access the surface level consciousness (the rider), while it reflects none of the ‘elephants’.

Pugh (2013) argues that this framework misses the point of the interview. Instead of taking the interviewee’s account at face value and reaching a conclusion, researchers should focus on the emotions of the interviewees. To this end, he categorized information in in-depth interviews into four categories. Through *schematics*, interviewees describe the variety of schemas that are available to them, which reflects how they see the world. Contradictory schemas, nevertheless, may exist. Interviewees ultimately choose one schema to portray themselves in the most positive light through *honorable*, which reflects the current social context. However, on a deeper (elephant) level, it is ultimately *visceral*, the emotion that stems from desire, morality, and expectations, that determines the action. Nevertheless, the visceral may or may not reflect the honorable, which is reflected through *meta-feeling*: how we feel about what we feel, which reflects the distance between the elephant and the rider.



Graph 1: Schematic tree of logical pathway

I propose an extension of this framework which I term a schematic tree (see Graph 1). To interpret and form an opinion on a societal issue, we arrive at a conclusion by traversing a logical pathway. On such a logical pathway, we encounter different intersections (*nodes*) where we subconsciously make different schematic preferences (*visceral*), and build our subsequent understanding on such preferences. Our visceral conclusion, which drives our behaviors, is therefore based on a series of prior visceral decisions. An example would be the issue of race: such a logical pathway includes possible nodes like racial categorization, racial meaning-making, and racial project.

The structure of the schematic tree is determined by the level of development of given discourse in a given societal environment. In a society where such discourse is less developed, the upper part of the tree (close to the starting node) will be larger. Conversely, in a society where such discourse is readily available and fully developed, the lower part of the tree (near the terminal node) will be larger. In the United States, there is little disagreement on the racial categorization of a given person (i.e. who is categorized as Black, White, Asian, or Latinx). However, the racial meaning-making nodes have more split with numerous schemas shaped by earlier and current societal contexts. In contrast, in China where racial discourse is rarely invoked, there are more splits at racial categorization nodes and fewer schemas at racial meaning-making. Indeed, as we will see in the following, while most respondents sometimes are conflicted about the racial categorization, they are more consistent on the racial meanings of Whites and Blacks, resulting in a singular consistent schema in the lower part of the schematic tree. This research explores the schematic tree of the interviewees on three different

nodes: racial categorization, racial meaning-making, and racial project of immigration. Using this framework, I seek to describe the local pathway and explore the (dis)similarities of the schematic tree among respondents with the help of historical context and past research.

As one of the first studies on this subject in China, this exploratory/descriptive study is based on a semi-structured interview to allow participants to not only express their opinion on immigration but also explain their reasoning behind such opinions. Formal interviews are structured to last from 45 minutes to 1 hour. All participants were asked about their views on immigration and nationalism, as well as their experiences interacting with foreigners. The majority of interviews took place in person in social establishments (cafés or restaurants) as decided by the participant and the interviewer at a convenient location. Some interviews took place online, whether because the interviewer and the participant could not find a mutually available time to meet in person, or because the participant was not physically in China at the time of the study.

Participants were recruited through convenience sampling and purposeful sampling. I first reached out to my friends and colleagues who showed interest in participating in the research. However, although my close contacts have different backgrounds (some were native Chinese with no experience with foreignness, while others have traveled extensively to Western countries and are in close contact with foreigners), they have similar socioeconomic class positions (middle-class), educational backgrounds (university educated), and typically occupy white-collar or academic jobs. Recognizing the limitation, I later switched to purposive sampling to recruit participants who do not fit this profile. The purposive sampling is conducted by looking for participants who (1) were employed in occupations associated with the working-class (e.g. taxi drivers, restaurant workers), and (2) who express nationalist or anti-immigration sentiments. The latter is recognized through, for example, their posting on social media or their comments on international news in daily conversations. In total, 16 formal interviews and two informal interviews were conducted, whose characteristics are listed in Table 1. Two interviews were conducted together when an acquaintance of the interviewee joined the scheduled interview unexpectedly. Participants were from different socioeconomic, education, and demographic backgrounds, and expressed a range of different perceptions on immigration and integration of foreigners in China.



No.	Interview type	Occupation	Exposure to local foreigners	Exposure to international foreigners	Experience living abroad
1	Formal	Master student	None	None	No
2	Formal	Chinese company office worker	Some	Some	No
3	Formal	Master student	None	Some	Yes
4	Formal	Chinese company office worker	Little	None	No
5	Formal	Multinational company office worker	Extensive	Extensive	Yes
6	Formal	Chinese company office worker	Some	Some	Yes
7	Formal	Chinese company office worker	None	Some	Yes
8	Formal	Taxi driver	Some	None	No
9	Formal	Master student	None	None	No
10	Formal	Bachelor's student	None	Extensive	Yes
11	Formal	Taxi driver	None	None	No
12	Formal	Unemployed	None	None	No
13	Formal	Master student	Some	None	No
14	Formal	Unknown	None	None	No
15	Formal	Master student	None	Some	Yes
16	Formal	Multinational company office worker	None	Some	Yes
17	Informal	Taxi driver	None	None	No
18	Informal	Restaurant worker	Some	None	No

**Table 1. Participants' occupation, level of exposure to local and international foreigners, and whether they have experiences living abroad**

Levels of exposure to local and international foreigners are concluded by the researcher through the interview, and categorized into "none", "some" and "extensive". Experience living abroad is defined as experience living in another country for at least a semester (for studying) or half a year (for working).

Burawoy (1998) emphasized that as a researcher, we have several powers over our participants: the power of deciding what to observe and what to ask, the power of representing others, and the power of constructing and presenting the arguments. In this case, because the research is solely conducted in Mandarin Chinese, but the results are presented in English, the researcher (I) also has the power of translation. This power can bias readers' perception of the quote. For example, *heiren* in Chinese is a neutral term that could be translated to either Blacks or Black people, but readers may perceive the former as disrespectful compared to the latter, therefore it is up to the researcher's discretion and subjective idea to attempt to choose the best translation to fit the context. Furthermore, many terms in Chinese do not have a direct translation in English, but the terms themselves are considered as a discourse to justify the racial hierarchy (as is the case for the term *suzhi* as seen below). The researcher has the power to decide which term deserves further studies and an explanation of its implication, and which terms should be directly translated.

#### IV. Studying Race and Immigration in China

In contrast to the racial discourse in the United States, both the Chinese official and popular discourse has been mainly preoccupied with the notion of *minzu* (people-lineage) for categorization of the Chinese people. Historically, Chinese exclusively refers to Han, the majority, while other *minzu* were called *yizu* (different zu) or *waizu* (outside zu). Han people were described as advanced, agricultural people who inhabited the Central Plains, while other *zu* were backward nomads who were brutal, cruel and destructive (Baranovitch 2010). Such a discriminatory view largely disappeared least from official discourse. Today, the Communist Party emphasizes equality and unity among different *zu* in China, with the constitution forbidding any "discrimination and oppression toward any *minzu* (Chinese Government 2006)." To further the integration of *minzu*, the Chinese government classifies all 56 officially-recognized *minzu* under the umbrella term of *zhonghua minzu* (Chinese people-lineage, Chinese Government 2005). Indeed, the government emphasizes that each *minzu* is an indivisible part of the Chinese state, and it is only through such unity that China can become the strong and thriving nation it seeks/strives to be (Min 2014). However, the *zhonghua minzu* discourse obscures *minzu* differences while legitimizing Han-ization assimilation projects, most notably the forced assimilation of Uygurs.

The notion of race as phenotype was not introduced to China until the Century of Humiliation. During the New Culture Movement era (1910s-1920s), intellectuals represented all inhabitants of China as the descendants of the Yellow Emperor, and created a new racialized identity called *huangzhong* (Yellow race, Dikotter 1997). The yellow race remained in the popular discourse as the shared characteristics of all Chinese people. As the song Descendants of the Dragon (long de chuanren)

famously declares, “[people with] black eyes, black hair and yellow skin are forever the descendants of the dragon (read Chinese).” Nevertheless, even today, such a notion cannot easily be translated into Mandarin Chinese. The closest equivalent may be *zhongzu* (breed-lineage) or *renzhong* (human-breed). The government maintains that race is not a Chinese issue but a Western – and especially American – one (Lan 2017, Gao 2022).

While the official discourse today is careful not to invoke race, the popular discourse implies that Chinese is a racially homogeneous collective. Nevertheless, the identity of the yellow race only comes up in the popular discussion of the relationship between Chinese population and foreigners and is manifested in the dichotomy between the “yellow-skinned Chinese” and non-yellow foreigners. Yellow skin, therefore, serves as a unifying characteristic of all Chinese inhabitants, despite the phenotypic observation that some minority *minzu* “have characteristics of caucasians (P.R.C 2008).” Indeed, during the interview, an interviewee asserted that “call me conservative, but we [Chinese] should only have yellow skin. (#8)” Similarly, in the popular imagination of foreigners, as we shall see in the following analysis, the phenotypic notion of race, as well as its national associations, has become the most important attribute.

When studying immigration, many scholars turn to immigration policies. As FitzGerald and Cook-Martin (2014) observes, “when governments decide whom to let in and whom to keep out, they literally define the community that makes a nation state (8).” However, as they also contend, even in liberal democratic countries, immigration policies are shaped by immigration ideologies held by governing elites. Using political scientist Robert Dahl’s classification of regimes, democratic governments typically have a high level of “societal inclusiveness” (participation by the public in governance) and “political contestation” (Openness of government to public demands, FitzGerald 2014: 3). In contrast, China has a very low level of societal inclusiveness with virtually non-existent suffrage process. Although there is supposedly a political contestation process in the form of a comment box on the government website titled “request for comments (*yijian zhengqiu*),” public’s request seldom invoke a response from the government. In rare cases, government is forced to respond due to wide-spread public dissatisfaction, as is the case for the proposal for expanding permanent residence in China (BBC Chinese: 2020). Therefore, immigration laws in authoritarian countries like China may reflect exclusively the ruling elites’ ideologies, rather than reflecting the popular discourse.

Indeed, an important divergence between immigration policies and popular discourse is especially remarkable on China’s internationalist policies. Since the foundation of the People’s Republic in 1949, the country accepted a large number of African students and provided substantial aid to African countries (Cheng 2019). As detailed in the previous section, such policies led to widespread protest especially among Chinese students in the 1980s. Such protests did not result in the shift of national policy objectives, but rather was faced with indifference and repression, most noticeably

during the 1989 Tian'anmen Square protest<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, the government mobilizes resources to proactively shape the public's perception of several matters including on its internationalist policies, most noticeably through mandatory education (Jiang 2021) and Internet "public opinion guidance (*yulun daoxiang*)" (Yin 2021). It is no surprising that studies on the official discourse of nationalism reflect hostility toward the West (He 2018). However, it is misguided to generalize immigration law and policies as the popular perception on the issue. Similarly, social media research (see Jiang 2012) in China should also be scrutinized as it could disproportionately reflect government agenda.

Recognizing the limitation of immigration law, other scholars turn to literatures (Barme 1995, Dikotter 1997, Cheng 2019) and pop cultures (Cheng 2019). However, these it is problematic to generalize these findings, as they are confined to the ideologies of selected elites. Nevertheless, employing Burawoy's Extended Case Method (section IV), these studies provide important contexts and frameworks for the interpreting the popular perception of immigration. Nevertheless, such studies are severely scarce, except a survey research conducted by Han (2017). While the study suffers from limited sample size, questionable conceptualization and operationalization process<sup>3</sup>, the most fatal error is its misguided focus on the demographic characteristic of respondents (e.g. education, class) while completely obscuring the question of race. As argued in introduction, because immigrants in China are nearly always seen as the "racialized other," failing to consider race renders the study extremely flawed. With these limitations in mind, this study fill the gap in the area through qualitative research with the general public.

## V. The Racialized Others: The Racialization of Foreigners

In the popular imagination, China is a racially homogeneous nation of yellow-skinned Chinese. Racialized others, therefore, are always seen as foreigners. Conversely, foreigners are assumed to be from a different race. Race is therefore inseparable from the issue of immigration. Therefore, when talking about immigration, one is obligated to choose how race is incorporated into the narrative. One can either take for granted the racial differences and assuming foreigners to form a group of uniformed racialized others, or explicitly acknowledging the racial diversities within the group of *foreigners*. Such categorizations are especially visible in this study.

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<sup>2</sup> The Tian'anmen Square protest in 1989 was organized around a demand for modernization and democratic reform. Students and intellectuals believed that the Central Government, by allying with African nations, wasted China's resources and its people's welfare.

<sup>3</sup> For example, the study surveys whether people support the introduction of foreign workers and spouses as measurement of "public attitudes toward immigration."

This section seeks to provide an overview of the racial definition of foreigners in the Chinese discourse, as well as how different races are categorized. This section divides respondents into three groups: The first group assumes the foreigners to be a homogeneous collective while obscuring the racial discourse; The second group draw racial lines when discussing foreigners and actively use the racial categorizations to explain perceived differences within the *foreigners* group; The third group are agents of social remittances, the migrant-driven cultural diffusion, who apply Western racial discourse to the Chinese context.

### **First group: homogeneous foreigners**

The first group of interviewees consider “foreigners” to be a uniform (White) racialized-other. This does not imply that these interviewees are unaware of the existence of Latin Americans, Africans and other Asians. Rather, their visceral response indicates they intuitively understand foreigners to be White. For example, one participant only referred to her experience interacting with Europeans and Americans, disregarding other national origins. Several respondents used a White-specific corporeal description to describe the bodies of all foreigners:

Because [foreigners] look different, so I would look at them more. And then I think, oh it’s great, their skin is so white. (#1, Master student)

When Chinese people see foreigners, we just think: the eye sockets are so deep, the eye color is different, eyelashes are long, brow bones are high, faces are very angular... yellow hair... But I can’t tell them apart... For Black people it’s even harder, they all look the same: all so black. (#4, Chinese company office worker)

We observe that the corporeal differences of the human bodies serves as a permanent indicator to differentiate the host (the Chinese) and the others (foreigners). Different from the cultural assimilation framework found in, for example, France, such framework is more closely related to the ethnic model of immigration in Germany, where nation is considered as a predetermined community determined by blood and heredity (Silverman 2002). The “other” are denied membership foremost based on their physical experiences, and they are not given the opportunities to gain such membership.

### **Second group: Drawing the racial line**

As opposed to respondents who consider foreigners as a homogeneous (White/European) group, the second group divide foreigners along the racial or national lines. As I argued above that the discourse of race/immigration is not maturely developed and readily available to the general public in China, as opposed to the United States. This explains the two phenomena observed in the interview: (1) the

existence of interchangeable schemas of racial and immigration lines, and (2) the fluid and diverse definition of races.

This group of participants recognize the diversity in the group of “foreigners,” and they invoke the concept of race and nationality interchangeably in distinguishing between the different groups, as shown in the following instance:

There are different kinds of foreigners, like different *races*... European’s suzhi<sup>4</sup>, East Asian’s suzhi, and let alone African’s suzhi, it’s different. (#8, Taxi Driver)

Especially those Africans, they don’t leave after they come to China... Why don’t those Blacks leave? It’s because China is better than their country/countries... (#11, Taxi Driver)

Before I analyze the implication of the quotes (see next section), I invite the readers to focus on the *mélange* of the concept of race and national identity. The first quote explicitly considers national identity as races, while the second equates Blacks with Africans and considers Blacks as a (collective of) “country/countries <sup>5</sup>.” Indeed, such concept duality is reflected in most interviews within this group. As opposed to a single racial framework of analysis, I therefore adopt a racial/national framework which more accurately describes the racialization of foreigners: Whites/Europeans and Blacks/Africans.

The United States, as a Western country that is noticeably racially diverse, is described using a dual (and sometimes conflicting) racial identity. While it is sometimes used as a metonym for Whites (often in a positive context), it is simultaneously seen as consisting of two races (Whites and Blacks). In the latter context, the country always serves as the warning for the negative consequences of immigration and racial diversity.

Comparing to a racialized state like the United States, the discourse of race and immigration is still in its developmental stage in China. Therefore, the unstable racial meaning leaves room for fluid interpretation of races. Indeed, most interviewees, by using racial/national terms interchangeably (Whites/Europeans, Blacks/Africans), link race to nation in a manner that conforms to the Western discourse. However, one respondent stands out in her interpretation of the Black race:

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<sup>4</sup> Suzhi could be briefly translated to higher-class capital. Its definition is discussed in detail in the following section.

<sup>5</sup> Mandarin Chinese does not distinguish between singular and plural, unless the speaker uses descriptors such as “many.” It is therefore unclear whether he was referring to one country or several countries.

[If we welcome more foreigners,] there is definitely more Black people who will come...  
When I went to medical school for college, there were a lot of Indian students... (#3)

When I was in elementary school... and then we saw Black people. At that time we [China]  
had a good relationship with Pakistan, so probably those were Pakistanis? (#3)

In her racial categorization, she sees South Asians as Blacks, which is different from other respondents and the Western approach. While she was alone in invoking such categorization, she was the only participant who racialized South Asians, so I cannot conclude the prevalence of such discourse. However, as previous sections show that the pre-colonial Chinese discourse of *kunlun nu* consists of dark skin Asians including South Asians, as opposed to *hu ji*, the Caucasians. It is likely that she bases her racial understanding on the historical Chinese racialization, while extending it to include Western-defined Blacks. The racial meaning in China is thus fluid and ever-changing. While it reminisces the pre-colonial China's racial definitions, it is also largely influenced by the Western (binary) racial discourse.

### **Third group: Agents of social remittance**

In her studies of the Dominican immigrants in Boston, Levitt (1998) observed a process which she termed social remittances. She defined it as process by which “the ideas, behaviors, identities, and social capital flow from receiving- to sending-country communities (p.926).” As I have repeatedly argued, China's race/immigration discourse is still in its development phase. Meanwhile, China is one of the largest immigrant-sending country in the world, powered by a large and ever-increasing amount of student studying abroad (OECD 2021). These students therefore become active agents in shaping the racial meaning-making through the process of social remittances. In this study, several respondents are educated (or are being educated) in United States and European countries. Their understanding of race, while distinctly different from those without foreign exposures, also differ among themselves.

Race is a concept fundamentally embedded in the American liberal discourse. The history of the United States is largely defined by the struggle of minorities (especially Blacks) for racial equality. Accompanying such struggle is the societal-level need for the definition of race. The American tradition has a stable and fully developed racial system, with its consistent definition of different races. Consciously or unconsciously, racial identity and consciousness affects nearly all aspects of social lives in America (Omi and Winant 2015). As education being the most effective way for social reproduction (Bourdieu 1999), higher education, with its liberal leaning tendency, is particularly effective at reproducing the American liberal racial ideologies. In 2019–2020, 372,000 Chinese undergraduate and graduate students studied at U.S. universities (McGregor 2021), serving as agents

for social remittance. Many of these students participate in shaping the racial discourse in China by introducing the American liberalism.

In accordance with the liberal tradition, participants who were socialized in the United States have several characteristics. First, they are more nuanced in describing a person's racial/national identities, as opposed to the interchangeable schemas of racial and immigration described above. They invoke careful description such as "I have a friend who is English, but his ancestry is from Nigeria, and his family is from Nigeria (#5)." Second, they are eager to make racial distinction, and readily implement categories and theories of racial inequalities to analyze their experiences and reach conclusions:

I think there are different types of foreigners in China. Whites, regardless of their countries of origin and educational background, I think they enjoy a lot of privilege of being expat. And the Black people who came to China, for example there are a lot of them in Guangdong, they are perceived in a less positive light. (#10)

In contrast to the American liberal racial discourse, racial discourse is rarely invoked in Europe. Because of the painful memory of Nazism, "race" has been a taboo topic that was to be avoided at all costs in the mainstream discourse (Lentin 2008). Such tradition is also reflected during interviews with respondents who underwent socialization in Western European countries (Germany, France and Switzerland, respectively). First, the racial-blind approach permits racist acts as no sanction was enacted against them. One respondent bluntly asserted that "Black people in Guangdong, they level of culture is rather bad(#6)." Second, shaped by the ongoing debate in Europe on refugees, participants supplemented their racial understanding with an additional category of "refugees." Explicitly citing the debate, another argued that "I don't want China to introduce too many refugees... News in France last year said that refugees from the Middle East and Africa had very bad impact on society's security and safety (#16)."

While the European racial tradition allowed the existence of such discourse, one may also choose to evade the racial/refugee topic all-together, as one individual did. However, similar to some respondents with the first group, she used the term "foreigners" to exclusively refer to Whites. By listing only European/American cities, describing White experiences such as foreigners receiving preferential treatments, and asserting that most foreigners work as diplomats (a White-majority occupation especially in China), she deprived non-Whites' membership in the collective of foreigners.

Prior to the discussion of racial meaning-making, this section explores how corporeal dimension of human bodies are divided into different categories. Among individuals without international experiences, they either consider foreigners to be a homogeneous White collective, or divide the group based on race/nationality. Racial and national terms are often used interchangeably, while the definition of racial categories vary. Such ambiguity and inconsistency suggest the racial/immigration



discourse in China is still in its developmental phase. Meanwhile, through social remittance, students and workers with international experiences participate in the construction of the discourse by transmitting their racial understanding, shaped by their experiences at the destination countries, back to the host country. Indeed, from these processes, we can see the ongoing construction of discourse of race in an age of globalization. Such understanding provides the foundation to interpret immigration as the following sections will soon introduce.

## VI. Constructing the Racial/Cultural Hierarchy

Before we dive into the racial project of immigration, we must understand the subjective meaning given to the corporal dimensions of human bodies in the racialization process. Inherently, these meanings are either positive or negative. Thereby, a racial/cultural hierarchy is created which ranks groups based on such meaning, providing the basis for the formation of immigration perceptions in China. Such hierarchy I seek to uncover in this section is not a contemporary invention. The racialization process in China underwent significant transformation during the *Century of Humiliation*. Western subjugations and the following New Cultural movements transformed the ancient Chinese understanding of race to formulate a contemporary hierarchy that we observe today. This section discusses how the perception of wealth (i.e. class), together with the discourse of modernity, leads to the different perception of supranational entities (Europe, Africa) and its members (Blacks/Africans and Whites/Europeans), as well as China's struggle to locate itself on the racial/cultural hierarchy.

Class, arguably one of the most important identities in the capitalist society, shapes China's understanding of the racialized others. Similar to the Western discourse, Chinese people sees the collective of Africa as a poorly-developed land of poverty, whose "barren land cannot even grow crops (#11)." Poverty necessary leads to cultural backwardness, as a participant reasoned below, invoking the memory of China in the past Century:

Some developing countries... Their children can't even have food or wear clothes, what civilization/culture can there be? [China] in the 60s-70s... didn't even have food or water, what do you expect children to do? Study?... You have to solve these basic needs before considering personal cultivation, *suzhi* and hobbies. (#8)

*Suzhi* has no direct translation to English. Its meaning mostly overlaps with the concept of *embodied cultural capital*, while is defined as the nonmaterial social assets that a person owns, shaped by their upbringing and education (e.g. character, style of speech, way of thinking; Bourdieu 1986). While Bourdieu argued such cultural capital enables social (class) mobility, social class also defines shape a person's cultural capital. Class culture thereby refers to the collective of values, beliefs, customs,

attitudes, styles, behaviors and worldview possessed by different groups of social class (Jensen 2012). Most societies assume the superiority of middle (and upper) class cultures, and discriminate against working class cultures. Operating similarly, *suzhi* is intertwined with class. The *possession of suzhi* or *high suzhi* refers to the possession of upper/middle class culture, while *absence of suzhi* or *low suzhi* refers to the possession of working class culture. Evidently, the notion of *Suzhi* is intrinsically classist.

However, the quote above shows more than a classist interpretation of Africa (by extension Africans/Blacks). Instead of a *working-class culture*, a discourse of *underdeveloped nation culture* is created. Indeed, the *nation-class culture* is similar to *class culture* in that both entail the absence of (high) *suzhi*. Yet, the former discourse is much more powerful as it allows for a colonialist reading of the collective of Blacks/Africans. Such reading is based on a temporal template (Samman 2015) that argues that Africa (and African culture) is stuck in the past, while the rest of the world (including China) moves forward. Therefore, African culture is not only “violent” due to its inferior class culture, it is also “violent and simple (#8)” due to its failure to cross the bridge into modernity, like China did during its New Cultural Movement in the last Century.

For Whites/Europeans, the same class/*suzhi* discourse therefore legitimizes their superiority. After all, Europe/White’s class advantages means that “[their] child-rearing and education is different than [African] countries. No matter what they do, they won’t do anything really bad. (#8)” However, the most powerful driver for their superiority is the collective imagination that sees them as the agents of modernity. Western narratives, including famous theorists like Marx and Hegel, long considered the West to be the modernizing force that could save the Far East from its backwardness (Mirsepassi 2000). The same discourse was accepted by the Chinese intellectuals during the New Culture movement, exemplified by Chen Duxiu’s famous declaration that called for the abandonment of Chinese cultures and embrace of Western democracy and science (see Introduction).

Such similar ideologies are reflected in all participants. Many participants raised the Century of humiliation, and interpreted the invasion as the result of “closing borders and locking the country” (*biguan suoguo*), with some explicitly warning against the risk of reliving such history. For many, immigration is essential to facilitate the international knowledge exchange, to allow China to learn the latest technology from the foreign countries. Even among those who did not invoke the history, they express similar sentiments. However, the “foreign countries” which Chinese needs to learn from are implied to be developed countries in the West. Whites/Europeans, as representatives from these countries, thus are reflective of their “higher cultures” while serving as “agents of modernity and civilizations,” occupying the superior position on the racial hierarchy.

Situating Chinese on the racial discourse is a more difficult task. While Chinese comfortably assume their superiority over Black/Africans, the positionality of Chinese vis-a-vis the Whites have long been a point of confusion. During the 20th Century, intellectuals initially claimed that Yellow are, if not

superior to, at least at the same level as Whites as united, wise, and intellectual rulers. The discrimination that they later suffered during their experience in the United States made them compare the Chinese to Blacks, exclaiming that “we Chinese are less than black slaves... even the ‘black slaves’ in the United States were educated. (Cheng 1997:182)” Modern Chinese intellectuals on the one hand maintained that Yellow were at least as good as Whites, while on the other hand interpreting the racial discrimination they suffered in terms of racial inferiority of the self. This research revealed that, even after 120 years, the same confusion and anxiety persists.

We may use a metaphor to illustrate the relationship. In the elementary school, the group of third-graders (Chinese) comfortably assume their superiority over first-graders (African/Blacks). While some third-graders undoubtedly accept that the six-graders (European/Whites) are superior, others refuse to simply accept the fact. The latter group, on one hand, protest that they are treated unfairly by the six-graders and demand equal treatment. On the other hand, they are proud to receive any recognition or compliments from the six-graders, and wear them as a badge of honor. Below, I focus on the two groups of Chinese in their perceived position vis-a-vis European/Whites. The two acts, whether they are apparent act of acceptance or defiant, reflect the underlying idea of Chinese inferiority over Whites.

The first group undoubtedly accept the superiority of European/Whites over Chinese. This is reflected by the argument that no Europeans would want to come because China “is not good enough to worth considering (#8).” Another participant positively analogized Europeans to “a stuffed pancake,” arguing that they “won’t fall off the sky. Even if they do, they won’t fall onto your head (#11).” Through the idiom, he argues that good things (Europeans, the superior other) don’t come to you (Chinese, the inferior) for no reason. Interestingly, both respondents are more than 40 years ago and occupy working-class jobs. While the number of respondents is too small to reach any conclusion, future research may explore whether such ideologies are prevalence among older-generations and/or working-class individuals.

The second group protested the unequal treatment from the West toward China while assuming the superiority of the latter. Barmé (1991) argues that China sees itself (still) being pushed over by “Western bullies,” exemplified by China’s failure during the 1993 Olympic bid. Similarly, many participants observed that on an international level, China is often treated unfairly by the West, including by Western media (“foreign media often unfairly portray China”, #4), Western diplomats (“Western diplomats refuse to acknowledge the truths”, #2) and Western people (“Americans, when they’re looking at issues that are prevalent all over the world... they always pick China to talk about.”, #10). The perceived inequality treatment did not push respondents to develop an antagonizing attitude toward Europeans/Whites. On the contrary, respondents purposefully grant preferential treatments to them while seeking validations (see the following section). Respondents underscore the necessity for foreigners “to have a good impression of China (#1),” so that “after they go back... they would compliment China in front of their friends (#4).” They are especially proud if any

validation from Europeans/Whites is given, whether is it the increase in the number of European immigrants, or a European choosing to live in China. The emphasis of such validation implies the underlying assumption of Europeans/Whites as the superior, while China assumes an inferior position itself.

The contemporary racial/cultural hierarchy, first created in the 20th Century, thus persists in today's China. The hierarchy places Whites/Europeans on the top, Chinese in the middle, and Blacks/Africans at the bottom. While Blacks are from a backward culture marked by its simplicity and violence, Whites are agents of a superior culture who serves to modernize China. On the other hand, China, taking for granted its perceived superiority over Blacks, finally reluctantly accepts its inferiority via-à-vis their White counterparts. In the following section, we will explore how the hierarchy guides the racial project in the area of immigration, resulting in a bifurcated view of immigration that is unparalleled in Western countries.

## VII. The Bifurcated Immigration Discourse

“All foreigners who came to China are trash (#11),” a respondent announced angrily. The apparent xenophobic remark seemingly expressed as a hatred for all foreigners indiscriminately. However, does the racial/cultural hierarchy I presented above play no part in his perception of foreigners? This section, building on the previous discussion on racialization of foreigners, explores how the racial/cultural hierarchy is reflected in the racial project of immigration.

The location of the host in the middle of the racial/cultural hierarchy poses an apparent dilemma for immigration. The assimilation of the immigrants into the host culture requires that the host to identify with a superior position on the cultural hierarchy, as is the case in France (Silverman 1992). However, how is the immigration discourse constructed in a country like China, where the host is located in the middle of the cultural hierarchy? From the interviews emerged a new type of immigration discourse: an inconsistent bifurcated discourse, where immigration policies against Blacks/Africans are *assimilationist* or *exclusionist*, while Whites/Europeans undergoes a process I term *reverse integration*.

### Lack of integration

In the Western immigration discourse, the view on integration of foreigners into the host cultural typically follows the three discourses: forbidding foreigners from entering (exclusionism), allowing foreigners but require them to adapt to the host culture while marginalizing their cultures (assimilationism), and seeking the coexistence of multiple cultures (multiculturalism), as several studies on Belgian immigration concludes (Ceuppens 2006; Mielants 2006). Even in Anglo-Saxon

countries where multicultural discourses are prevalent, the requirement for integration is often built into informal and formal institutions. The United States require immigrants to pass the citizenship tests to be naturalized. Cultural insults to immigrants, such as yelling “Speak English!” to individuals speaking a foreign language is prevalent. In much of Europe, such as is the case for Flanders, Belgium, knowledge of local language is a requirement for immigrants, as exemplified by the slogan of the Flemish movement “de taal is gans het volk (Language is the whole people)” (Ceuppens 2006).

In contrast, no integration requirements seem to exist in China. During the interview, participants are asked about whether immigrants should culturally or linguistically integrate into the Chinese society. Many participants expressed confusion at the question, indicating the absence of such schema.

What do you mean integrating into Chinese culture? Celebrating Spring Festival? (#1)

One participant even expressed her frustration with such discourse:

Do you think I have a lot of communication with Chinese? I just go to the mall, buy things, [talk with] the people in my office. What communication with Chinese do I have? Why are you forcing your values on others? (#3)

It is therefore evident that no discourse of integration exist in China. Indeed, for the hierarchal-top (Whites/Europeans), assimilationism is not necessary nor desired, as the discourse of integration contradicts their role as the agent of modernity. After all, if the superior Whites were to be on the same hierarchal level as the Chinese, China will have lose its role models and its competition, which will lead to another crisis in the country’s identity. The introduction of the hierarchal-bottom (Blacks/Africans) nevertheless requires an assimilation strategy, to avoid the de-escalation of China on the hierarchy. However, absence of such discourse renders exclusionism the only option enacted toward the latter group.

## **Excluding Blacks/Africans**

Claiming that Blacks/Africans come from the poor and backwards Africa, participants locate the group on the bottom of the cultural/racial hierarchy. On one hand, their introduction pose a threat to the safety and stability of the Chinese society due to their inherent “violent” and “sexual” nature. On the other hand, their inferior culture, once entering the mainstream, will corrupt the superior Chinese culture, completely destroying any chance for China to modernize itself.

First, people view that the inferiority of African culture as a threat to the stability of Chinese society and to the safety of the Chinese people. From this perspective, Africans/Blacks are at best lazy and

immoral freeloaders, and at worst sexual predators and murderers. Two university students (#3, #15) recalled that Black students not only “do not listen in classes,” but also “cheat in tests... and have parties everyday” which “severely interrupted our daily lives.” Two (#6, #13) warned that Africans/Blacks frequently “find and use [prostitution] services,” which corrupted China’s moral values. Three participant (#6, #7, #16) mentioned an incidence where “a girl was hacked to death by a Black teacher because they got involved.” One respondent went so far as to claim that “Black people in Guangzhou attacked the government [and sought to] overtake the government.” These stories underscore the urgency of the matter, arguing that Blacks/Africans pose an imminent threat to the stability of the Chinese society and threatens the safety of the Chinese population. Following such argument, if nothing is done about the situation, China will end up like the Western countries who are being invaded by Blacks/Africans. The United States was repeated invoked to portray the detrimental effect of racial diversity where Blacks bear the blame (#3, #8). In Europe, a participant asserted that Switzerland’s safety worsened after Blacks immigrated (#16). One person recalled that in Germany, “there were only niggers on their streets,” making the country “very dirty, chaotic, [and] very dangerous (#11).”

Second, people express the fear that Africans/Blacks threaten to take over China and corrupt the Chinese culture. They viewed such process as already in the process, as those who are already in China now “refuses to leave (#11).” Invoking memories of China in the 60s and 70s, where couples had no entertainment except sex every night, a respondent (#8) argues that because of the low “level of culture”, Africans/Blacks will necessarily have sex frequently, leading to a dystopian future where they have “hundreds of millions of their children in China,” who, “when orders are given,” will take over China. As a result, China’s “root” will be affected, including “[its] traditions, [its] cultures, and [its] governance.”

These impressions lead participants to, explicitly or inexplicitly, adopt an exclusionist view on Blacks/Africans. Although only one person directly expressed exclusionist views toward Blacks (#7), such ideology is reflected in obscured ways in other participants, of which I divided into two groups. Some respondents (#3, #8, #11) are against the introduction of immigrants in general, with one exclaimed that “all foreigners who come to China are trash! (#11)” Although the remark seemingly reflects an indiscriminately xenophobic ideology, it is later revealed that he thinks that the only Africans/Blacks would want to come to China in the first place. After all, “few Americans (read Whites) want to immigrate to China, so everyone who comes will be those people [Blacks/Africans].” Therefore, the exclusionist ideologies they adopted practically apply to Blacks/Africans. Conversely, among those participants who do support the immigration of foreigners, they consciously or subconsciously consider all foreigners to be uniformly White, thereby excluding Blacks/Africans from the immigration discourse completely.

## Seeking Validation from Europeans/Whites

The attitude toward Europeans/Whites are distinctively different. As a middle-/upper-class collective who are agents of modernity, they are located at the top of the racial/cultural hierarchy. The threat to the Chinese culture, and to the safety and stability of the Chinese society, is therefore irrelevant in this context. Rather, China is preoccupied with the introduction of Whites to bring about modernity and development (see section V), as well as seeking validations to prove its self worth on the international stage. The latter consists of the active process of catering to foreigners through *reverse integration* and *preferential treatment*, as well as the active interpretation of empirical observations as validations of the accomplishment of the self.

Many European countries, such as the Netherlands, adopt a linguistic integration approach, requiring immigrants to learn the national language as part of the integration requirement. In contrast, no Chinese respondents think it is necessary for immigrants to learn Chinese. Instead, participants adopt a *reverse integration* approach, where the host adapt to the language of the foreigners. Many argued, almost with a sense of pride, that “so many people in China speak English (#4),” and expressed that they would go out of their way to assist foreigners who don’t speak Chinese. Some even expressed apology for their inability to accommodate to the foreigner’s linguistically:

If I see a foreigner I want to talk to, but I feel like my language [English] is not so good, there might be some communication issue. I just won’t go bother them. (#1)

While *Reverse integration* illustrates the perception of inferiority of China vis-à-vis European/Whites, it is also used as an active strategy to seek validation of the later. Furthermore, such phenomenon further illustrates the bifurcated vision of immigrants. Such discourse is only invoked in the contest of foreigners as Whites/Europeans, and the target language for the reverse integration is always a European language (English).

A second strategy for the host to actively seek validation of the superior is through preferential treatment. Most participants recognize its existence for foreigners on an institutional level. As a probing question in the interview, I briefly recounted the well-known event of Chinese police finding a lost bicycle for a Japanese person in 3 days, but in comparison, no lost bicycle that belongs to a Chinese person was found that quickly (People’s Daily, 2012). Most respondents are aware of this incident. In interpreting the event and other institutional preferential treatment practices, most respondents argued that they are understandable and even necessary. During the discussion of this incident, most engage in a process I have termed the *family discourse*, in which they analogize China as their family. The host is considered as the family member, whereas the foreigners are considered guests. Citing the traditional Chinese culture of “welcomingness and hospitableness (*requing haoke*)”, respondents argue that it is only natural for the host to provide better treatment for their guests,

considering that “family members are used to each other so we are not overly polite to each other (#1).” Meanwhile, the goal of preferential treatment of foreigners in China, analogized to the better treatment of guests in a family, is for them “to leave a good impression of China (#1),” so that “after they go back... they would compliment China in front of their friends (#4).” A similar sentiment is shared in a 2012 People’s Daily article which recounted the lost bicycle incident, arguing that “a random event [of a Japanese losing a bicycle], is thus enlarged to reflect the international image of Wuhan in comparison to the moral standards of other areas of the World.” Institutional preferential treatment is thus considered necessary to boost the China’s image internationally, thereby seeking the validation from the West.

Notably, preferential treatments are never justified when the beneficiaries are perceived to be Blacks/Africans, which is due to two reasons: First, Blacks/Africans occupy a lower hierarchal location than the host, so there is no need for validation seeking. Second, Blacks/Africans are portrayed to engage in egregious acts unlike their civilized Whites/Europeans counterparts, rendering preferential treatments less justified. Indeed, respondents mentioned that the hierarchal-bottom attend university for free (#10), were assigned female students as escorts by universities (#13), cheat with the assistant of the professors (#3, #15), and rape female students without facing consequences (#15). These instances invoked fear and anger, as they not only underscore unfairness, they illustrate a dystopian future where Chinese resources are taken advantage of, Chinese students suffer unfair treatment and Chinese girls are objectified and exploited by Blacks/Africans.

While participants use reverse integration and preferential treatments as mechanisms for actively soliciting validation, they actively interpret empirical evidences to show China’s development and progression. On the collective level, the increase in the amount of immigration is seen as evidence of China’s globalization and modernization. On the individual level, those who interact with Chinese foreigners proudly asserted that “the foreigners in China who stayed under these circumstances [the COVID pandemic] must really like Chinese culture (#7, Chinese officer worker).” Another respondent cite foreigners’ experience, comparing China to other developed nations in Europe and East Asia:

[The British and Spanish people I know] are from big cities. They have seen the world. It’s not that their horizon is limited, so they have no other options but to stay here. They compared, some may have lived in Korean or Japan, and then they chose China. Maybe they relate more to China, to living in here... On a certain level, China is modernized and cosmopolitan enough, so that they are comfortable living here, right? (#4)

In this instance, foreigners’ decisions to live in China, especially given that they have lived in Europe and other developed countries in Asia, validate the “modernization” and “cosmopolitanism” of China.

These validations, however, must be from Western countries, or to a lesser extent, other developed countries in Asia to be valuable. After all, compliments coming from (African) countries that are



perceived to be poor and underdeveloped while receiving aid from China do not testify much, as it is only natural “these developing countries like Africa think China is good (#8, Taxi driver).”

## **Role of the host in the immigration project**

According to older participants, the host also has an active role in the immigration discourse. The host and the hierarchal-bottom bear equal responsibilities for the negative consequences of immigration, while the hierarchal-top escapes the discourse: While Africans/Blacks pose an inherent danger (i.e. weakness), the decision for its internalization ultimately sits with the Chinese people. After all, “everyone has strengths and weaknesses... If you see their weakness and you learn them, that’s your problem. (#12)”

Seeking to return to the pre-modern China rural state of “male-domination, semi-feudal social hierarchies and education inequalities (Barmé 1995: 225),” a respondent is deeply disappointed by the perceived moral decadence in today’s society, where women are promiscuous and crime is prevalent. He argues that such is the consequence of Chinese tradition of “removing the essence [positives] and taking the dross [negatives],” spinning on the Chinese proverb *quqi jinghua, quqi zaopo* (removing the dross and taking the essence).

The perceived moral decay in China threatens the development of the Chinese race. On one hand, foreign freeloaders (Africans/Blacks) are seen as taking advantage of China’s resources while posing an inherent danger through their inferior culture. On the other hand, with “opening up” of the country, Chinese learned nothing but the decadent side of foreign cultures while discarding the positive side.

This section explores how the cultural/racial hierarchy is implemented in the racial project of immigration. The lack of integration discourse render assimilation projects, often seen in Western countries, impossible in the Chinese context. Therefore, facing Africans/Blacks’ perceived inferiority, to avoid the threat of moral corruption, crime, societal destabilization and cultural invasion, the host either explicitly adopt an exclusionist approach, or exclude the group from the discussion of immigration. In contrast, Whites should be introduced to China for its modernization project. Meanwhile, the host engages in several mechanisms to actively secure the validation of the superior group to prove its self worth. Such insecurity of the self, in contrast to its self-centered confidence prior to the Western invasion, is deeply rooted in the West’s modernization, colonization and emancipation project. The internalization of the Western discourse of Enlightenment value renders China to be inherently inferior, and in a constant race to modernity to seek to surpass the West. However, in this game where rules are defined by the West, China will never win.

## VIII. Conclusion

Adapting Omi and Winant (2014)'s framework of racialization, this study explores the racialization process and the implementation of racial projects in immigration in China. Through literature review on colonization project and the racial formation in China and semi-structured interviews, several key conclusions are reached: First, although racial categorization in China largely resembles its Western counterpart, its differences reflect the ancient-China racialization discourse. Second, racialization process defines Whites/Europeans as agents of modernity, and Blacks/Africans as uncivilized savages and sexual predators. While Yellows (Chinese) take for granted their superiority over the latter, they are positioned on the hierarchy lower than the former. Third, the hierarchal position renders the necessity for a bifurcated immigration discourse, where the host excludes Blacks/Africans while attempting to seek validation from Whites/Europeans through reverse integration and preferential treatments. Fourth, the racial discourse is simultaneously destabilized through social remittances, the ideological influence of the exchange students from Europe and North America.

This exploratory study with a limited sample size does not seek to be representative of the racial/immigration discourses in China. Nevertheless, it provides a much-needed framework to begin the immigration research in China by identifying race as an essential aspect in shaping people's perception toward immigrants. The issue of immigration and race should never be considered as separate topics, especially in a country like China where foreigners are highly racialized. Further research in the area should critically examine the racialization process in China, as well as the issue of immigration as a racial project in the nation-building project of China.

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