

Contemporary Racial Formation in China:
Interactions Between Africans and Local Chinese in Guangzhou, China

A THESIS

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By

Jiumei Gao

The Colorado College

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Abstract

In the 19th century, China encountered the first group of European colonialists and other foreigners. Nationalism, including views on different races, started to form. In the 20th century, ideas of racial categories and how Chinese people belong to the more superior “Yellow race” continued to develop and triggered national pride and rebellion against colonialists. During the Mao-era, nationalism was temporarily replaced with communism, but soon came back after Mao died in 1976. In the 1980s when China opened its market, people of the world, especially of the developing countries, were driven to China for its massive economic opportunities. As a result, Chinese people started to practice ideas of nationalism in their daily interactions with foreigners. This study took an ethnographic approach in order to examine the practice of nationalism in daily life among Chinese residents in Guangzhou, which has the largest African population throughout the country. The study included an explicit review of the historical development of China’s nationalism, along with a one-month ethnographic field research project that utilized interviews with 22 Chinese and 14 Africans in areas with higher concentration of Africans in Guangzhou. The results show that racism against Africans is commonly expressed among the Chinese participants. I found that their rationale of anti-African racism mostly originates from the structure of China’s nationalism that has been building since the 19th century.

Background

“Racism is modern superstition yet have occurred throughout human history. Racism is usually utilized for political purposes because of its great simplicity. The racist formula has no rival under political context. In all modern science there is no field where authorities differ more than in the classification of human races. By the beginning of the 20th century the nations of Europe were brought into increasing conflict. Nationalism rose in all nations of Europe, and racism became a national tool in this era of nationalism. In countries in need of a common uniting tool it provided a pedigree and a bond, which any human could understand and take pride in. Wherever we study racism, there are similar evidences that racist doctrines are invoked for political ends. Nations are hailed now as blood brother, now as destined foe, according to political alignments in peace and in war” --- Ruth Benedict (1945).

While racism can be explained as a large-scale political strategy, individuals of a society can fall into this process and express racism in daily life. In the US, it is believed that at the micro-social level, racial projects link signification and structure, not in the purpose of shaping policy or defining large-scale meaning, but as the applications of “common sense.” To see how racial projects operate at the level of everyday life, we need to examine how we “notice” race (Michael, 1994).

One of the first things we notice about people when we meet them is their race. We believe that race can define a person and we utilize race to “understand” a person. We are confused when we encounter someone who does not belong to our existing racial categories, such as a racially “mixed” person or a person of an ethnic/racial group we are not familiar with. Such an encounter becomes a source of discomfort and momentarily a crisis of racial meaning. Our ability to interpret racial meanings depends on preconceived notions of a racialized social structure (Michael, 1994).

Comments like “Funny, you don’t look black,” have an underlying image of what black should be. We expect people to conform with their racial identities and do not believe people could act outside of their identities. Existing and popular stereotypes of race reveal the always present, already active link between our view of the social structure and our conception of what race means.

Our ongoing interpretation of our experience in racial terms shapes our relation to the institutions and organizations through which we are imbedded in a social structure. Thus we expect differences in skin color, or other racially coded characteristics, to explain social differences. Temperament, sexuality, intelligence, athletic ability, aesthetic preferences and so on are presumed to be fixed and discernible from the apparent mark of race (Michael, 1994).

The theory of racial formation suggests that society is always affected by racial projects as is everyone in the society. Everybody learns some combination, some version of the rules of racial classification and of their own racial identities, often without obvious teaching or conscious inculcation. Race becomes common sense, a way of comprehending, explaining, and acting in the world. Since racial formation is always historically situated, our understanding of the significance of race, and of the way race structures society, has emerged and changed over time (Michael, 1994). Therefore, by knowing something of how it evolved, we can perhaps better discern where it is heading.

The aim of this study is to understand the historical development of racial classification in China, and how it is embedded in the everyday life of Chinese people. I have done extensive literature reviews on the formation of the modern nation-state China and the emergence of racial classification since the early 20th century. I also conducted an ethnographic study with Chinese residents and Africans in Guangzhou, China, which has the highest concentration of African population among all Chinese cities, in order to understand how racial classification is practiced in the everyday life of Chinese people. This study has found that some Chinese people indeed have internalized the notions of races that have been forming since the building of race classification in China. The majority of the Chinese participants of this study expressed a racial classification system of “white, yellow, black” and demonstrated negative stereotypes of Africans being poor and uneducated. As a consequence, the African participants have experienced being discriminated against by Chinese people during their stay in Guangzhou.

Race, racism and nationalism in China

In the beginning of the 20th century when China first encountered a large number of foreigners, under the impact of European discipline, Chinese scholars proposed nationalism and racial identities for the construction of a nation-state China (Dikotter, 1997). The scholars introduced the “yellow race” as the Chinese identity, which primarily concerns patrilineal blood heritage. The

“yellow race” was considered superior to all other races, white, black and red (Dikotter, 1997).

These ideas gained popularity among the Chinese and were widespread during the early 20th century to be utilized as a part of the rise of a nation-state China. While racial categories and nationalism have been prevalent during the Republic of China, they diminished after Mao Tzetong took over China in 1949 when the communist ideology challenged capitalism, which was racially white dominant at that point. While the West was seen as the typical exploiting class, people of the third world were recognized as the proletariat (Larkin, 1973). Because of the belief in communist ideology that all workers of the world need to unite, China was trying to unify with third-world countries, mostly African countries (Dikotter, 1997). There was a lot of aid to Africa, such as building roads and railways (Larkin, 1973), which were considered to be friendly gestures to the Africans. However, racism against Africans appeared in the post-Mao era, when the Open Policy allowed the operation of market economy and private property in the country and abandoned some Communist ideologies (Sautman, 1994). Therefore, nationalism, eugenics, transition to capitalism, along with disdain for poverty, gradually occurred in Chinese society, which triggered anti-African protests in some universities in China during the 1980s (Sautman, 1994).

Academic conversations occurred regarding Chinese nationalism and racial discourse. Researchers like Ke Wang, Frank Dikotter and Barry Sautman performed comprehensive analysis of policies on different minority groups. Having been through the early stage of capitalism, communism and the current Open Policy era, nationalism gained popularity in the 21st century. Since the 1980s, with the increased number of foreigners in China, the Chinese government has correspondingly developed immigrant policies, and the Chinese society reacted with incorporating racial discourse in nationalism. Cyber racism and Han supremacism emerged and gained popularity within the society (Cheng 2011).

In my opinion, the historical development of perspectives on Africa demonstrates how the ideology of a nation impacts the construction of racial categories. In this study, I am interested in how contemporary Chinese view Africans and how their opinion is a reflection of modern ideology

in China. I conducted a one-month long ethnographic study in Guangzhou in order to examine the communication between Chinese and Africans because of Guangzhou's unique history and population composition.

Guangzhou is the capital of Guangdong Province, which has been at the forefront of China's Open Policy since the 1980s, when the new political system allowed the operation of market economy and private property. It was also the mark of a transition to a non-communist ideology. Since then, Guangzhou has attracted investments from Hong Kong and foreign companies, particularly in electronics, garments and textiles (Lyons et. al., 2008). It has become the "trading center of the third world." New opportunities and economic growth resulted in population and immigration growth. From 1978–2005, the official population of Guangzhou has increased from 5 to 7 million. Wu (2001) suggests that undocumented migration accounts for a considerable part of this increase. Of these immigrants, approximately 20% are Africans, whose population has risen from 6000 in 2000 to 20,000 in 2005, an annual increase of 33.3 per cent—far higher than other immigrant groups (Lyons et al., 2008). Due to the transience of Africans in Guangzhou, the official population of African residents in 2014 is 16,000, but data from the Chinese customs authorities shows there were 40,000 Africans entering into China in 2014 (Liu, 2014).

Despite all the recent contact with Africans in China, anti-African racism is still prevalent overall in the country. The images of African people on the Chinese internet are frequently related to poverty, lack of intelligence and HIV carrier status (Fei, 2014). However, citizens in close contact with Africans in Guangzhou may have some different perspectives from what is presented in the media (Castillo, 2014). Residents of Guangzhou have had more exposure to foreign culture as a result of the city's nature as a historical trading center. Therefore, I would like to investigate whether there has been a change in how Africans are viewed by Chinese people in Guangzhou. Furthermore, I also hope to gain insight into the potential changes in how Chinese people view other races in China over time as a result of the increased African population.

Literature review

In Frank Dikotter's book *The construction of racial identities in China and Japan* (1997), he discusses the construction of racial identities in China starting from early 20th century to the 1990s. The Chinese people first felt the need to have a racial category at the end of 19th century as the result of the initial contact with the western world in contemporary times. The term "yellow race", which concerns patrilineal blood heritage, was used to identify Chinese people within the Chinese academic field, media and general public. The academic field also argued that the finding of the Peking Man (*Homo erectus*) in Zhoukoudian proved that there was a separate origin for Asians, which was not shared with other races. As a systematic racial category was developing, the academic field came up with biological and cultural definitions for different races. While the "white race" was temporarily dominant in the world, the "yellow race" was intellectually equal with the "white race" and was the only race that could compete with the "white race". The "black race" and the "red race" were the unintelligent, lazy and barbaric slave races. Some scholars even put the "black race" in the same category with chimpanzees and gorillas (Dikotter, 1997).

These ideas were extremely powerful during the early 20th century due to the contact with the western world, which resulted in colonization and unequal treaties. These were perceived as a shame and humiliation in Chinese history (Wang, 2014). Sun Yat-sen, the first president of the Republic of China, believed that only nationalism could save China from this shameful stage. He and his followers adopted the ideas of nationalism in order to provoke "the proudness to be a Chinese." As a result, they also utilized the systematic racial category formed earlier. These powerful ideas from the Republic of China still have an influence in modern China (Wang, 2014). However, they diminished temporarily under the ruling of Mao Tzedong, when the People's Republic of China that was built upon communism, was ideologically opposed to the white-dominated capitalist world, and was trying to "win hearts and minds" from third world countries (Dikotter, 1996). During the time when China recognized African people as proletarians that need to be united and as potential international supporters, posters of Mao with students of all ethnicities

were common. In the 1960s, the Chinese government invited African students to study in the universities and provided them with scholarships and living expenses (Dikotter, 1996).

However, aiding the third world countries as a friendly gesture under the ideological frame gradually vanished in the 1980s after the death of Mao (Sautman, 1994). Under the Open Policy starting from 1979, the country abandoned some communist ideology and adopted nationalism. While aid still continued on the international level, it was no longer perceived as a friendly gesture to the third world countries, instead, people believed that this aid was an economic strategy because of the rich resources and commercial interests in Africa. Meanwhile, anti-African racism emerged in China due to the previous depiction of African countries as exploited subjects, meaning poor and lacking in capital, which had the effect of relating Africans to poor peasants, a group that was discriminated against in China after the transition toward capitalism. The racism was also compounded by the depiction of Africans as HIV carriers and Africa as a continent in which epidemic diseases spread.

Additionally, prevalence of eugenics and the belief that China needed a pure “yellow race” triggered rage among Chinese men when Africans interacted with Chinese women. According to Sautman, eugenics occurred with the rise of nationalism because of the requirement of one foundational ancestry, which under the Chinese context was the “yellow race”. Since the “yellow race” is based on patrilineal blood heritage, any marriage between the “yellow race” and other races would “contaminate” the purity of the “yellow race”. After explaining the mechanism and rationale of anti-African racism in China, Sautman’s study summarized the anti-African protests in the 1980s in Chinese universities. The biggest one happened in 1988 at Nanhua University, Nanjing, when African students were playing loud music and trying to approach Chinese women. Hundreds of Chinese students burst into dorms of African students, breaking things and yelling chants such as: “Kill the black devil.” It resulted in the removal of African students from the campus dormitories (Sautman, 1994). In 1989, slogans such as “protecting our women” were still seen in the

universities on posters and boards. The tension eased after the sanctions on universities following the *Tiananmen Square event* in June 1989.

The campus racism in the 1980s developed into a cyber racism in the 21st century across the Chinese internet. Yinghong Cheng's (1992) study surveyed primarily Chinese students and intellectuals and found a similarity between attitudes towards blacks and towards peasants, as both were regarded as less intelligent, cultured and civilized. They were seen as on the lower or bottom level of modernization and development. Cheng argues that there is a gut-level racism in China. Blacks were stigmatized as sexual predators and a relationship between a black man and a Chinese woman was socially unacceptable. This racial prejudice remains the most sensitive part in the anti-African racism (Leibold, 2010). Despite the official Sino-African friendship propaganda, Africans often experience aggression when living in China. M. Dujon Johnson called this racial barrier "Afrophobia." On the internet, there is a popular consumerist culture attaching values of beauty and health to light skin while degrading dark skin, creating a racial "aesthetic premium." (Leibold, 2010) The issue burst out in summer 2009. On the 15th of July, two Nigerians ran to escape police checks in Guangzhou. One was seriously injured after jumping from a building. Believing he was dead, hundreds of Africans gathered around a local police station to protest about being victims of racial profiling by frequent police ID checks. The incident immediately caught media attention and was followed up by feature reports (Leibold, 2010).

However, despite how a lot of studies show anti-African racism among Chinese people, Roberto Castillo's (2014) study concerning the place-making practices of the Africans in Guangzhou takes a different perspective on the issue and discovers interesting results. His study focuses on how Africans built their community in Guangzhou since the growth of the African population in 2008. When discussing discrimination with African interviewees, Africans generally stated that they did not think Chinese people were racist. The participants claimed that the media portrayed the problems they were facing as racism, however, Africans believed that the difficulties they were facing were more about cultural differences, such as language barrier, rather than racism (Castillo,

2014). They claimed that once they had learned Chinese, their life became easier. They reported that racism was a much bigger issue in Europe than in China. Other participants blamed the bureaucratic system for having discriminating policies against Africans, but they did not think the citizens of Guangzhou on the personal level were racist (Castillo, 2014).

Researchers have also explored similar issues concerning the change of racial identity in other countries due to the encounter of another race. For example, Chinatowns have been emerging in the last century in many countries as a result of a large number of recent Chinese immigrants. The views of locals on Chinatowns can be a reflection of the construction of racial identities in those places. In a study conducted by Anderson (1987) in Vancouver, Canada, the researcher found that “Chinatown”, like races, is an idea that belongs to the “white” European cultural tradition. Anderson states that the Canadian government, which is one of the social institutions that represents part of the ideology, has granted legitimacy to the ideas of Chinese and Chinatown, inscribing social definitions of identity and place in institutional practice and space. Chinatown has been a critical nexus through which the race definition process was structured. The African community in Guangzhou as a marginal space under the mainstream Chinese culture can be compared with the Chinatown in Vancouver. Investigating how the citizens of Guangzhou view the recent Africans emerging in the city and how the social institutions have dealt with their existence can give us clues to how the ideology of the nation affects racial categories and views on different races.

Method

An IRB approval for the interviews was granted prior to the beginning of the field part of the study. The study took place in Guangzhou, China. According to Michal Lyons et al. (2013), Zone 1 and Zone 2 in the following map (Figure 1) are regions of high concentration of African immigrants. I stayed in close proximity to these regions in order to conveniently reach the target population, the African and Chinese people living in these areas. I applied both participant observation and ethnographic interviews (Schensul et.al, 1999) to collect data.

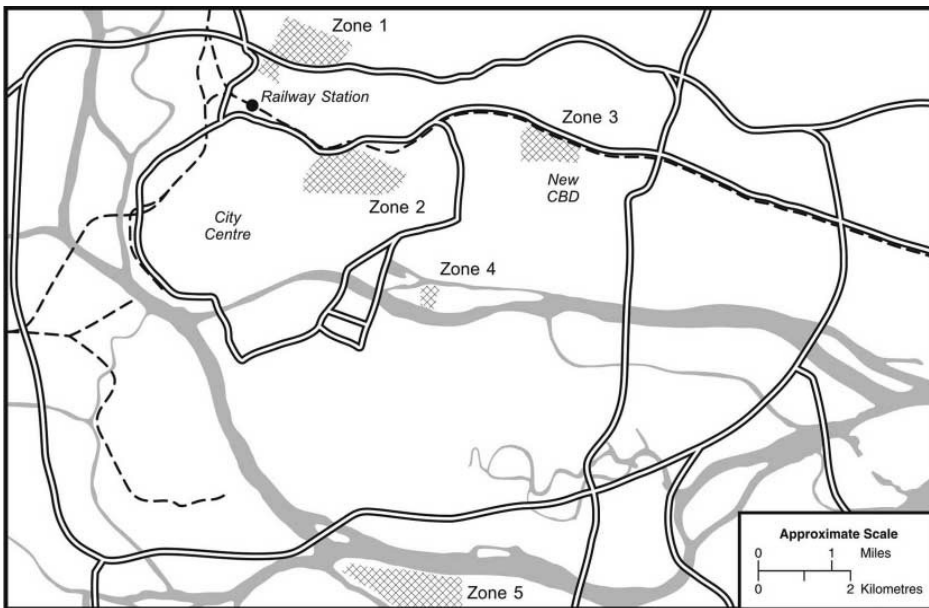


Figure 1: Map of Guangzhou. Zone 1 and Zone 2 are regions of high concentration of African population.

Participant observation took place in malls, markets, coffee shops, restaurants, nail shops and streets in Zone 1 and Zone 2. Zone 1 is called Sanyuanli, where a lot of stock markets are located. There are thousands of wholesale shops of clothes, shoes, small electronics, beauty products and etc. Zone 2, with the name Xiaobei, is a residential area that has a variety of grocery stores and restaurants serving people of different backgrounds. Zone 1 and Zone 2 are only 3 to 5 bus stations away depending on different routes and one subway station away. African business people typically live in Xiaobei and engage in business activity in Sanyuanli. In coffee shops and restaurants, I recorded the composition of and interactions between customers. In malls and markets, I mostly observed how African customers interacted with staff members of the stores. Additionally, I acquired simulated observation on occasions where it was hard to approach the observation sites. For example, I asked one of the African participants whose brother was an business person in Guangzhou to pretend to be shopping around in the market and observed how the shop owners interacted with him. On the street, I observed how Chinese pedestrians reacted to both individual Africans and groups of Africans and Chinese. One of the participants of the study played soccer with local teams in a league match, thus I observed how the Chinese and African members of the teams communicated with each other. Furthermore, I also conducted participant observation in the

biggest catholic church in Guangzhou that has English Mass every Sunday afternoon and attracted large numbers of African Catholic Christians.

I conducted interviews with both African and Chinese residents in Xiaobei and Sanyuanli, Guangzhou. I collected data from 13 Africans and 24 Chinese. To add a third perspective, I also interviewed a British person who has taught English in China for three years. I reached the participants mostly by random selection and chain referral sampling (Schensul et. al, 1999). I found my first group of participants through a Chinese teacher who taught Africans Chinese language, which helped me to reach more participants. I also consulted a local Chinese resident, Yunneng He, who had extensive connections with Chinese in Guangzhou. Interviews usually took place in restaurants, coffee shops, or an office room, with refreshments provided such as a drink or a dessert.

The interviews were all semi-structured (See Appendix for a list of sample questions). Questions concerned mainly interactions between African and Chinese people, including how Africans viewed the Chinese and Chinese life and how Chinese perceived the existence of large numbers of Africans in China. To understand these topics, the questions asked about working environment, transportation, living community and education. Because individuals had different experiences, the questions were flexible to change during the interviews. Electronic recorders were not accepted most of the time so I took extensive notes during interviews and wrote down details to the best of my memory.

Research has shown that most Africans in Guangzhou are Francophones from West Africa (Liang, 2010). I speak mandarin Chinese and English, which can lead to difficulties in communication with Africans who speak neither. Furthermore, some local residents of Guangzhou speak Cantonese, especially elders who grew up before the mandatory study of Mandarin. Speaking Mandarin with them could create miscommunication. Therefore, in order to reach a broader population, I incorporated two translators in the research. One of them was a sociology student in East China Normal University and a native Cantonese speaker. The other one was a recent high school

graduate from a foreign language school and had studied French for five years. They acted as both translators and assistants throughout the whole field part of the research.

After collecting data, I applied coding to analyze each interview. I typed all the interview notes in a Word document and highlighted keywords in each interviews. Then, I used Microsoft Excel to summarize all the keywords, found patterns that exist in all the interviews and summarized them into themes.

Results

The results were divided into three parts, which were interviews with Chinese, interviews with Africans, and participant observation. Different themes were addressed under different parts. In total I interviewed 24 Chinese people, including 15 males and 9 females, ranging from age 18 to 60, but mainly drawing on the young adult to mid adult range, from age 22 to 40. Nineteen of them were local residents of Guangzhou, five were students in universities or recent graduates from other places in China. I interviewed 13 Africans in total, including 8 males and 5 females. The occupations of Chinese participants varied, including students, teachers, taxi drivers, vendors, lawyers, bankers, guards, and business owners. Their intensity of contact with Africans varied from daily conversation/business to no interaction. On the other hand, the occupations of African participants were limited to students or business people, because the Chinese government mainly gave Africans a student visa or a business visa for staying longer than a travel visa. The interviews mostly took place in Xiaobei and Sanyuanli (Zone 1 and Zone 2) or nearby them, at restaurants, coffee shops, or participants' shops and offices. Some of the interviews with taxi drivers happened during a taxi ride.

The interviews mainly covered the Chinese participants' views on four themes: living with the Africans, marriage between Chinese and Africans, race and ethnicity recognition, and current policies and law enforcement on Africans. For the African counterpart, themes include living in

China, Chinese culture, and relationship with Chinese people. I will summarize and briefly analyze the interviews under each theme. Then, I will combine them in the discussion.

Participant observation included observing soccer games with Africans and Chinese playing together, walking around with an African on the street and observing other pedestrians, observing Africans and Chinese on subways and buses, observing the interactions between shop owners and Africans, walking with Chinese people in Xiaobei and observing their reaction, and observing the behaviors of Africans and Chinese in the catholic Mass.

With the Chinese participants

One thing that every participant shared in common, regardless of age, gender, origin and the length of time staying in Guangzhou, was that they were all able to describe in detail the exact locations of the highest density of African population, such as Xiaobei and Sanyuanli. They also all had some idea, either clear or vague, about what Africans were doing in Guangzhou, which was mainly trading business or studying in college. When asked about the impressions of Africans, all participants were able to summarize their experience into one or two sentences describing how they formed impressions of Africans from either daily encounters, news or social media. Furthermore, regardless of what language I used in my questions, all participants used the word “black people” (黑人) instead of Africans (非洲人) when referring to the African population in Guangzhou.

Therefore, the theme that was most relevant and most frequent in all interviews was a discussion of what they thought of living with Africans in Guangzhou. To pulled out the theme, I asked questions like “how often do you see Africans in your daily life”, “do you know any African on the personal level”, “have you interacted with Africans”, “what are the Africans in Guangzhou like in general”, “what is your impression of Africans”, “do you think Africans have an impact on public security”, “would you want to be neighbors with Africans”.

On one hand, the people who actually had Africans living in their neighborhood, which was the majority of this study, mostly said that the Africans in Guangzhou had no impact on public security. They did not seem to have any strong negative attitude toward having Africans as neighbors. Although some of them did read news and comments from the Internet that accused Africans of committing a number of crimes in China, such as rape, robbery and drug dealing, these local residents of Guangzhou did not feel the Africans had any significant contribution to the crime rate in Guangzhou. For example, a prevalent picture of a Chinese prison filled with Africans was used on the Internet as evidence of Africans committing crimes. Three participants were able to point out that those Africans were held in custody not because of crime but because of missing valid residence or visa documents. In fact, most of the older participants who have lived in Guangzhou for more than 10 years during their adulthood believed that in general Guangzhou has gotten safer in the past 10 to 15 years. They reacted to the question “Do you think the Africans in Guangzhou influence the safety of your environment” with “Guangzhou was a much more dangerous place 10 years ago. There were motorcycle robbers everywhere.” Their comments included “the public security significantly increased during my time living here”, “it is much safer here than 10 years ago”, “I don’t think Africans have any influence on that, I mean, they are all business people and won’t want to break the law because they want to make money not crime here.” Six of them said that the current negative comments about Africans on the Chinese Internet were results of cultural barriers, stereotypes and discrimination against the black race. There was one exception when a female participant described that the Africans around her neighborhood seemed violent, but she also added that they mostly fought with themselves and did not threaten her. Her relatives warned her to stay away from the Africans, but personally, she did not think they were actually dangerous.

However, some younger participants or the ones that have not spent much time in Guangzhou, would intentionally avoid being close to Xiaobei and Sanyuanli because of the density of Africans there. They thought Xiaobei and Sanyuanli were more dangerous than some other areas in

Guangzhou. The rest of the participants said that they could not comment because they did not have any knowledge on this topic.

On the other hand, while having Africans did not seem like a problem for the Chinese participants, they did not seem to be fond of the new neighbors either. Five participants had positive views such as Africans being friendly, well-mannered and educated. Four commented that they thought Africans were just like ordinary people and were not really different from Chinese people. Three said that they did not know much about the Africans and their backgrounds. The remaining half of the participants thought of Africans as poor, dirty, stinky, lazy, violent, uneducated, engaged in illegal activities, ignorant of Chinese rules and regulations and not fit to Chinese culture in general. There was a unique Chinese word that appeared at a high frequency, luan (乱), literally meaning chaotic but often implying generally uncivilized behaviors. Additionally, most participants, even among the ones who hold positive views, have reported that Africans had an unpleasant strong body odor and they used way too much perfume. Occasionally, they would bring up that Africans were too black and did not conform to the Chinese aesthetic. One young male phrased it as “they look like walking directly from a coal mine.” Another female thought that black skin was disgusting. The discussion on aesthetic usually continues to a conversation about marriage between Africans and Chinese.

In my interviews I always included some questions regarding the marriage between Africans and Chinese. Most usually, I started by asking if the participants knew anyone in their life who was married to an African, then I moved on to their opinions of this kind of inter-racial marriage. For participants who were not married yet, I asked if they would like to date an African. For the older participants who have children, I asked if they would accept their children dating an African. According to Chinadaily (Peng, 2015), there are around four hundred Foreigner-Chinese couples in Guangzhou; most of them are between Africans and Chinese. In the church where a lot of Africans go on Sundays, I was able to identify 5 to 6 African-Chinese couples with their mixed-race children. Additionally, an African man-Chinese woman couple was more common than an African

woman-Chinese man couple according to the interviews. All of the Chinese participants also reported that they have either never seen any African-Chinese couple or they only have seen African men with Chinese women. It conformed with the African interviews where only the African male participants had experience of dating Chinese females, while the none of the female African participants had dated Chinese males.

Six of the responses were neutral, where they said that marriage was about personal choices instead of race. Some young participants said that they would not oppose the idea of dating an African, but their parents and other relatives would not be happy at all. It conformed with other interviews where some older participants said that unless their children threatened to kill themselves if they could not marry an African, they would strongly disagree with the marriage.

The rest of the responses all strongly opposed the idea of an African-Chinese family. Some of them said it would be fine to date but ending up in marriage was unacceptable. Two of the participants said that the girls who chose to date Africans had “heavy taste” (重口味), meaning “abnormal taste”, and the girls were unbelievable. Four participants had a stronger opinion that Chinese girls who dated African men were poor, uneducated and were from rural areas. One of them said that those girls just assumed all foreigners were rich and by dating Africans they were actually selling their bodies. They did not think that any Guangzhou local girls would make such a decision.

When asked about why a marriage between Africans and Chinese was unacceptable, while some of them said that it was mostly about cultural barriers not race, it also became clear that they would not have such a strong attitude if it were a white person. They related Africans to low socio-economic status and white people with higher socio-economic status. However, some participants did insist that they would only marry another Chinese and some even said they would only marry another Guangzhou local. A local participant laughed when he heard this question and said that

“The Guangzhou locals don’t even want to marry any Waidiren.” (外地人, meaning Chinese from other parts of China).

Another consideration about marrying an African was about the appearance of their offspring. One girl specifically said that she thought Africans looked disgusting (Cantonese: 核突). Five participants said that they were afraid that mixed blood children (direct translation from 混血儿, which is used for mixed-race children) with Africans would look ugly and they were concerned about mixed blood children being discriminated against in schools. In the common Chinese aesthetic view (Cheng, 1992), features of an African appearance mostly do not fit into the notions of beauty.

While interviews usually started with views on Africans as neighbors, the third theme is about the views of Africans as a race. It was mostly about how the Chinese people in Guangzhou recognized different races and how they defined being Chinese. Ke wang’s book showed that an important way of categorizing human groups in China is to examine if a group can be assimilated into Chinese culture. For example, the Manchus, the Tibetans, and the Hmong belong to assimilable groups. In the academic field it is believed that white and black people are the unassimilable groups. However, unassimilable races can potentially shift to assimilable races through time. On the Chinese Internet, the notion of Africans potentially becoming one ethnic group of China is common (Leibold, 2010). Therefore, I often asked if the participants thought that Africans could be assimilated. I also approached this theme by adopting a lot of different questions, such as “How many races are there in the world and what are they?”, “How do you distinguish races?”, “Are Africans different from Chinese?” “How do you define Chinese?”, “Can an African person become Chinese?”, “Can a mixed blood child become Chinese?”, “Which of the following person is more Chinese---an African born in China or a Chinese born in America?”. I utilized a range of different approaches because most participants seemed to be confused about this type of question and I needed to

elaborate a little more. One female participant actually said, “I would never think about it had you not asked me.”

Most of the participants demonstrated a “white, black, yellow” kind of race identification system, where they recognized races mainly based on the appearances and divided them into the white race, black race and yellow race. Some of the participants said that they could not distinguish Indians from Africans because they all had dark skin. In their opinion, both Indians and Africans were black.

When it came to questions about whether Africans could become Chinese, the responses varied. One participant said that he did not think Africans could be assimilated. Another participant said that they could either choose to become assimilated or leave China. The rest of the participants reported their answers in different ways. Five of the participants said that by obtaining Chinese nationality and growing up in China, Africans can become Chinese. One participant said that it all depended on the mind; an African with a Chinese mind was definitely Chinese. The rest of the participants said that the African’s appearance was too distinct and that they could never be recognized as Chinese unless further conversation happens. I showed some participants a picture of Jing Lou, an African Chinese girl growing up in Shanghai with a Chinese single mother and fully capable of Mandarin Chinese and Shanghai dialect, and asked if they thought this girl was Chinese. They usually demonstrated some hesitance first and said “well it depends...” However, when I asked them to compare this girl to an American born Chinese, they mostly agreed that Jing Lou was culturally more Chinese than an American born Chinese.

One more way to approach the participants about how they think of Africans in Guangzhou is to ask how they think about the current policy and what could be improved in the future, which is the fourth theme of of results. One participant reported that he thought the current policy was reasonable and immigrant policy decision should be handled by the leaders of China based on Chinese interest. Four participants reported that they thought the current policy was acceptable but should be more open. They said that it would be better for the Africans to conform more with

Chinese culture if the policy was more open. The rest of the participants thought the current policy was flawed and the enforcement of the law was weak. They believed that there was not enough force in customs and in the police to control the number of illegal immigrants. Three of them said that the government needed to control the composition of Africans, letting more “high-quality” (高素质) Africans in China and reducing the number of Africans from “lower level” (低层次).

Three participants believed that there should be surveillance on Africans in order to prevent crime and terrorism. On the daily life level, all participants said that as long as the Africans did not cause any trouble in China, they would be willing to live with them. These kinds of responses included “They can stay if they don’t mess around (搞搞震)”, “It will be fine if they conform to Chinese culture”, “I’ll be fine as long as they don’t affect my daily life.”

With the African participants

I interviewed 13 Africans in total, including eight males and five females. Seven of them were college students and six of them were engaged in business activities. My interviews with Africans began with sitting in a Chinese language class in Guangzhou Polytechnic Normal University. I asked a Chinese teacher if I could approach her students. She kindly agreed and let me sit in before an exam. I recruited my first group of Africans participants from here. Then, I reached out to more Africans not only in classes, but also when I went to the market and church. Interestingly, the majority of the participants, besides three business people, were familiar with the most popular Chinese instant message application, WeChat, and were able to communicate with me on WeChat.

In order to understand what Africans have experienced in Guangzhou, I asked questions like “How do you like life in China?”, “How do you like Guangzhou?”, “Have you been to other cities in China and how are they different from Guangzhou?” However, when asked about culture, the participants sometimes also responded with some comments on Chinese people. I usually followed the flow of the interviews and incorporated questions regarding Chinese people, such as “How do

you think of your classmates/neighbors/colleagues?”, “How do you think of Chinese people in general?” In addition, to further understand their experience in Guangzhou, I asked if they would like to live in Guangzhou in the future or if they would want their children to grow up in Guangzhou. Additionally, most participants do not know much about Chinese geography and culture and responded more generally about how they thought of China as a whole instead of the city they were living in. During the interviews they mentioned “Chinese people” instead of “the people in Guangzhou”, and “China” instead of “Guangzhou.”

Every African participant reported that it was not easy to live in China. One student said that it became easier when he learned how to speak Chinese, yet added that he still experienced discrimination on a daily basis. The rest of the participants either thought it was not about the language or they could not say anything because they did not speak fluent Chinese.

“Not easy to stay” was the most frequent response and needed some more elaboration to make sense. Therefore, I always asked the participants to elaborate more about why it was not easy to stay and to provide examples. Students and business people had different responses. Students commented more on the daily life aspects, such as class, housing, transportation and shopping. While the business people also talked about some daily activities, they talked about them more generally and they added more comments on Chinese business activities.

African students tended to stay in China for a longer period of time than business people, because business people traveled between China and Africa frequently. Therefore, students were exposed to more aspects of Chinese life. They were able to give specific examples in their life and showed deeper emotion. Kevin, my first participant, learned from the Internet that Chinese people thought Africans were thieves, bad people and had an unpleasant odor. He complained that he did not know why people thought he smelled because he took a shower every day and used fragrance. He asked me again and again during the interviews if he was smelly. Seven other participants reported similarly by saying that Chinese people go around them or cover their noses when passing Africans.

One of them asked me, “When Chinese people do this (cover their noses) next to me, what do they mean? Why do they do this?”

The students also provided other examples. Five students said that their neighbors would not talk with them and it was hard to make friends in college. In the most extreme case, an African girl who has studied in China for four years said that no single student in her class would sit next to her during her whole college life. However, there was one exception. An African male student, Sai, who was passionate about soccer, made a lot of Chinese friends when playing soccer together. He and a middle-age Chinese man, DK, were neighbors and played soccer together. They established a strong friendship. DK would invite him to his apartment and bring him to bars and karaoke with other Chinese. DK also introduced Sai to a local soccer team. Sai called DK his Chinese papa. However, even Sai did not think Chinese were friendly on a larger scale. On the bus, an elderly would reject a seat offering from Sai. A more representative response would be from an interview with three students from Guangdong University for Foreign Studies. One of them said that if the class ended today, he would go home tomorrow. Another one added that he would go home tonight if the class ended today.

Another thing that all African participants had encountered and found annoying was Chinese people taking pictures of them without their permission. One day when I was having lunch with Sai, a middle-age woman suddenly took a picture of Sai. Sai became upset and started to complain about how Chinese people took pictures of him everywhere. One participant said that Chinese people were probably too shy to ask. He said, “If you want to take a picture, ask me, I will take a picture with you.”

I used to think that getting a taxi might be hard for Africans, but it turned out to be a little different from what I assumed, according to the interviews. Among the African participants who did choose taxi to be their method of transportation, three of them said that it was not hard to get in a taxi, but the drivers did overcharge them. They either took a further route or charged them without using the meter. A business person said when his friend came to visit him, the Chinese taxi driver

overcharged his friends six times the normal price range. One business person who has been to Shanghai and Beijing said that while Shanghai's taxi drivers treated everyone equally, Beijing's drivers were the most discriminating, and Guangzhou's taxi drivers liked to overcharge.

Business people responded to questions about Chinese culture and people with how Chinese people cheated them in business and overcharged them with lower quality of goods. They said that Chinese people really liked money. They were not friendly and were discriminating against Africans.

In response to these answers, I asked some Chinese participants who were business people about overcharging Africans. They said that it was because some Africans were not familiar with the market and would bargain with Chinese all the time regardless of whether the price was good. Therefore, the Chinese business people would raise the initial price so there was room to bargain with Africans. A similar case occurred when I was shopping around with an African female. She liked a dress and would like to purchase the dress. The vendor offered 40 yuan, which sounded like a reasonable price to me, but the African female still bargained and cut the price to half. Twenty yuan was way too low for a dress in China. The vendor got angry and cursed the African female in Chinese. When I tried to appease things and raised it up to 30 yuan, the vendor got even more angry and accused me of helping Africans.

In the ethnographic study done by Robert Castillo, Africans in Guangzhou thought the rules and regulations in China were discriminating, but the Chinese people were not. Most of them spoke of how the bureaucratic system in China gave them extra trouble when going through the visa process. Therefore, I also incorporated questions about how they thought of the procedures they had to go through for coming to China. One element to be considered in this study was that all my participants were of legal status in China when the interviews happened. I never encountered any illegal immigrant during my staying in Guangzhou.

This problem was brought up in the Chinese language class on the first day of my study. One participant said that some students here were actually engaged in business activities. They tended

not to tell anyone because it was illegal. They complained about how student visas did not allow them to work in China. Furthermore, it was extremely frequent to be stopped and checked on the street as an African. One of the participants was stopped and checked after the interview when we were walking to a subway station. A group of three to five police came to us, asked the participant to present his passport, visa, residence permit, student ID and annual registration to the police. It took 10 to 15 minutes and the police let us go when all documents were checked. While the policeman was checking all the documents, he started to ask me in Chinese what I was doing with the participant. I told him we were just walking to the subway station. He showed some disbelief by saying “No way”. He then started to educate me on how Africans were dishonest and dangerous and told me to stay away from Africans. He also said that he had seen too many cases of how Africans lied to Chinese girls. Every African participant has encountered stop-and-check at some point during their stay in Guangzhou. They had to carry all the documents all the time when they walk around. When they were found with missing documents, they would be held in custody unless someone delivered the documents for them, which would still result in a fine of 2000 yuan (\$309). If they failed to present documents, they would be held in custody first and wait to be deported later. Two participants said that in their neighborhood, Xiaobei, the police would knock on their doors and ask to check their documents, which was a form of harassment. In contrast, a British teacher, one of the participants in this study, never encountered stop-and-check during his three-year staying in Guangzhou. He only needed to register and renew his status every year at the police station by himself. Besides stop-and-check, legal status like business visas only give Africans visas valid from two weeks to one month. They would need to leave and renew the visa in other countries, which was incredibly inconvenient according to some business people.

Four African participants claimed that the rules were a huge hassle and it was completely different in their country. They complained about how China did not welcome them and needed to change. They said that in their country, Nigeria, illegal immigrants were never problematic. There were illegal Chinese immigrants, but no one cared. They were never checked and the Nigerians

welcomed their stay. Two of them also claimed that there was not such harassment in the US and that was why the US was a powerful country. According to them, if China wanted to be as powerful as the US, they should be open to African immigrants and business.

A few participants have had a romantic relationship with Chinese. The male participants were mostly open to the idea of dating Chinese females. Four of the male participants asked me out, while I usually told them I had a boyfriend. One of them asked me to break up with my boyfriend and marry him. Two of the participants had either dated or were dating Chinese girls when I interviewed them. One was married with a Chinese wife. None of the African females dated any Chinese male or showed any interest. One African girl said that Chinese men only approached her in clubs, but never outside of a club setting.

The first African participant I interviewed who has dated a Chinese girl said that they broke up because of the girl's family. Her family strongly disagreed with the relationship and she decided to leave him. He also said that on the Internet, a lot of Chinese people did not like Africans dating Chinese girls. He thought it was because the Chinese men were jealous of Africans' sexual ability. He thought Chinese girls were more open and it was only Chinese men who were hostile to Africans. Another participant, Sai, who was dating a Chinese girl when I interviewed him, did not have such an opinion and they seemed to be in a good relationship. However, his Chinese friend and neighbor DK thought the girlfriend was ugly, uneducated and poor.

The only African-Chinese couple I was able to approach were Prince and Cherry. I met them after the Sunday Mass at the church, and they kindly agreed to do an interview. Prince was a Nigerian business person and married Cherry three years ago. He had met Cherry's family and they were living together in Guangzhou. Prince thought that Cherry's family was nice and friendly to him and he enjoyed living in China. He would raise their children in China and have them grow up under Chinese culture. He then started to try converting me to become a Christian. Cherry was mostly silent during the interview. Two months later, she approached me on WeChat and spoke more about their relationship. She said that Prince brought his culture from home and she sometimes could not

stand his habits. She thought he was a male chauvinist and did not like to do any housework, which was different from what women would ask from a Chinese husband. She ascribed his habits to his African backgrounds and said that she was not being thoughtful before they married. She then also added that Prince was the rare kind of African. While Prince was nice, most Africans in Guangzhou were still bad people.

The participant observation failed to meet my expectations because I caught attention from shop owners when I stayed too close to a shop and tried to observe them. I addressed this predicament to Sai. He immediately proposed to pretend to be a businessman and have me stand next to him and see how he interacted with the Chinese shop owners. He claimed that he was familiar with this process because he has done business with his brother. To move the study forward, I agreed to his plan. We spent one afternoon at the artificial hair market in Sanyuanli. Artificial hair was a popular fashion in Africa, thus the market in Sanyuanli attracted a lot of African business people. We shopped in five different shops. Sai would enter a shop, pretending to be interested in one type of hair, and waiting for further interaction. In all five shops we visited, the staff in the shops would first say "Hello" in English and then just wait for Sai to pick the hair. Then, when Sai picked something and asked for the price, "How much?" in English, the staff would bring out a calculator and show him a price on the calculator. Sai sometimes shook his head to show disagreement and the staff would re-enter a lower price on the calculator. Finally, Sai would ask for a name card by saying the word "card" and left. The whole interaction was limited to less than five spoken words. In two occasions where I saw some Africans sitting down in the shop, the staff always spoke fluent English. However in the five shops I visited with Sai, the staff of the shop only spoke limited English and in one shop they asked me for assistance.

The second participant observation happened in Xiaobei where I walked with two African participants after an interview. When I kept talking with the participants, one of them suddenly told my translator and me to stop and look at other Chinese, saying "See, see how they are looking at us." My translator and I stopped talking for a while and observed other pedestrians. It was obvious

that we did catch some attention because as an average-looking Chinese female I have never experienced such intense staring in China. While I would describe the attention as curiosity, my translator thought they showed some hostility. She saw some pedestrians glancing at us with rolling eyes.

Discussion

In conclusion, the Chinese participants in this study expressed negative assumptions and stereotypes of Africans. Their responses showed that there were prevalent stereotypes of Africans being uneducated and poor. They accepted Africans as neighbors “as long as Africans did not cause any trouble”, which implied that they assumed Africans were going to bring trouble. This kind of assumption was also revealed when the Chinese participants said that the law enforcement should implement more surveillance on Africans.

Moreover, while being neighbors was acceptable according to the Chinese participants, marriage between Africans and Chinese was harshly rejected. They thought Africans were not good-looking, and were not fond of the idea of having a mixed-race child. Some parents would be extremely opposed if their children decided to marry an African. The participants also did not believe that the existing marriages between Africans and Chinese came out of love. I was told that the Chinese girls who married Africans were poor and uneducated, mistakenly believing that all foreigners were rich. They additionally asserted that a lot of inter-racial marriages between Africans and Chinese were for economic benefits. The views on marriage suggested that Africans were not accepted as members of the Chinese society.

The participants expressed their mental structure of nationalism when they talked about ethnicity recognition. Africans could never become a Chinese unless they recognize and practise Chinese culture. If they chose to preserve African culture, they would not be accepted as a Chinese even if they spent a lot of time in China. It showed that Chinese people carried the idea of how only assimilable races could become Chinese.

While a lot of participants showed negative perspectives on accepting Africans in their community, some participants leaned more toward a neutral or positive perspective. They viewed Africans as a part of the city and did not care much about what the Africans did or how the media portrayed Africans. They were friends, classmates, colleagues and business partners with Africans. Some of them had studied nationalism and racism and understood why Africans were associated with negative images in China. This type of participants were able to comprehend the aim of my study after two or three questions and directly addressed their opinion. Another type of participants who were leaning to a neutral perspective changed their opinions during the interview. During the interview they claimed that the questions from the interviews allowed them to think more thoroughly about social issues relating to images of Africans and to examine their own opinions.

The African participants mostly have experienced discrimination from Chinese people. While the Chinese participants showed both positive and negative perspectives, the African participants rarely experienced friendly gestures from Chinese people. It was hard for them to connect with Chinese people. The ones who were not proficient in Chinese language felt hurt when they were overcharged in stores and avoided on streets. The ones who were fluent in Chinese felt even more discriminated against because they were able to comprehend hostile language use against Africans on the Internet. The hassle from law enforcement and regulation, such as frequent stop-and-check, led them to think of Chinese culture as extremely exclusive. The obstacles of living in China as Africans showed consistency with the responses from the Chinese participants.

A few African participants who demonstrated more understanding of Chinese culture and put a lot of effort in studying the language were able to establish a good relationship with some Chinese people. This supports the Chinese participants' idea of assimilable races being more accepted in Chinese society.

By combining the two sides of participants in this study, some interesting findings occurred. Discrimination against Africans were both expressed by the Chinese and experienced by the Africans. There could be some explanations like cultural barrier other than nationalism and racism.

Most Chinese people were not proficient in English and most Africans could not speak Chinese. Thus, misunderstandings occurred during communication. For example, while Africans felt discriminated against in business activities when they were overcharged, it was in fact a bargaining strategy of the Chinese people. During my interview with one Chinese participant who had business experience, she said that African people did not understand the rules of Chinese market. No matter what the first offer of price was, the Africans always cut the price to half, which could be way too low to make any benefit. Therefore, when doing business with Africans, Chinese people would raise the price first so there was room for bargaining, which led the Africans to conclude that the Chinese people were discriminating against Africans.

The “smelling problem” was mentioned in both sides. Africans frequently experienced being avoided on the streets. Some Chinese people would cover their noses when passing Africans. While Africans felt discriminated against and took a lot of showers everyday, it was actually another cultural difference. During my interviews with the Chinese participants, they indeed talked about how Africans “smell”. However, it was not necessarily “stink” as being unclean. Perfume/fragrance usage was not a common practice among Chinese people, especially Chinese men, while every African used perfume/fragrance on a daily basis. When discussing the smell of Africans, the Chinese participants always said “their perfume is way too strong.”

The findings from this study differ from Robert Castillo’s study on the place-making of Africans in Guangzhou, where Africans said that they did not experience discrimination from Chinese people. They attributed the image of Chinese people being racist as a misrepresentation of the media. In my study, most African participants agreed that there was discrimination among Chinese people. The Chinese participants also expressed negative assumptions of Africans. It might be due to the different image between Castillo and I. Robert Castillo, as a non-Chinese and non-African, entered the community as an outsider, while my native Chinese identity might lead the African participants to view me as a representative of Chinese people. For example, the African participants would throw questions like “why are Chinese like this” directly on me and expected an answer.

They might be expressing different emotions on this topic when talking to a Chinese. In addition, this kind of discrepancy between Castillo's and my study could also be a result of different composition of participants. Castillo's study focuses on the building of a community among Africans in Guangzhou. The discussion of discrimination, which was the main focus of my study, was only a small part of Castillo's study. Therefore, he conducted his research in the African community in Guangzhou and interviewed mostly Africans, while I included the point of view of both Chinese and Africans.

Previously when I was referring to Castillo's study as an evidence of less racism in Guangzhou than other places in China, I attributed it to the higher concentration of African population in Guangzhou. However, the higher concentration of Africans in Guangzhou did not relate to more understanding of Africans among the Chinese participants, according to this study. In the simulated observation, the communication between African and Chinese business people were limited to only selling and buying of the goods. They tended not to discuss anything other than business. Therefore, the more exposure to Africans may not be directly associated with more understanding of Africans. The interviews and simulated/participant observation both demonstrated an exclusion of Africans as a part of Chinese society.

Some potential biases might exist in this study. Since the field research only lasted for one month, the composition of participants that I could reach was limited. The Chinese participants were mostly under the age of 40 in this study, which excluded older people who were probably more influenced by the ideology of the Mao-era. Secondly, most of the Chinese participants were also highly educated with at least an undergraduate degree, which was not representative of the Chinese population, as the Sixth National Population Census of the People's Republic of China in 2010 showed that only 8.93% of the whole Chinese population had college education (). Thirdly, the Chinese participants might have hidden some opinions when talking with a college student from the US. For example, two of the Chinese participants immediately claimed that "I'm not a racist/nationalist" after I presented my topic and my goal of the study. It also showed that my

interview design might have included some leading questions. Additionally, due to the limit of my identity as an undergraduate student, I was only able to approach Africans with legal status. Opinions from illegal immigrants were missing in this study.

Conclusion

This ethnographic study has demonstrated that Chinese people on the daily basis expressed the nation's structure of race. On the micro-social level, Chinese people carried the notion of race and identified foreigners based on racial categories. They all showed a "Yellow, White and Black" racial classification system, which has been developing since the foundation of modern China in the early 20th century. There is no obvious sign of communist ideology when expressing concepts of race, but the anti-African racism that began in the 1980s was much more prevalent among my study sample.

Unlike some western countries, China has only opened its market for 36 years. Before the 1980s, China was closed to the world and most Chinese people had never seen a non-Chinese person in their life. However, as China's economy rapidly grew recently, it has begun to attract more foreigners who were seeking economic opportunities. Guangzhou, as the host city of the annual China Import and Export Fair, attracted a large number of business people from the third world, including Southeast Asians, Indians, and Africans. The local residents in Guangzhou are now experiencing being exposed to a large number of foreigners in their daily life. As responses to such new phenomena, the Chinese people in Guangzhou adopted notions of race that were formed in the early 20th century. Unlike the United States, where the Civil Rights Movement took place in the 1960s and shifted concepts of race among the Americans, China has not had the chance for this kind of shifts. There has not been someone like Martin Luther King Jr. who advocated for the rights of the minority in China. In addition, the Africans in China today are extremely mobile and mostly did not plan to reside in China. Thus, Chinese people still have not had the necessity to have conversations on race topics in the near future. However, a small portion of Africans, like the

couple in this study, indeed decided to settle in China and have a family. Therefore, perhaps as the second and third generation of African Chinese start to appear in Chinese society, more discussion on racism may occur and concepts of race may have the opportunity to shift.

Last but not least, for future research on similar topics, I would suggest expanding the study population beyond Guangzhou. While the majority of the Chinese participants in my study expressed discrimination against Africans, some of them have a more neutral or positive perspective. The reason why I could not see the relationship between larger African population and more understanding of African people may be due to the fact that I did not compare Guangzhou to the rest of China. As one of the African participants mentioned, people of Beijing actually showed less tolerance toward foreigners than people of Guangzhou did. Thus, perhaps we would be able to perceive a trend of more people being more accepting of Africans in Guangzhou, if we could compare Guangzhou to other cities of China.

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