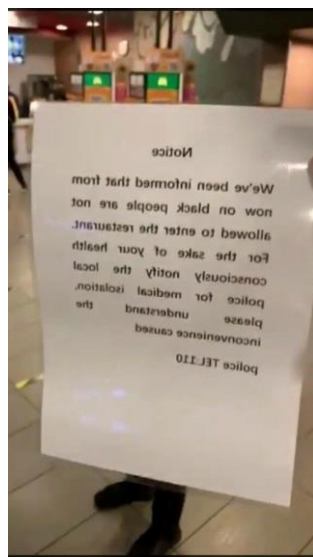


Guilty by racialisation: historically mutual racializing in China-African migration flows.

Cast your mind back to the peak of the COVID 19 pandemic in 2020. You may have come across images online of a sign placed outside a McDonalds restaurant in the Chinese province of Guangzhou, a region accounting for a large part of China's African residents and commercial traders. The sign stated that black people were "not allowed to enter the restaurant", most likely due to widespread belief that black people were more susceptible to contracting and spreading the coronavirus.



Guangzhou, China, April 12, 2020

In the same province, black people were evicted from places of residence without explanation or notice, denied healthcare, barred from entering public and commercial spaces, disproportionately monitored by the Chinese state and forced to quarantine for fourteen days even if having tested negative. . Circulations of the experiences of Africans in Guangzhou went viral on social media, prompting the hashtag *#ChinaMustExplain*, which was reshared across the global black diaspora in protest of this discriminatory treatment. And whilst such an incident clearly speaks of a racially targeted campaign against China's black populations, the treatment of black peoples in China is also telling of a more deeply entrenched history of Chinese racialization and pathologizing of black immigration into the country, as well as the

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historic stereotyping of black immigrants by Chinese societies themselves, even beyond state government policy.

Simultaneously, the presence of Chinese immigrant waves of entrepreneurs, traders and contracted workers in Africa as of 2012-13 have received mixed response among African populations. Local rumours of the thriftiness, dishonesty and financially shady nature of Chinese wholesalers and traders in African media discourse and public opinion are reflective of racialised stereotypes of the inherent criminality of Chinese migrants in the continent. So, whilst we cannot assume that all Chinese natives think black people are super spreaders. And that not all Africans think Chinese merchants are financially corrupt, the racial profiling of African immigrants in China and Chinese immigrants in Africa is mutually experienced today but is also historically rooted.

You might find that when you think about anti-immigration, criminalised racial profiling or the medicalisation of immigrants, you subconsciously imagine people of colour, maybe even African and Chinese, being on the receiving end of such targeting at the hands of white government propagators. Perhaps, this is due to the overwhelmingly South to North assumption we still have as to the centrality of Euro-America in our thinking about migration. But histories of Sino-African cross-migration indicate that along with decades of human movement and exchange between Africa and China have also come historical processes of othering, stereotyping, and alienating. A historical look at the racialised narratives underpinning China-Africa cross-migration not only helps us see that migration occurs outside of the West, but also that the racialised scepticism and villainizing of immigrants is similarly not a Westerncentric phenomenon.

The migration and long-term settlement of Chinese convict labourers in South Africa under the Dutch East India Company in the mid-late 17th century marked the beginning of an emerging indigenous community of Chinese South Africans, the first and largest of its kind in the continent. Later waves of Taiwanese migrants to South Africa in the early 1900s, and of Hong Kong contracted worker migrants as of the 1950s came to form, along with the earlier Chinese, the three main East Asian ethnic populations settled in South Africa. Historically, as the extensive duration of first wave Chinese immigrants in South Africa saw them establish

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themselves socioeconomically throughout the generations, emerging as a more affluent and professional middle class, even into the apartheid era.

However, the affluence of Chinese South Africans meant they did also become the target of anti-Chinese xenophobia, often instigated by opposition parties who sought to stoke anti-Chinese sentiment in public opinion to delegitimise government affiliation with Chinese South African business affairs. The circulation of narratives of Chinese South African financial bribery and fraud were intended to scapegoat Chinese migrants in the country as the ones to blame for South Africa's socioeconomic challenges. Such an agenda fed into the criminalising of Chinese South Africans, who by the late apartheid era were essentially naturalised South Africans and pit them against the black South African population. The class elevation of Chinese South Africans consequently became the cause of their demonising among the South African general population. Not only this, but a consequence of this was that East Asian immigrants to South Africa who could be mistakenly assumed to be ethnically Chinese were too criminalised and scapegoated. This is all too telling of the complexities of racialised anti-immigration and the homogenisation of migrant groups in discourses of criminalisation.

So, though this may not have been accurately experienced by black or white South Africans engaging with Chinese South Africans, Chinese South Africans were held up in broad view as corrupt and thieving. And so was anyone who looked like them.

It's also worth us thinking about contemporary claims of Chinese activity in Africa being on an pseudo-imperial and neo-colonial nature and how this type of anti-Chinese rhetoric can also be historically traced. Mass movements of Chinese migration to Africa during the 1980-90s, in some lights, though not all, were framed as predatory and exploitative of African economies. In the case of Lesotho, strong anti-Chinese sentiment prevailed during the late 20th century with the commercial activity of Chinese migrants establishing businesses and selling low-cost goods being demonised as the reason for the closure of Lesotho local enterprises and the depletion of its textile industry. Chinese migrants were seen by locals as robbing innocent Lesotho small scale trade, resulting in the entertainment of Chinese migrants not only as criminal, but also as financially greedy and cold. This potent anti-Chinese sentiment, which was also mostly homogenising of all visibly East Asian migrants fed into racialised media reporting of the Chinese migrant presence as a threat to Lesotho authentic

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commerce, and even incited anti-Chinese violence and the looting of Chinese migrant run enterprises and Chinatowns in the capital of Maseru. In this way, the supposedly inherent criminality of the Chinese in Africa became a reason for reactionary criminal retaliation. Chinese immigrants, the only other prominent ethnic group represented in the Lesotho population at the time were not just deemed to be other, but the criminalised and racialised other.

Chinese migrants in Africa have also, as Chinese African migration researcher, Yoon Jung Park, suggests, been ascribed criminal otherness due to what has been historically received by African host populations as their voluntary self-isolation. The tendency of young Chinese constricted workers to live in work compounds with other Chinese migrant workers rather than among the wider African communities has been historically interpreted as an unwillingness to integrate. We could even go as far as to say that by such logic, the failure of Chinese immigrants to assimilate to African societies, whether intentionally or unintentionally, is their perceived crime. In Lesotho, for instance, the apparent exclusive spaces in which Chinese migrants lived and socialised were widely believed in Lesotho society to be proof of their concealed moral and economic ambiguity. So, as continual waves of Chinese immigrants arrived and left Africa, they were historically thought by Lesotho peoples as to blame for raising suspicions as to their own presence because of their seemingly covert behaviours and habits.

But now if we turn to look at how Africans have been historically racialised in Chinese anti-black attitudes to immigration, we see the pathologizing of blackness informed by Chinese traditions of racial ideology. Chinese society has long been underpinned by categories of racial ideology even during Chinese isolationism. This ideology was not, however, about racial supremacy and power domination in ways Western forms of racial hierarchy have tended to be, but on moral grounds, and not just beauty standards. So traditional ideals of race in China deemed skin that resembled whiteness was to be equated to morality, and skin that was dark as suggestive of one's inherent immorality.

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This racialised morality spectrum also translated into racialised assumptions about cleanliness and personal hygiene. Commonly believed among Chinese societies was the correlation between blackness and body odour and general uncleanliness, similarly, feeding into reinforced stereotypes of the diseased nature of blackness, and black immigrants into China. The image below is a Chinese propaganda poster depicting a Chinese doctor administering medical aid to an African woman's baby to the delight of both her and all those surrounding her. The intention of the image is to depict China as an ally and aid to African nations, playing into Sino-African friendship rhetoric of the 1940-70s to achieve this. And yet still, the pathologizing of Africans as in need of Chinese medical aid is impossible to negate, even if it intendeds to

communicate itself sympathetically. The poster encapsulates the double standard that coloured Chinese perceptions of Africans and the China's relation to them: the paradox of maintaining an image of China-Africa solidarity at an international level amid deeply entrenched beliefs about the intrinsic moral and biological inferiority of black bodies.



It is definitely possible for us to draw historical parallels between the medicalisation of black populations in Guangzhou and the pathologizing of African immigrants during the Chinese wave of the HIV epidemic during the 1980-90s. During this period, what we can term 'the Chinese gaze' held that black immigrants, most likely of African origin, were more susceptible to HIV due to their perceived disease prone nature and more likely to spread it among the Chinese population.

Black bodies were not only pathologized but also weaponised in black threat rhetoric that depicted the Chinese population as vulnerable to the presence of African immigrants in the country. Black immigrants and residents in China were monitored by the Chinese state and prevented from entering specified public spaces, a disturbing mirroring of the treatment of

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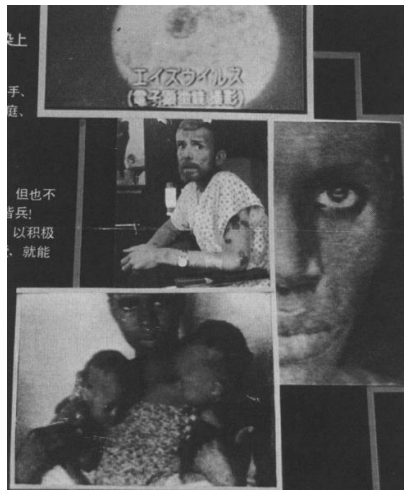
black people in China during the coronavirus outbreak. The HIV/AIDS awareness poster below captures racialised prejudice among the Chinese as to the inherent pathology of Africans, particularly of African women in relation to AIDS. The two African women that dominate the poster appear to represent to perceived equating of AIDS to blackness itself, and the significance of black African children AIDS sufferers, in the poster is suggestive of the diseased status of African mothers being reproduced and inherited by their children. African women's bodies are portrayed as infected sites of disease and contagion not only to Chinese society, but to their own children.

It was this very rationale that was used to justify the curb of African immigration into China at the point of the epidemic, and even legitimise the deportation of Africans back to their respective nations. In other words, blackness was framed in the language and imagining of medical diagnosis that warranted state intervention or purging in the interests of wider Chinese society. As far as the Chinese racial ideology of the 1990s was concerned, the exclusion of African immigrants was a necessary course of population preservation.

So, if we come back to thinking about China-Africa cross-migration, what can we take away from such an exploration? We should come away compelled to look beyond Euro-American narratives of migration that centre the West as the primary destination for migrants. We should be able to perceive of South-south cross-migration between China and Africa as by no means new, and far from being a 21st century emergence, even if it hasn't always been visible in the way global migration is written about and represented. And even still, Chinese African migration has never occurred within a vacuum independent of fluctuating degrees of racial prejudice, exclusion, and resentment. Put simply, anti-immigrant racism is not a feature unique to British, American or Canadian societies.

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Africans and Chinese diasporas have moved back and forth. Their children have moved back and forth. They forged new communities and spaces of belonging and identity. They have historically chosen when to assimilate, but also to intentionally self-exclude. They have mutually co-existed and tolerated. And they have mutually pathologized, homogenised, and racialized each other. And they have done for decades.



HIV/AIDS public health poster from Yunnan province, early 1990s.