ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The Politics of Racism: Constructions of African Immigrants in China on ChinaSMACK[†]

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The purpose of this study is to identify the politics of Chinese netizens' racism toward Africans on the website, ChinaSMACK. Critical and grounded theory analysis reveals that racism on ChinaSMACK (a) is triggered by perceived threats to identity, economic stability, and State fidelity; (b) exists in a paradoxical relationship with globalization; and (c) perpetuates sexist attitudes toward women. We conclude that racism functions politically to disguise criticism of the government, scapegoat Africans for social problems, and obscure netizens' role in perpetuating social inequality.

Trade and cultural ties between China and Africa have grown over the last 5 decades. In the 1960s, African students were invited to study at Chinese universities, and business contacts followed (Y. Cheng, 2011). Since the late 1970s, when China formally opened up to trade, African people increasingly travel, work, and study in China (Jaffe, 2012). Today China's African population is estimated between 200,000 (Mathews & Yang, 2012) and 500,000 (Bodomo, 2012). However, interpersonal contact between Chinese and Africans remains limited, so the media is an important source of information for the Chinese about Africans. Media portrayals of Africans are linked to biased attitudes toward Africans among Chinese people (Tan, Zhang, Zhang, & Dalisay, 2009), and this racialized thinking is expressed on Chinese websites (Y. Cheng, 2011).

The Internet functions as a kind of third space site of political struggle over racial meaning (Daniels, 2013). Chinese netizens post a wide variety of political comments

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despite governmental controls, and this online behavior reflects social trends (Yang, 2011). Websites that have no immediate political function or consequences function as a quasi-public sphere (Fung, 2002). While racial constructions are political, online discussions of race are not overtly dissident so likely go unchecked by the Chinese government. Because of the Internet's interactive nature and perceived anonymity (Shirky, 2011), the Internet offers a unique opportunity to explore the discursive functions of racial thinking.

There are over 618 million Internet users in China (a 45.8% penetration rate). The largest percentage of users are urban and the largest growth is among rural users (China Internet Network Information Center (CINIC), 2013). ChinaSMACK is a Shanghai-based website that translates the most popular and trending Chinese Internet stories and their corresponding interactive comments sections into English. More netizens read than post (Nonnecke, Andrews, & Preece, 2006), but Chinese netizens are able to vote for their favorite comments and the comments with the most votes are translated along with the original story by ChinaSMACK's editorial staff. Thus the translated comments included on ChinaSMACK are the most popular comments associated with the original story and reflect attitudes held by more readers than number of posts alone suggest. Because political and social context shape online behavior (George, 2005), analysis of racial discourse on ChinaSMACK stands to reveal insights into the social and political functions of racial constructions in China. We searched ChinaSMACK for stories and comments referencing Africa, Africans, Blacks, and foreigners. We identified and analyzed 13 stories and 122 comments using a grounded theory approach to textual analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1997) to reveal how race is constructed and employed politically. Of 122 Chinese netizen comments, 27 comments did not advance racial discrimination or racial stereotypes. Of these, 18 comments were explicitly critical of racist views. Nine of the 27 comments focused only on other aspects of the news story. For example, comments regarding a video of an African man singing a Chinese nationalist song included praise for his performance but did not mention his racial identity. We also identified two comments appearing positive toward African women but expressing hyper-sexualized stereotypes of Black women's bodies so included them in our analysis. A total of 95 comments were analyzed to identify the nature of stereotypes toward Africans and what the constructions of African stereotypes reveal about the speakers' own social and political sense of self.

It should be noted only a small percentage of netizens actually post comments online (Nonnecke, Andrews, & Preece, 2006). They are most likely to be young and students. Their language is often vulgar and offensive; their ideas sometimes extreme. The comments we analyze should not be considered reflective of all or even most Chinese people. These are the words of a relatively small and unique group of netizens. Because of these limitations, this analysis cannot provide insight into how Chinese people think or feel about race. Rather, our hope is to reveal insights into the practical and political functions of racial thinking.

At the same time, the nature of our questions regarding racial thinking limits our analysis to only relevant comments. In each case, we noted the total number of comments posted and the number of comments addressing race. However, because our research question centered on functions of racial discourse, we discuss only those comments relevant to answering the question. The data contains much more than just ideas on race. For example, the data also reveal interesting insights into gender as well as very complex emotions toward the West. While both relate to racial rhetoric and inform our analysis, developing them as additional themes is beyond the scope of this study.

Initial review of comments revealed a variety of constructions focused on physical and social stereotypes about Africans that mirror globalized racial stereotypes. The coded themes were compared to topical themes in the translated stories to identify contextual triggers for employing racial rhetoric. In the end, we found four major themes surrounding constructions of race in China which we then evaluated and interpreted according to China's particular social, political, and historical context. The rest of this article reviews the relevant historical and social context, describes the themes revealed through analysis, and interprets the social and political functions of racial rhetoric among Chinese netizens.

Sociohistorical context of racial thinking in China

As group categorization processes such as racialization simplify complex social structures for perceivers (Deaux & Lewis, 1984), racial thinking likely exists to some extent in most societies. In the process of group identification, oppositions among people are emphasized (othering) and these oppositions form divisions that solidify group identity, enable group differentiation, and increase in-group cohesion and loyalty (Lalonde, 1992). The particular nature of racial constructs, however, reflects local social, political, and economic forces (Omi & Winant, 2009), making historical context relevant to understanding meaning.

Many scholars argue modern notions of race in contemporary China emerged after the Opium Wars with a shift in governmental reasoning (Dikotter, 2008; Meissner, 2006; Sigley, 1998). During this time, they argue, nationality became equated with race and produced a construction of the Han race (90% of Chinese population) as a way to resist foreign power and influence, minimize internal divisions, legitimize Chinese sovereignty (Sigley, 1998), and foster identification with the nation state (Oakes & Schein, 2006).

Racial thinking in China changed with the rise of communism under Mao (Jacques, 2009). In 1960, the Chinese government began offering Chinese university scholarships to African students in countries friendly to the Communist government (Sautman, 1994). However, the Chinese government became less supportive of African nations after gaining official United Nations recognition in 1971, and enthusiasm for promoting unity with African nations faded as China reoriented toward economic development (Johnson, 2007). In the 1980s, clashes between African and

Chinese students erupted over perceptions of unequal treatment (Sautman, 1994). The Chinese government downplayed the importance of these incidents but also blamed the African students (X. H. Cheng, 2011).

At the same time, mass media and entertainment helped make race part of Chinese public discourse (X. H. Cheng, 2011) while Western media influences perceptions of race. Half of the top grossing movies in China are American (Ma, 2013). Chinese television stations carry American major league baseball (MLB), basketball (NBA), and football (NFL) (Chang, 2013). The Chinese version of YouTube, Youku.com, enables citizens to view and share Western music videos. Sohu, a Chinese version of Netflix, holds program licenses to a number of American television series making American television increasingly mainstream in China ("More Chinese content providers airing American TV shows," 2014) . These Western images in China help dissolve "self-other binarism between China and the West" (Schein, 1994, p. 148) but also elevate whiteness in the racial hierarchy. Western features and light skin is privileged, darker skin othered and fetishized (Schein, 1994; X. H. Cheng, 2011), and yellow symbolizes the center (Dikotter, 2008).

After the economic crisis of 1997, Africans began traveling to China for business. Estimates range from 200,000 (Mathews & Yang, 2012) to 500,000 (Bodomo, 2012) Africans currently living in China. China's constitution includes protections against discrimination in any aspect of civil life and various laws are designed to promote equality. One 2011 article on ChinaSMACK, titled, "Africans in Guangzhou: Opportunities & Discrimination," stated "China doesn't actually have racial discrimination against Africans, 'the so-called discrimination is instead similar to how urban residents discriminate against people from the rural countryside who have no money nor know the rules'." However, the comments following the article do not support this claim, and because China does not have large immigrant populations, foreigners stand out.

Guo's (2003) interviews with more than 20 foreigners about working in China provides anecdotal details of racism in daily life. She argues racial prejudice against people of darker colors is deeply rooted in Chinese society. Johnson (2007) documented extensive housing and employment discrimination of Africans in China. Rennie (2010) reported that discrimination against Africans in China is increasing at the interpersonal and governmental levels. Others suggest that racism in Chinese society has developed in both scope and complexity, often being misconstrued as nationalism and patriotism (Y. Cheng, 2011) and is a much more serious social problem in China than in the United States (Gao, 2013). Our purpose is not to debate the existence or extent of racism in China, but rather to explore how racial rhetoric, to whatever extent it exists in China, functions both socially and politically.

Chinese netizens constructing race

Part of the quest to understand racial rhetoric in China necessarily involves a quest to understand motive (Burke, 1969). Racial thinking facilitates privilege but also centers

on and reveals a sense of vulnerability (see Sidanius, Pratto, & Bobo, 1996; Tatum, 2009), so expressions of racism reveal much about how the speaker views the self in relation to social and political context.

Racist rhetoric consistently occurred in response to dissatisfaction with social and/or economic conditions. For example, responses to a story about Chinese citizens immigrating to the West. The story described foreign influence, government corruption, and economic conditions shaping citizens' desires to immigrate. ChinaSMACK translated 10 user comments along with the article. The first and most popular comment stated, "Let's do a survey, those who want to emigrate/immigrate, ding [this comment]." Here ding means to like or support. The comment received 49,305 votes in support. It was the most highly supported comment on the article.

Five of the 10 comments supported leaving China and articulated the nature of netizens dissatisfaction. One comment states,

> The poor get poorer, the rich get richer, the corrupt become even more corrupt, society is unjust, materialism overflows, harboring ulterior motives, the more developed, the more angry everyone is, those below unable to live in peace and work happily, those above unable to see a way out of the predicaments, so leaving is the best choice.

Another comment stated, "To get to the point, the government is arbitrary! Think, why is business becoming harder and harder to do?" These kinds of comments reveal a general sense of injustice and betrayal. The remaining comments critiqued the West in general and the United States in particular for "subjugating" the Chinese both at home and in abroad. These same frustrations appeared repeatedly throughout the data and corroborate racist rhetoric occurs within social and political contexts.

Racism triggers

Further data analysis reveals three culturally specific triggers for racist rhetoric. The first trigger is threats to group and individual identity. On one hand, netizens construct their group identity through nationalism and racial purity. The following are responses to a photo story titled "Chinese men with black women & African wives" presented as a series of pictures and captions depicting various Chinese men with African wives. ChinaSMACK translated 14 comments, one of which stated,

> It's okay if you want to marry, just don't leave your children/descendents in China. I don't want future Chinese people to be like those half-black half-yellow people in Latin American countries, with lowered intelligence, having lost the purity of their blood, with only a name to claim.

Another comment stated, "I've given it some thought, if in the future China can be as developed as America, a lot of foreigners will want to immigrate and become Chinese nationals, but I still won't accept them, because I feel they wouldn't be true Chinese people." According to the data, both national and racial foreigners threaten netizens' shared group identity.

At the same time, other comments suggest that the State is a threat to netizen's individual identities. Responses to a photo story of an American baseball game with a brief tribute to the Chinese student killed in the Boston Marathon bombings are telling. The story contained a picture of the tribute, a brief caption explaining the event, and the title "Chinese bombing victim memorial at American baseball game." ChinaSMACK translated 49 comments. The most frequently occurring idea expressed in comments (16 comments) suggested the State does not value individuals. One netizen wrote, "Even dying abroad gets one more respect than living in China," while another wrote, "Only when in America are Chinese people treated like people." A third comment summed up this sentiment stating, "Us Chinese people must rebuild our respect towards life, an attitude of valuing and cherishing." These comments reveal netizens feel disregarded or dehumanized, which is likely an inevitable product of the State's campaign to cultivate a national identity.

The second most frequent theme (10 comments) highlighted the hypocrisy of Americans commemorating one life but disregarding life in Iraq or Afghanistan, carrying guns, and harboring imperialist desires. Nine comments defended Chinese people by suggesting they also care about human life. "Don't say look at the Americans, which one of our Chinese people doesn't care about life?" Four comments suggest that the entire story and image are fakem suggesting distrust of the media. Collectively, the comments construct a true Chinese group identity in tension with individual identities, both of which are threatened by the State and outsiders.

A second trigger revealed through the data is netizens' sense of neglect. China has been investing heavily in infrastructure throughout Africa. Netizens' responses to some stories revealed a sense of material neglect at home. For example, in response to a story titled "Chinese aided African Union Conference Center inaugurated, at a cost of 200 million USD" reported on China spending US$200 million to help build an African Union Conference Center in Ethiopia. There were 19 comments translated. Four comments supported providing economic aid to African countries, but 10 comments described the spending as extravagant in light of economic conditions at home. Comments included, "The children at home express they need care and attention," "I really want a house/apartment to live in," "Not only haven't our wages increased, they've even decreased," and "Yeah, much prettier than the schools in China." These comments suggest that netizens feel a need for Chinese investment in China and are frustrated with government spending on foreigners.

Another story titled "Lu Meimei & China-Africa project hope controversy" details a scandal surrounding a charity funding schools in Africa. When a microblog revealed that the charity is run by a 24-year-old "second-generation rich" woman, Lu Xingyu, who receives a rather large salary for her work, netizens were outraged and the blog post went viral. The story transcribed for ChinaSMACK reports the original blog post stated "No wonder she doesn't care if our own country's children can't afford to go to school yet is keen on helping African children go to school" and was reposted 23,836 times. The ChinaSMACK story also includes Xingyu's video response to criticism. There were 15 translated comments, most of which criticized Xingyu and her video

response to netizens. However, several of the comments also mirror frustration with economic neglect as described in the previous example. One comment stated, "to have a country whose education spending only amounts to 4% [of GDP] do Project Hope for a 7% education-rich country is truly something I cannot understand." Another comment stated,

> China has innumerable children without schooling watching you, innumerable run-down schools and resource-poor schools watching you. When those children who cannot attend school because of their family's poverty and are thus forced to enter [working] society early in order to help bear the heavy burdens of their family, when those children in mountainous areas of different grade levels must all crowd into a single run-down classroom to listen to a single teacher teach class, I think they will definitely feel very confused, asking why when we're this poor and distressed you would instead run abroad to help foreigners.

The comments suggest a feeling of economic neglect caused by outsiders and foreign investment.

Finally, a third trigger for racist rhetoric is the appearance of collusion between government and foreigners. A story titled "Heifei's 'foreign *chengguan*' attracting onlookers on the streets" depicted Africans working as volunteer *chengguan* [civil law enforcement officers]. Twelve comments were translated. Half of the comments expressed distrust of overly aggressive local law enforcement. "Civilized law enforcement is something anyone would welcome." Five comments criticized local government hiring foreigners, one of which stated, "Now even the *chengguan* are hiring laowai, finding a job in the future will be even harder." Laowai is a term referring to foreigners. Another comment stated, "Foreigners in China do not have the power/right to engage in law enforcement, so the relevant government departments involved have already broken the law! Our law-illiterate countrymen, always filled with servility!" Like the comments to the previous story, these express hostility toward the government's relationship with foreigners, even though the workers in this story were unpaid. In each comment, there is a clear sense of economic vulnerability attributed to government neglect at home, which is heightened by government's support of immigration and foreign investment. Netizens experience this neglect as betrayal.

Netizen comments also criticized government corruption in response to a story titled "Changsha sexual assault by foreigner, Chinese reactions." The story reports on a Chinese woman sexually assaulted by a foreign man. The story does not mention the man's color or nationality. It does say he was heard speaking English. There are 35 translated comments. Two themes occurred frequently. One theme (11 comments) blamed the woman or questioned her moral character. However, the second theme (11 comments) suggests that both government and foreigners are corrupt and in collusion with one another. "This foreign man is just like our government officials, wanting to fuck every hole they encounter." Another comment states,

Of the international students that come to the Heavenly Kingdom, 80% of them are all foreign hooligans, and yet the Heavenly Kingdom caters to them as if they were the boss, as if a bunch of slaves. My school is eight people to a room, while foreign students are two to a room with air conditioning, television, and a water dispenser, their own private bathroom, shower, and the housing fees they pay are even lower than the Heavenly Kingdom's students.

According to ChinaSMACK's web glossary, Heavenly Kingdom is a common nickname for China or the Chinese government. Each of these comments suggest that foreigners and the government are corrupt, responsible for crime and moral corruption, and suggest that government and foreigners enable one another to be corrupt.

In sum, analysis shows that racist rhetoric occurs in social and political context but have culturally specific triggers. Threats to identity, a sense of neglect (economic instability), and the appearance of collusion between the State and foreigners consistently trigger racist rhetoric.

The paradox of stereotypes toward Africans

While analysis suggests that netizens feel socially and economically vulnerable to outsiders, the racial constructions legitimizing resentment toward foreigners are paradoxically reflective of globalized racial stereotypes. In response to a ChinaSMACK story titled "Africans in Guangzhou: Opportunities & discrimination," 8 out of 15 total comments expressed stereotypical beliefs about Africans. For example, one stated,

Blacks are simply a low-level race … When white people ruled South Africa and social resources were in the white people's hands, all various aspects of South Africa achieved great development! But after Mandela overthrew white rule, … there's almost no social control development and the violence rate has increased daily!!

A second comment stated, "Chinese people know their place and are orderly wherever they are, an active and motivated people … As for black people, they are lazy and carefree wherever they are, and like to cause trouble." Of the remaining translated comments, four were sympathetic or neutral toward Africans and/or immigrants and two were negative toward immigration but did not mention race. The comments define blackness as violent, impetuous, lazy, and destructive while elevating whiteness. Language elevating whiteness was common to the text we analyzed and is consistent with Schein's (1994) work exploring constructions of color in China.

Another phrase common to many posts and indicative of attitudes toward Africans is "black devil."

[comment 1] All the black devils living long-term, get the fuck out of China!!!

[comment 2] The black devils in Guangzhou are really annoying!

[comment 3] These no class black devils.

There is no Chinese translation for the highly derogatory English word, "nigger." However, "black devil," functions in Chinese in a similar, intensely derogatory way. At the same time, the linguistic association of darkness with devil equates dark skin with one who tempts others to sin. Black as devil legitimizes perceptions of Africans as the cause of social ills.

Another stereotype is the hyper-sexualized African. In response to a story about a Chinese girl dating black foreigners, one netizen wrote,

> First, this girl's B [B = 屄, vagina, pussy, cunt] is more satisfied being fucked by black people, so she has discarded the rest and chosen to remain under black JJ [translates as cock, penis or dick] . She also hopes she will be even more satisfied being fucked by other foreigners when she goes abroad!

Other similar comments include, "Lousy [African] *foreigner*, big dicks with big tempers to match. Deserves a beating, a kick to the face should make him honest," "Black devil dick is big," and "Laowai's [penis] are big, especially black people's." Numerous comments to a variety of stories on ChinaSMACK equated Africans and black male bodies with anatomical differences that enhance sexual prowess but also contaminate their female Chinese partners.

Netizen comments also depict hyper-sexualized African women. Several comments to a photo story of a Chinese man showing affection toward an African woman on a public bus included the following:

> [comment 1] The guy cannot possibly satisfy her, must use an electric vibrator.

> [comment 2] [if he] can satisfy a black, obviously has an exceptionally long …

> [comment 3] This girl likes it from behind, look at the knees:

Both African men and women are constructed as highly sexualized in a way that fetishizes the African body and sexuality. Stereotypes of Africans constructed black as violent and sexually aggressive. Thus violence and aggression are attributed to race rather than the political and social structures of the Chinese cities in which Africans live.

A final meaningful stereotype is of the dirty and diseased African. Many comments associate African with AIDS. The diseased African stereotype is expressed in responses to the article "Africans in Guangzhou: Opportunities & discrimination," which had 15 transcribed comments with 8 of them critical of Africans. One comment stated "What can Africans bring us besides AIDS??!!" and "The majority of blacks are representatives of promiscuity, violence, and AIDS." A story of a Chinese teacher dating a Black man had 11 translated comments with three neutral or supportive of the interracial relationship. One netizen wrote, "Be with whoever you want, as long as you like them." However, the remaining comments were more critical. One netizen wrote, "She won't be so happy if she gets AIDS." In response to another photo story containing pictures of a Chinese woman and Black man rafting naked in an underground cavern, one netizen writes, "Sooner or later will get AIDS." And a final comment states, "I am a customs officer who monitors infectious diseases, just look at how many

people checked are AIDS sufferers from Africa and you'll know we should keep such garbage far away." In each, Africans are constructed as diseased and responsible for the spread of AIDS.

One story from ChinaSMACK reports on a Chinese advertising campaign called "AIDS is a mass murderer." The ads include one image of Hitler having sex with a white woman. A second image is of Stalin having sex with a white woman and the third image is of Barack Obama having sex with a white woman. Each image states "AIDS is a mass murderer." One clear message perpetuated by Chinese media is AIDS is spread by having sex with foreigners. It is thus not surprising one stereotype of Africans is diseased.

AIDS is in fact a problem in China but is most problematic in rural areas rather than the cities where there are populations of African immigrants. The primary factor is unregulated and unclean blood collection, testing, and transfusion procedures. Consequently, AIDS is particularly problematic in poor, rural areas where citizens sell blood for money (Clemmow & Lewis, 2007). However, stereotypical constructions of Africans as dirty or diseased function to legitimize blaming foreigners for problems in China.

The above stereotypes of Blackness mirror American stereotypes of Blackness. On one hand, this is not surprising considering American media is widely consumed in China. However, stereotypes used to legitimize racism, which is triggered by perceived threats by foreigners to identity, economic stability, and government fidelity, are likely products of foreign media influence. Netizens simultaneously internalize and resist foreign influence through racist stereotypes.

Gendered racism and interracial romantic relations

A striking difference in attitudes toward African women versus African men suggests racism is linked to local gender inequalities. One Chinese netizen noted, "I'm wondering, why is it when Chinese men marry foreign women, it is because they are capable and patriotic? [Whereas] Chinese girls marrying foreign men are contemptible/base, gold-diggers, shameless." In fact, netizens' attitudes toward African men were particularly harsh. Responses to the story (described above) of a Chinese teacher dating a Black man included, "Black people are hard to accept … and our cultural differences are so great, nothing will come of this," "I'm not a racist, but I object to black people on purely aesthetic grounds," "Black people always make me feel like they haven't fully washed themselves, I can't accept/handle someone who is dark all over their body," and "Those who are too dark I truly am unable to accept. Just looking at them I lose all sexual desire! Turn the lights off and its okay." In each, Black male bodies are depicted as unclean, unattractive, and undesirable. Of the 11 translated comments, three were supportive or neutral toward the interracial relationship.

Attitudes toward woman in the story were also especially harsh. One response stated, "Why do foreigners see Chinese girls as easy and cheap? It's all because of girls like this!" Responses to another photo story titled "Nude underground rafting by Chinese girl & black man" contained the heading "Beautiful girl and laowai black devil

take off clothes to go nude rafting in scenic area." It had 16 translated comments and all but one were critical of Black men with Chinese women. Comments critiqued the woman's character with statements like "Chinese women today are all so low class" and "These days, laowai all know it is cheap to come to China to fuck B [pussy]."

In another instance, an article written by a female Chinese student describes why she dates African men. Responses to the article highlight the taboo of Chinese women dating or marrying black men. Comments included the following:

[comment 1] Your parents working so hard to raise you and provide for you to go to university was just for you to be fucked by foreign black people? … You lose face for female university students … I truly feel embarrassed for your parents, having given birth to you!

[comment 2] You are just fucking lowly/cheap. Those foreigners who come to China to fool around/waste time are all fucking trash, yet you fucking treat them like treasure. You bunch of lowly people simply do not have enough self-respect. Learn well.

[comment 3] Not every foreigner is rich, so maybe she just likes long and thick.

Chinese women who date African men are constructed as promiscuous and disgraceful. Journalists later learned that the author was actually a Chinese man who was upset by the number of mixed-race couples he observed on buses.

Other responses to interracial relationships perpetuate stereotypes of African men. For example, one comment stated, "She can marry whoever she wants to marry, black devils is fine too, foreigners is also fine, it has nothing to do with us." The comment reifies the othering of Blackness by using the highly derogatory "black devil" and differentiating Black from non-Black foreigners.

At the same time, attitudes toward African women and their relationships with Chinese men appear to be more tolerated. For example, a story (as opposed to comments) about Chinese men marrying African women stated,

In my neighborhood is a Chinese engineer who returned from Angola, and his wife is a black girl. However, she's one of those very pretty high-end black girls. She's very slender and not one of those fat auntie types. Her skin also isn't the kind of oily/greasy black but rather black-brownish and more brown.

Note that the story's author rationalizes the legitimacy of the marriage by emphasizing the woman's brown rather than "oily/greasy black" skin reinforcing notions of racial inferiority/superiority.

ChinaSMACK translated 16 responses to the story. Several comments expressed the same negative racial stereotypes already described. What is different with these comments is several are openly supportive of these interracial relationships. Netizens wrote, "These black MM [young/pretty girl] have nose-bleeding [hot] bodies and bewitching looks, just a little dark," and "Is it not okay for others to like eating chocolate abalone." One writes, "Turn off the lights and they [women] are all the same. As long as there is no smell," "I wish them the best/happiness, so what if

they're from Africa/are African [Black], as long as you like/love them, that's all that matters," "Doesn't matter, love has no borders," and "The son of a wealthy Sichuan Chinese businessman who married last year's Miss Kenya!!! Strongly recommend!!!" Finally, a number of comments called out the gendered difference in how interracial relationships are treated. One stated,

> I've discovered our country's females are far more tolerant, rational, and have more character/class than the males ~ … If it were reversed, a bunch of WSN [猥琐男, *wei suo nan*, wretched/little men] would be falling over themselves cursing how Chinese women worship the foreign.

A photo story titled "Chinese-black couple on Shanghai metro" depicting an African woman with a Chinese man also elicited more favorable but sexist comments from netizens. Most highlighted stereotypes of African women. "Black people's butts, both tight and perky," "Don't say [his] taste heavy/strong, it is that this girl has a healthy body. Once the lights are off, what guy who not want to try," and "The photograph captures the point, NIGGA's have great butts, this friend has good fortune." Others express finding African women attractive, writing, "I feel black people's skin is far more fine/exquisite than white races. I used to often see black girls when I went to work, very attractive!" and "African women are very pretty! This brother is very blessed/happy." Throughout the comments, the African body is fetishized while the female body is sexualized and objectivized. It is noteworthy that African women were never referred to as "black devils" in the data analyzed.

The politics of racism

Stories discussing racial issues are among the most popular and commented-on stories on ChinaSMACK (Herold, 2012), indicating that race is an important topic in Chinese society (Sautman, 1994; Y. Cheng, 2011). Analysis of Chinese online news stories and comments reveal much about local constructions of racial identities and stereotypes. However, analysis also reveals how racism functions socially and politically as resistance to perceived vulnerabilities. Below we discuss the social and political implications of racism.

In a society where resistance to the government is highly restricted, stereotypical racial constructions provide a way of critiquing the government without personal consequences. Blaming Africans for China's social ills provides a way for netizens to express criticisms of the government without directly attacking the government. For example, comments about investments in infrastructure in African countries demonstrate a frustration with the government's foreign policies. Comments suggest that the netizens felt betrayed by foreign investment because government has not lived up to its promises and foreigners are unworthy of China's resources. Framing the criticism within racist ideology magnifies the criticism of investment abroad. The stereotype of "Africans as lazy" helps buttress the claim that money spent in African countries is wasted. In other words, as the in-group identity solidifies, the critique of

spending money on the out-group is sharpened and the anti-Black rhetoric heightens the prodomestic spending rhetoric. Yet, all of the criticism appears targeted at Africans, so critique of the government remains somewhat disguised.

Constructing negative racial stereotypes also provides a means for critiquing China's family planning policies. The double standards concerning romantic and sexual relations with African women and African men indicate an additional dissatisfaction with the Chinese government. As noted above, Chinese men dating and marrying African women was often approved of whereas some of the angriest rhetoric observed among these texts was reserved for Chinese women dating and marrying African men. Some of this double-standard approach may simply be reflective of gender norms in China. Yet, a deeper analysis suggests that this standard may also stem from frustrations with the increasing gender imbalance in China due to government family planning policies coupled with greater social value placed on male children. Chinese women who date African men are particularly troubling to netizens due to the increasing scarcity of single Chinese women. Thus the Chinese women and African men who date and marry become the means of critiquing the long-term effects of the government's policy. Yet again, critique of the government policy is disguised as critique of Africans. Consequently, constructing negative racial stereotypes functions as a form of resistance to the government and its policies, thus constitutes localizing power (Fiske, 1993).

Furthermore, stereotypes of Africans held by Chinese netizens mirror U.S. racial stereotypes of African Americans (Zhang & Tan, 2011) and Western patterns of social stratification according to color (see Schein, 1994). These comments reflect what appears to be a globalized racism supporting Bourdieu and Wacquant's (1999) claims regarding globalization and "the refashioning of social relations and cultural practices in advanced societies after the US pattern" (p. 43). However, the irony of legitimizing the scapegoating of Africans by adopting rhetoric influenced by foreign stereotypes reveals an interesting tension between globalization and nationalism. As globalization disrupts traditional patterns of Chinese identity rooted in nationalism, racial scapegoating serves to obscure the inherent tension. Thus the Internet provides netizens a space for resisting or renegotiating identity constructs.

At the same time, scapegoating Africans enables sexism (preference for male children) to be ignored. Comments characterizing Chinese women with foreign men as promiscuous, materialistic, and of low moral character reify the existing gender inequality. By focusing critique on foreign men, misogynistic cultural practices that produce the imbalance remain hidden, and Chinese people themselves become more cohesive by increasing their perceived distance from the out-group (Lalonde, 1992). By scapegoating Africans, the discourse obscures internal tensions between sexist practice and social policy. In this sense, constructing negative racial stereotypes functions as a form of imperializing power by reproducing the status quo of gender inequality.

In conclusion, this critical examination of racial rhetoric among a particular group of Chinese netizens contributes to the growing scholarship aiming to understand

racial tensions and social organizing by attempting a deeper understanding of their causes. Prior research argues that racial constructions emerge in ways that justify and legitimize structural inequalities (Omi & Winant, 2009). It has long been argued that racism helps reproduce the status quo. Yet looking at the average Chinese netizen's racial constructions of Africans in context reveal perceived vulnerabilities toward a more complex understanding of the relationship between racism and social power. This study reveals racial rhetoric functions to both sustain and resist the status quo of control and advantage. In this sense, constructing negative stereotypes is functional as resistance when opportunities for resistance are limited.

Although race-focused rhetoric is often used to hide and perpetuate power in every culture (Fiske, 1993), our analysis suggests that racism has a much more complex function than mere imperializing control. The same racist constructions of Africans function to both sustain and resist the status quo while simultaneously obscuring the tension between control and resistance. This applied research supports that Mumby's (2005) theorizing control and resistance are mutually constitutive.

In conducting a critical rhetorical analysis, it is also important to note what is left out of the rhetoric. Notably missing is any indication netizens are aware of the paradoxical functions of their racist constructions. No comments expressed awareness of some racial constructions actually exonerating the Chinese government of responsibility for social and economic conditions. So while Chinese netizens directly critique their government and social structure, the racialized rhetoric obscures the ways they hegemonically reproduce what they resist. Thus the dual functions of racism hegemonically reproduce the status quo while simultaneously obscuring this social reproduction. Future research should continue to explore the complex relationship between control and resistance to provide a deeper understanding of the nature of power and social organizing.

Exploring racial constructions in China has allowed us to discover unique insights into political functions of race hidden in more ethnically diverse societies. However, this study also highlights the need for more research. Because this type of qualitative research is not generalizable beyond the specific group studied, it is impossible to assume anything about cultural norms regarding race within Chinese society. Also, because we looked specifically at contextual triggers for racial rhetoric, we were not able to address the range of ideas about race, differences across ideas, or the way ideas about race in China might be changing. These are possible areas for future research.

At the same time, this study suggests that there are conflicted and highly complex attitudes toward foreigners (both African and Western) and women. These tensions likely reflect greater tensions between nationalism/globalization and tradition/modernization. Further study into the evolving position of women in Chinese society and the sometimes paradoxical experiences of Western influence in China would both be fruitful areas for future research.

Finally, while much critical race research has focused on pluralistic societies throughout Europe and the United States (Loke, 2013; Pérez, 2013; Van Dijk, 1992), few explore racial stereotypes in a more homogenous societies. This study suggests

that African stereotypes in China mirror stereotypes of African Americans in the United States. Kim's (2012) study of media discourse in Korea finds that race is largely treated with political correctness that makes racially biased thinking subtler. Again, this is not unlike shifting discourses of race in the United States. Both suggest that Western media influences racial constructions internationally, and racism is linked to issues of globalization (Daniels, 2013). We would benefit from more research on the relationship between race and globalization as well as the discursive processes of global race relations.

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