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# Bias against Black immigrants and Black people among chinese online: an empirical study on the video platform Bilibili and its floating comments

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## ABSTRACT

While racism against people of African descent has been well-researched under a western context, the situation of these immigrants in China has been generally overlooked by the academia. Through data-scraping and BERT-based two-step binary classification of Bilibili video floating comments, this research has investigated anti-Black racism on the Chinese internet. This research analyzed the correlation between certain video metadata and negative comments present in the video. The author also manually classified 2000 randomly selected comments based on the type of sentiment expressed, which is used as the training set of the proposed natural language processing model. By collecting and analyzing 90259 floating comments from 683 videos, the study has found that 9.58% of comments were race-related and among these, 80.37% expressed negative sentiments. The author identifies online racism manifesting in the forms of nationalist repulsion of immigration, call for genetic and cultural purity, and associating Black people with negative qualities like violent, womanizing, lazy, and unintelligent. In summary, this research completes a large-scale quantitative and qualitative analysis of the unique types of anti-Black online racism among Chinese netizens while also accounting for the prevalence and causes of such racism, especially in the socio-cultural context of China.

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Cultural Studies; Sociology & Social Policy; Mass Communication; Artificial Intelligence; Race & Ethnicity; Media & Communications; Social Inequality

## Introduction

In an era dominated by digital communication, the dynamics of racial commentaries are evolving within the vast landscape of social media platforms. Past research highlights the importance of the Chinese internet as a space for new activism and democracy (Yang, 2009), while other works point out its 'flaming' effects and potential to establish echo chambers (Bachman & Yang, 2010). Despite the extensive connectivity facilitated by these online platforms, the experiences of certain demographic groups remain understudied. This research focuses on a critical yet overlooked aspect: the prevalence and types of online racism against people of African descent on Chinese social media platforms. As this overlooked field is being investigated, it is crucial to understand the historical and contemporary context that shapes these interactions and the urgent need for a comprehensive examination. For the purpose of this research, the term 'racism' is defined as the manifestation of prejudice and discrimination, either in an individual or institutional capacity, towards other individuals based on their perceived race, culture, ethnicity, or national origin.

Racism, both historical and contemporary, has been a persistent societal challenge affecting diverse communities worldwide. While the academia has commonly accepted race as a social construct (Conley & Fletcher, 2017; Cornell & Hartmann, 2006; Graves, 2005; Morning, 2011), genetic explanations of racial

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differences and essentialist beliefs have been driving factors of racial biases in daily society (Byrd & Ray, 2015; Chen & Ratliff, 2018; Gelman, 2003; Jayaratne et al., 2006; Jayaratne et al., 2009; Keller, 2005; Morning & Maneri, 2022; Phelan et al., 2013; Soylu et al., 2017; Tawa, 2023). People of African descent, in particular, have faced systemic discrimination (Fredrickson, 2002). As our lives become increasingly intertwined online, the digital sphere becomes an important arena for studying these issues (Nakamura, 2013). In China, a nation experiencing rapid globalization while embodying its history and culture (Mackerras, 2003), social media platforms have become integral to daily life for many (Yang, 2009). However, amid the digital connectivity, the experiences of the African immigrants within this space have remained largely unexplored.

While anti-Black discrimination has been well-studied in a western context, particularly in the United States, the presence of such discrimination has been generally overlooked when placing it in China, or most other Asian countries (Dikötter, 2015). Two of the few researches that examine this in an online Chinese context focus exclusively on Weibo, a Chinese social media platform (Liu et al., 2021; Gu & Ho, 2024). However, it is estimated that around 500,000 Black people reside in China, with some 100,000 living in the city of Guangzhou alone (Bodomo, 2020). The exigency not only lies in the social welfare of these 500,000 people, but also the valuable academic basis that this investigation can bring, in terms of the intersection of immigration, race and national identity, as well as their effects. With a thorough understanding of the causes and effects of anti-Black online racism in China, further plausible insights can be gained by examining the underlying logic of such bias in the context of Chinese society. The ultimate vision of this research's results can contribute to the understanding of online racism, both in China and beyond.

Thus, this study seeks to fill this academic gap by investigating the specific manifestations of online racism targeting people of African descent on Chinese social media platforms. The research question is twofold: what is the approximate prevalence of these types of anti-Black racism on popular Chinese social media platforms? and what are the types of online racism encountered by this demographic? The significance of this inquiry lies in its potential to uncover the lived experiences of a marginalized group, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of online racism in a national and global context.

## Literature review

### *Black immigration to China and situation of Black immigrants*

China has a long history of remaining as a nation with a largely homogenous cultural and ethnic identity, with 91.6% of the world population being of the Han ethnic group (Zang, 2015). Historically, China has sought to establish a common identity between the diversity of 56 defined ethnic groups. Such efforts included cultural homogenization, imposition of a common national language (*Putonghua*), and promotion of assimilation into the Han culture through Confucian ideals (Hui, 2020; Shih, 2000). Even though China's opening-up has opened it to a wider array of international developments, including immigration of Black people, its ethnic and cultural core remains heavily Chinese. This national identity has made it resilient but also resistant to external cultural changes. The opposition to immigration and external influence, as well as the effort to assimilate them, have been an inherent part of the Chinese identity (Zang, 2015; Zhao, 2000). Past literature have suggested this aspect of national identity as a major contributing factor, among others, to the rise of anti-Black racism, which targets a group of immigrants China has had little exposure to in the past (Sautman, 1994; Cheng, 2011).

Past literature has underscored anti-Black racism in parts of China (Dikötter, 1997; Dikötter, 2015). For example, demonstrations were held in 1970s and 1980s that protested against the presence of African students in major cities across China, including Nanjing, Tianjin, and Shanghai. The global response to these events of possibly 'vestigial xenophobia' has been 'evanescent' (Sautman, 1994). Additionally, in comparison with 'campus racism in the 1980s', racial relations between Chinese and Africans, especially in terms of cyber discussions, have shown an increasing trend of 'racialism' (Cheng, 2011). This was also manifested through the fact that the proportion of surveyed Africans claiming that they have a difficult time finding jobs in China is at a much higher rate than those from other racial and geographical backgrounds (Castillo & Amoah, 2020). Nevertheless, despite substantial qualitative reviews, data and statistics-oriented research on this topic have been generally missing, with the exception of one research

that exclusively examined manifestation of anti-Black racism on several posts of Weibo, a Chinese social media platform; such online racism was exemplified by focuses on marking Africans as carriers infectious diseases (such as COVID-19 and AIDS) and Chinese women who married Africans as ‘unchaste’ (Liu et al., 2021). However, this still leaves a wide gap in understanding of anti-Black racism in China at a larger scale and in greater variety.

Moreover, contemporary assessments highlight persistent inequalities, such as limited access to health-care, indicating that Black individuals continue to live on the margins of Chinese society. Despite these challenges, there is evidence of African ‘agency and resilience’ in securing well-being, particularly regarding access to medical treatment (Bodomo, 2020). The Black community in China comprises various categories, including governmental representatives, professionals, workers, traders, and a significant student population estimated between 30,000 and 40,000 as of 2012. These diverse experiences underscore the complex interaction between history, migration patterns, and socio-economic status shaping the lives of Black individuals in China (Bodomo, 2020; Jin et al. 2021).

Additionally, there are significant challenges posed by Chinese authorities that impede the development of typical ethnic enclaves of Africans in Guangzhou (Marsh, 2021). The obstacles imposed by the authorities, particularly in terms of acquiring long-term residence, create barriers to the establishment of cohesive residential concentrations (Jin et al. 2021). The pervasive presence of Chinese authority, for instance, facilitates the government and police’s ability to identify and apprehend individuals lacking legal visas or identity documentation within these enclaves. Consequently, the efficacy of these enclaves in providing social and economic functions is compromised, highlighting the complex interplay between cultural models and institutional frameworks in shaping the experiences of ethnic communities in urban settings (Jin et al. 2021).

### ***Chinese diplomacy with African nations and Belt & Road Initiative***

China’s diplomatic efforts in Africa, particularly amidst the COVID-19 crisis, have gathered attention and analysis regarding their efficacy and underlying strategies. The concept of ‘Mask and Vaccine’ diplomacy has emerged as a notable example of China’s successful engagement in the region. This diplomatic campaign, characterized by the provision of medical supplies and vaccines to African nations, has been instrumental in bolstering China’s image as a reliable partner in times of crisis (Van Staden & Wu, 2021).

Central to China’s image-building efforts in Africa is a carefully crafted rhetoric emphasizing the enduring friendship between China and Africa. Through a combination of social media outreach and public diplomacy initiatives, China has sought to reinforce the narrative of mutual support and cooperation between the two regions (Wong, 2023).

However, the effectiveness of these efforts came under scrutiny during a controversial event in Guangzhou in 2020. The handling of Black individuals by Chinese authorities during the COVID-19 pandemic in Guangzhou, when Black individuals were expelled from their homes, prompted significant outcry and criticism, both domestically and internationally (Van Staden & Wu, 2021). Moreover, also during COVID-19 Pandemic in Guangzhou, Africans were forcibly tested, and ordered to ‘self-isolate or to quarantine in designated hotels’, when ‘other foreign groups have generally not been subjected to similar treatment’ (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Despite the Chinese government’s attempts to use social media as a tool for disseminating its official stance and asserting its commitment to combating racism in any shape or form (Wang, 2021), these efforts did not succeed in shifting the tone of online discourse. The discrepancy between Beijing’s messaging of zero tolerance for racism in China and the reality of events on the ground underscored the complexities and challenges inherent in China’s image-building endeavors in Africa, highlighting the importance of addressing underlying issues and perceptions to foster genuine trust and partnership between the two regions (Van Staden & Wu, 2021; Human Rights Watch, 2020).

Thus, previous diplomatic and social approaches taken by the Chinese authority has supported the conclusion that the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has been of paramount importance in advancing China’s geopolitical and geoeconomic interests (Cai, 2017). The BRI prompts for ‘increasingly tangible and consequential’ impacts by China on its geopolitical and economic partners, particularly those in Africa (Links, 2021).

The Chinese government uses BRI and diplomatically friendly expressions towards African nations and nationals as a leverage for economic and political gains, within and outside of China. However, contrary

to its actions in building a friendly diplomatic image in Africa through economic aids and acceptance of African immigration to a certain degree, the Chinese government authorities have allowed the existence of anti-Black racist rhetoric online to go partially unchecked particularly among groups of netizens on various popular social media platforms, who have been posting radically nationalistic and hostile content towards Black people (Human Rights Watch, 2023).

### ***Anti-black racism in Chinese society***

The surge in online racist content targeting Black individuals on Chinese social media platforms has raised concerns in recent years, driven by profit motives and attracting traffic. Videos and posts frequently propagate offensive racial stereotypes and condemn interracial relationships as a threat to the Chinese race. Despite the Chinese government's robust censorship infrastructure and its responsibility to check on racial contents, the persistent presence of such content underscores shortcomings in platform policies and enforcement. Large amounts of videos and posts offered offensive racial stereotypes of Black people. Interracial relationships were also condemned and viewed as threatening the Chinese race. 'The amount and extremity of racist content on the Chinese internet suggest that the platforms either are not meeting their own standards banning racist content, or that their policies are inadequate when addressing racist content, both contrary to their human rights responsibilities' (Human Rights Watch, 2023).

Considering the surge of online racist content on popular Chinese social media platforms, my research seeks to answer the following two questions: what is the prevalence of these types of anti-Black racism on popular Chinese social media platforms? and what are the types of online racism encountered by this demographic? Specifically, my research analyzes user comments data related with perception of Black people on Bilibili (a popular Chinese social media platform) to investigate these questions.

## **Method**

### ***Data***

All data from this research has been obtained and collected from Bilibili. Bilibili is a video-sharing platform based in Shanghai, colloquially known as the B Station, with its users being overwhelmingly Chinese. Though previously an ACG (Anime, Comics, Games) -focused platform, Bilibili has grown increasingly comprehensive in its content and services. It allows users to submit, view, and comment on videos of a wide variety of themes, including but not limited to anime, technology, news, politics, history, food, movies, games, and music, making it analogous to a Chinese YouTube. Moreover, Bilibili is a platform that has '80% of its users belonging to ..... 'Generation Z', who are people born between the mid-to-late 1990 and early 2010s (Sun & Yan, 2023). Moreover, the majority of Bilibili users are concentrated in tier one and tier two cities. This demonstrates that Bilibili presents a strong appeal to young users, especially in the more economically developed regions.

Notably, in the first quarter of 2023, Bilibili demonstrated remarkable growth, with its daily active user base surging to 93.7 million, marking an 18% year-on-year increase. Concurrently, its monthly active users reached a staggering 315 million, reflecting its pervasive influence within China's digital realm, also making it one of the largest video-sharing platforms in China (Bilibili, 2023). This ascendancy underscores Bilibili's pivotal role in shaping contemporary online discourse and entertainment preferences among Chinese youth, while also making content on Bilibili representative of a significant portion of China's population. The data from Figure 1 further demonstrates that Bilibili has developed a large and robust youth user group, amounting to more than 80% of its users.

### ***Two types of comments***

There are two typical types of user comments on Bilibili. One is the traditional type of comments that can be sent by users and will be displayed in the 'comments' section beneath the video. However, Bilibili also features a type of floating comments known as 'Danmu' in Chinese, which can be literally translated to 'bullet screen'. This type of user comment can be sent, and would appear as part of the video, either

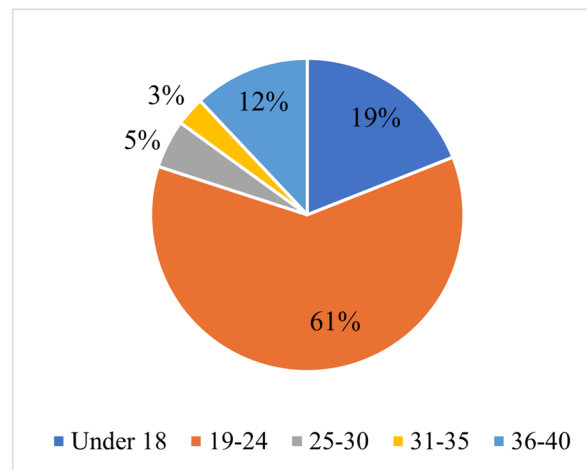


Figure 1. Percentage age distribution of Bilibili users (Photo credit: Sun & Yan, 2023).



Figure 2. Example of Danmu (Photo credit: 衣戈猜想).

statically staying on the screen for approximately five seconds, or appear on the right side of the screen then move to and disappear on the left side. Due to the interactive nature of Danmu, it is often heavily related to whatever appears on the screen at that particular time of the video, as shown in Figure 2, while the content of traditional comments tend to focus on a larger section of the video. Therefore, Danmu is capable of representing user sentiments and thoughts in real time. Zhu Yeqi (2017) elaborates that 'by enabling viewers to add their comments directly onto the screen, Danmu creates an atmosphere of a 'pseudo-synchronicity.' This research focuses solely on Danmu collectively extracted from videos.

### Data collection

All data in this research were collected on December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2023. In order to maximize the affinity of research subjects to the research question, two keywords in the Bilibili search box to search for related videos were used: '中国' (China) and '黑人' (Black People). On Bilibili, a maximum of one thousand videos

will appear for each search, ranked based on a mixed factor of video popularity, relevance, and other potential parameters. My data scraping algorithm automatically filters out videos that don't contain any Danmu, which leaves a total of 683 videos to be investigated.

The data scraping algorithm involves a multi-step process. On the first layer, by examining the HTML of the result pages, an iteration loops through all 1000 videos that appeared in the search. For each video, the URL appears in the format of <https://www.bilibili.com/VideoID>; however, by changing the URL to <https://www.ibilibili.com/VideoID>, the browser will be redirected to a summary page that contains the metadata of the video, including a XML file that comprises all Danmu of the video. Figure 3 shows the ibilibili page of one sample video, while the link to the XML file has been marked by the red lines. Figure 4 further gives a display of the XML file of the same sample video. Each video's HTML page was also used to record the metadata of the Video ID, the title, number of views, the publication date, and the



Figure 3. Screenshot of an ibilibili.com Page For a Particular Video (the URL on the bottom-left that begins with api.bilibili.com is the XML file that contains all the Danmu for this video).

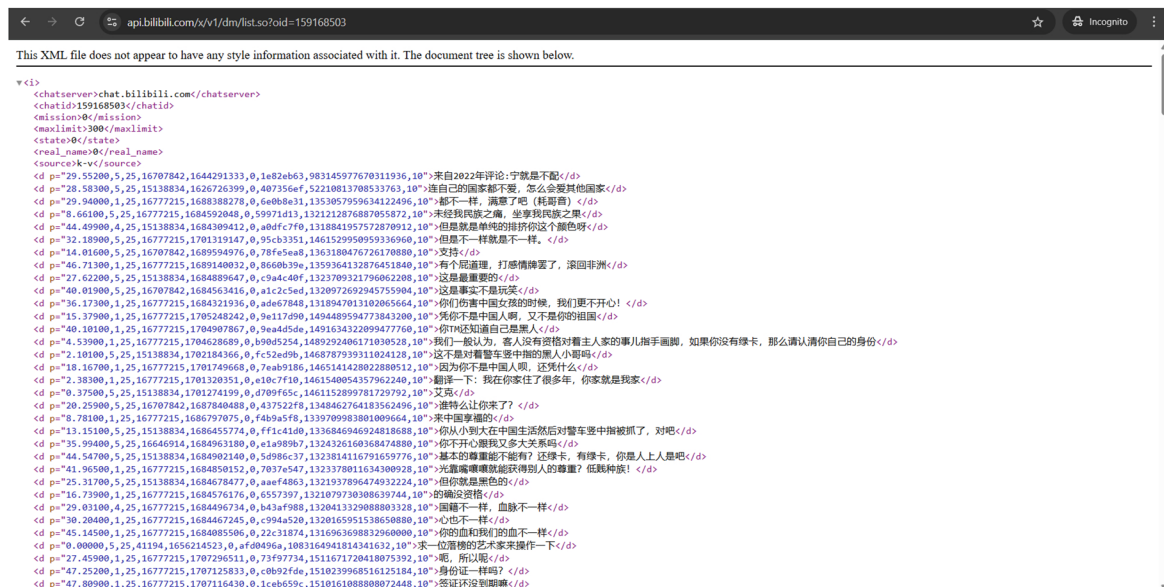


Figure 4. Screenshot of the Danmu XML File for the Video.

number of Danmu. Consequently, 683 text files were acquired, with each file representing the collection of Danmu in a video, and each line a specific Danmu. Additionally, a csv file was also created to organize all of the metadata.

## Analysis

A two-step binary classification was primarily used to analyze all of the comments collected. A pretrained Chinese language analysis transformers model downloaded from Huggingface, known as bert-base-chinese, was used. PyTorch was applied to enhance the process. To help the model adapt to the content of Bilibili Danmu, I manually labeled 2000 comments randomly selected from the comments collected.

In the first step of the binary classification, I analyzed whether the comments are related to race or not. To train this AI, I used the labeled training data from a CSV file and tokenized the comments using the BertTokenizer from bert-base-chinese. A 5-fold stratified cross-validation was implemented using StratifiedKFold to ensure balanced class distribution in each fold. For each fold, the data was split into training and test sets, the comments were tokenized and converted to tensors, and a BertForSequenceClassification model with two labels (related to race or not) was initialized. The model was trained for 3 epochs using the AdamW optimizer with a learning rate of 2e-5, and the trained model for each fold was saved. The accuracy of the model on the test set for each fold was computed, and the average accuracy across all folds was calculated.

In the second step of the binary classification, I analyzed whether the comments that are related to race contain negative sentiments. To train the second binary classification of the AI, I filtered out the comments that were not related to race (which have a value of -1 under the Sentiment column) and mapped the sentiment labels to binary values (0 for non-negative, 1 for negative). The comments were tokenized using the BertTokenizer from bert-base-chinese, and a 5-fold stratified cross-validation was implemented using StratifiedKFold. For each fold, the data was split into training and test sets, the comments were tokenized and converted to tensors, and a BertForSequenceClassification model with two labels (negative or not) was initialized. The model was trained for 3 epochs using the AdamW optimizer with a learning rate of 2e-5, and the trained model for each fold was saved. The accuracy of the model on the test set for each fold was computed, and the average accuracy across all folds was calculated.

The 2000 comments that I randomly selected as the training set were manually labeled based on two criteria: Related With Race and Sentiment. A csv file was created to assemble this classification. If the content of the comment was related with race in any aspect, such as but not limited to ethnic and racial identity, racism, immigrant status, it would be labeled '1' under that column, otherwise '0'. For the comments that have been labeled as related with race, a second layer of 'Sentiment' classification would be made. In the Sentiment column, a comment that is expressing a sense of negativity will be labeled as '1'; else, if the sentiment is positive or neutral, the comment would be given a '0'. However, if a comment is not directly and literally related with race, then under the 'Sentiment' column, it would be labeled as '-1', and not taken into account during AI analysis. A segment of the labels for the training set has been provided in [Table 1](#).

After manually labeling 2000 comments as a training set, the pre-trained bert-base-chinese was further trained and fine-tuned. Applying K-fold Cross Validation, with five folds in total and three epochs per fold, two series of trainings were performed, one for Related With Race, and one for Sentiment classifier. This prevents overfitting and underfitting by classifier ensuring that each fold is independent of

**Table 1.** Example Segment of Labeled Comments.

| Comments   | Related With Race | Sentiment |
|------------|-------------------|-----------|
| 光宗耀祖       | 1                 | 1         |
| 非我族类, 其心必异 | 1                 | 1         |
| 尼          | 1                 | 1         |
| 比博燃        | 0                 | -1        |
| 精锐         | 0                 | -1        |
| 哇          | 0                 | -1        |
| 黑人污染了中国基因  | 1                 | 1         |
| 艾滋有点多了     | 1                 | 1         |
| 不要歧视黑人同胞   | 1                 | 0         |

the other. Eventually, Related With Race classifier has an accuracy score of around 90% across folds, and Sentiment an accuracy of 75%.

Then, moving beyond the training set, these two models were applied to analyze all collected comments. Provided outputs include total number of comments analyzed, total number of race-related comments, total number of negative comments, percentage of negative comments among all comments, and percentage of negative comments among race-related comments. A text file was also created to store all of the negative comments, line by line.

## Results

The results, as provided in Table 2, reveal some staggering statistics. Of the 683 videos analyzed, 90259 Danmu were included. Among these Danmu comments, 9.58% were related to race, while 7.70% were both related to race and negative. To put this in a more direct context, among all Danmu comments that were race-related, as high as 80.37% of them were expressing negative racial sentiments.

Aside from the content of the Danmu, I have also analyzed the association between the percentage of negative comments in a video's Danmu and the metadata of the videos, including certain important parameters such as number of views and publication date. As a result, two graphs were created for the analysis. For both of the graphs, in order to minimize the effects of any extreme outliers that were caused by high numbers of negative comments in videos with small numbers of views and Danmu, I only included videos for which there are more than 50 Danmu, which usually corresponds to at least 10,000 views.

The first graph created, shown in Figure 5, was Percentage of Negative Comments vs. Number of Danmu. The scatterplot shows barely any trend, with very high variability even for the same number of Danmu. As a result, the R-squared statistic for six types of line fits were all 0.00, or extremely small, making them negligible. Therefore, I conclude that there is no association between Percentage of Negative Comments and Number of Danmu, as the variability is extremely high, changing from video to video.

The second graph created, shown in Figure 6, was a line plot that shows the monthly trend of percentage of negative comments on Bilibili over time. Overall, percentage of negative comments fell between and around 5% to 10%, with occasional spikes that can reach more than 20%. It is possible that these spikes correspond with social developments happening at the same time. The conservative backlash against social presence of people of African descent could have contributed to the trend during

**Table 2.** Summary of Output of AI Analysis.

| Category                                      | Count | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------------------------------------|-------|----------------|
| Total Comments                                | 90259 | —              |
| Race Related Comments                         | 8648  | 9.58           |
| Negative Comments                             | 6950  | 7.70           |
| Negative Comments Among Race Related Comments | 5565  | 80.37          |

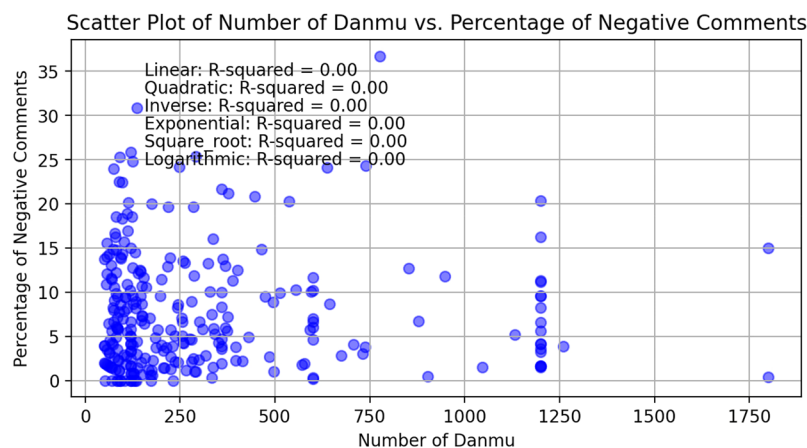


**Figure 5.** Scatterplot of Percentage of Negative Comments vs. Number of Danmu.

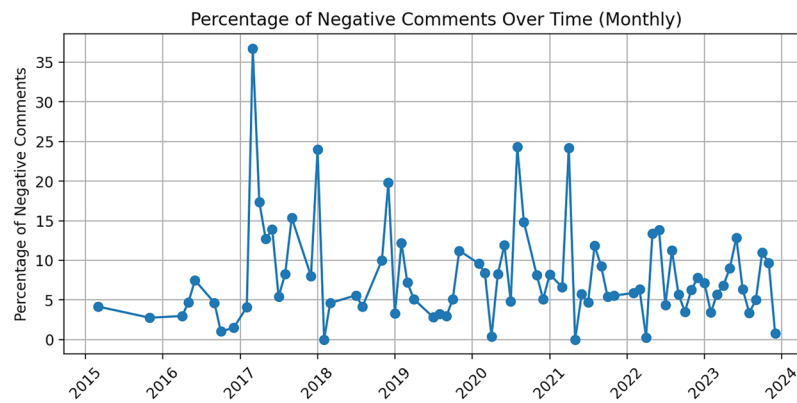


**Figure 6.** Percentage of Negative Comments Over Time (Monthly).

**Table 3.** Frequency Table of Types of Discriminatory Comments.

| Type of discrimination / bias                                                                       | Frequency |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Discriminates against Chinese women who have romantic relationship with or married Black immigrants | 30        |
| Skin color                                                                                          | 9         |
| Genetic, ethnic, and cultural purity                                                                | 29        |
| Animalistic and insulting description                                                               | 15        |
| General hostility and discrimination                                                                | 56        |
| Hostility against immigration                                                                       | 31        |
| Criminalization                                                                                     | 11        |
| Intellectual and economic discrimination                                                            | 7         |
| Disease                                                                                             | 10        |
| Sum                                                                                                 | 198       |

different times. One noteworthy period of high percentage of negative comments was during 2020–2021. This was the height of COVID-19 outbreak and regulations in China, during which parts of the Chinese public directed their anger and discrimination at Black immigrants, for a variety of reasons: Nativism, viewing Black people as ‘disease-carrying’, calls for racial purity, and demand for rule of law, etc. (Human Rights Watch, 2023; Ouassini et al., 2022).

Moving one step deeper into the analysis, I began to classify the comments based on the types of discrimination that they contained. I manually classified the 198 negative comments among the 2000 randomly selected comments that functioned as the training set for my models, with results and categories of the negative comments summarized in Table 3.

Most notably and broadly, there is a general expressed hostility against Black people among such comments, which took 56 out of 198 randomly sampled negative comments. These comments differ from other negative comments in such a way that they don’t clearly mention any specific excuse for dislike or theme of discrimination, but only directly states that they discriminate against Black people. A significant portion of these types of comments directly claims ‘I am a racist’, ‘I just discriminate against Blacks, that’s it’, ‘I feel uncomfortable and disgusted’, or it uses the word ‘尼’ to describe black people, which is the Chinese slang translation of ‘nigger’. There has even been comment posters arguing that he/she would even discriminate against those Chinese who don’t discriminate against Black people. It is difficult to argue the category of discrimination these comments fall into, but they do profoundly demonstrate the general hostility of certain Bilibili users against Black people.

The second most common category of discrimination was the hostility against immigration, which consisted of 31 out of 198 comments. This can also be viewed as similar to comments vowing for genetic, ethnic, and cultural purity, which consisted of 29 out of 198 comments, making it the fourth largest category. These two categories of comments appear to generally demonstrate a similar motive. To some extent, hostility against immigration was the expression, while the desire to maintain ‘purity’ was the cause. For example, comments labeled as exhibiting hostility against immigration usually contained the Chinese character ‘滚’, a highly aggressive word to demand someone to leave. Taking it one

step further, some comments under this category 'justified' themselves by arguing that Black people will be potential dangers to Chinese people, and that many Black immigrants lack legal status, making them '三非', or 'Three No's' (illegal immigration, illegal residence, illegal employment). A potential cause for such hostility can be explained by extremely nationalistic demand for genetic, ethnic, and cultural purity. Notably, a substantial portion of this type of discrimination contained elements of national pride and the belief that influx of Black immigrants will 'pollute' the skin color and genetic composition of the Chinese ethnicity. While a small number of comments cherished the idea that Black people can be accepted as long as they assimilate into Chinese culture, the idea that essential qualities of Black people fundamentally set them apart from Chinese, voicing the opinion that Blacks wouldn't be accepted even if they assimilate and follow legal immigration proceedings, has been much more prevalent. Another motive for this type of discrimination comes from the failure to incorporate Black people into the Chinese national identity. As one comment claims: 'you (African immigrant) don't have the soul of China; all of my ancestors have grown up on this land'. As hostilely put by one comment that appeared for multiple times: '非我族类, 其心必异', which is an ancient idiom that literally translates 'those who are not of the same race/ethnicity as mine, must possess a different mind'. These nationalistic and chauvinistic sentiments demonstrate the fact that many Bilibili users consider Black people to be fundamentally different, often dangerous.

The third most common type of sentiment is in fact not generally targeted against Black immigrants, but rather against Chinese females who have romantic or marital relationships with them. Two words have occurred particularly often over this subject, as derogatory or sarcastic descriptions of these females: '马桶' and '光宗耀祖'. '马桶' literally translates to toilet. This pejorative word also contains sexual implications under this context, viewing these females as feeble, unaware of national differences, and inferior if they have sex with Black male immigrants. On the other hand, '光宗耀祖' translates to 'honoring ancestors' or 'making ancestors feel proud'. This word is used sarcastically against females who are assumed to take pride in that they married a foreigner, who knows foreign knowledge and can speak a foreign language, a sign that is both controversial and respected in China. The occurrence of both words, along with the rest of the comment that they are part of, shows that radical commentators likely view these females as betraying their national identity, and are complicit in damaging the 'purity' of the Chinese ethnicity. Surprisingly, there has been very little exposure or criticism of Chinese males who have relationships with Black immigrant females, hinting that this discrimination is also patriarchal in nature.

Aside from the above four most significant types of discrimination, there are also comments that express different forms of discrimination, including animalistic descriptions, criminalization, intellectual and economic discrimination, and viewing Black people as disease-carrying.

In terms of animalistic descriptions, negative Bilibili comments most commonly associate Black people with dogs. There are a large number of times when Black people have been directly referred to as 'black dogs'. Moreover, there has been the repeated usage of the character '默', which translates to 'silence'; however, silence is not the actual meaning, but rather, if the character were split in half, it would become '黑犬', which also means 'black dogs'. The usage of this word not only shows the insulting sentiment carried by these comments, but also the effort of some to avoid platform censorship.

The criminalization of Black immigrants and Black people in general could also be seen. This criminalization was attached to qualities such as violence, robbery (likely a reflection of selective journalist coverage in China of shoplifting and robbery in the United States during the Black Lives Matter movement), and use of firearms.

Certain comments also tried to establish the 'inferiority' of Black immigrants by arguing that Blacks have less intellectual and economic capability. Intellectually, some comments stated that Blacks generally have less 'brain capacity' than Asians, making them genetically worse. Another comment also questioned if there is a single famous Black scientist. Foolishness and laziness have been most prevalently linked with Black people for discriminatory comments under this category. Economically, some comments referred to the underdevelopment and poverty of African nations, trying to assert Chinese superiority.

Additionally, negative comments also identified Black people as disease-carrying, particularly acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS). Comments with these stereotypes likely oppose Black immigration due to health concerns. Similarly, it also contains criticism of females that have sexual relationships with Black immigrants, and to some degree claiming that these females should take the blame.

Finally, there are also 9 occurrences of comments that discriminate against Black people because of their skin color. These comments mostly carry implications at discriminatory standards of aesthetic values. For example, one comment questions: 'haven't Chinese always viewed white as beauty? when did we start liking Blacks?' Moreover, the skin color of Black people has been viewed as a manifestation of their 'negative qualities'. It is important to note that there are more than 9 negative comments that include or hint at dark skin as associated with negative attributes, but only these 9 particularly emphasized skin colors.

## Discussion and conclusion

### *Goals and findings*

The primary goal of my study is to quantify and analyze the prevalence and nature of racial discourse within Bilibili video comments, with a specific focus on negativity and discrimination. Additionally, my study aims to examine trends in negative commentary in order to understand shifts and potential societal influences over time. Furthermore, my study seeks to identify and categorize the various forms of discrimination present within the comments, providing insights into underlying biases.

The analysis of 90259 comments across 683 videos revealed that 9.58% were race-related, with 7.70% of those expressing negative racial sentiments. Notably, 80.37% of race-related comments conveyed negative racial sentiments. Despite analyzing metadata, no discernible correlation was found between the percentage of negative comments and video views, as R-squared values for all potential correlations were too small to be significant.

Chronological analysis indicated that the percentage of negative comments fluctuated between 5% to 10% over time, with occasional spikes exceeding 20%. These spikes often coincided with major social phenomena, such as the COVID-19 outbreak and heightened nationalism.

My study identifies various forms of discrimination within the comments, including general and proclaimed hostility (often direct admittance of racist inclinations) towards Black individuals, opposition to interracial relationships, and assertions of ethnic and cultural purity. Discriminatory sentiments were often intertwined with nationalistic and patriarchal ideologies.

Furthermore, discriminatory themes encompassed hostility towards immigration, criminalization of Black individuals, assertions of intellectual and economic inferiority, and stigmatization based on disease and skin color. Animalistic descriptions and derogatory language were also prevalent, reflecting deep-seated biases.

### *Implications*

This research prompts significant changes in understanding of the Chinese government and its people. China has been proclaiming its position as a socialist and internationalistic nation since its establishment in 1949. It argues for unity of people within the nation and around the world while cherishing the ideals of equality (Wang, 2021). However, the significant and varied discrimination against Black immigrants, as proven in my study, has shown that there is a significant portion of the Chinese internet users (which can be, to some extent, generalized to the Chinese youth population) that discriminate against Black people. Such discrimination has been expressed by the prevalence of racist content on Bilibili Danmu. According to the two-step binary classification model built for this research, more than 80% of all race-related comments express negative sentiments. These comments also express highly extreme and nationalistic forms of discrimination. The high degree of bias confirms that the video platforms, such as Bilibili, and the Chinese government have not checked on such content with proper caution, nor did they fulfill their responsibility to human rights based on Human Rights Watch's standards, in spite of the fact that China possesses a robust censorship establishment.

Indeed, such public understanding of racial concepts can influence and shape attitudes about group differences (Condit et al., 2004; Dubriwny et al., 2004). The content of the online racism being expressed (particularly in terms of calling for genetic purity amidst Black immigration, marking Black people as sexual predators and womanizers, discriminating against Chinese females who have relationships with Black people, and assertion of Black people's intellectual inferiority) demonstrate strongly nativist sentiments towards the Black community, consistent with past literature's analysis of China's ethnic

homogeneity. In addition to jeopardizing the human rights and daily welfare of the Black diaspora in China, the manifestation of racism online and offline could also negatively impact China's diplomatic image among African nations that China is seeking to further relations with. This can be seen through the negative repercussions of publicized events of discrimination that took place in Guangzhou during COVID-19 (Van Staden & Wu, 2021). Therefore, I would advise that more policy measures be taken by both the video platforms and the Chinese government in limiting the publication and spread of online racist content to limit their impact in shaping the public narrative and echo chamber. Moreover, additional public education prompting racial equality should be conducted in order to alleviate racial discrimination and extreme nativism from their roots.

By completing a robust analysis through both quantitative and qualitative means, my research contributes to the understanding of anti-Black racism online in the context of historical and contemporary Chinese society. By identifying the types and prevalence of stereotypes expressed on popular social media platform Bilibili and connecting them with surge in Chinese nativism and nationalism, my results establishes that it is imperative for media platforms and the Chinese government to take appropriate actions in promoting equality and combating online racism. On this ground, future research can be conducted on methods to mitigate racism in both short-term and long-term.

### **Potential limitations**

In spite of the important findings, the data in my research also contains potential limitations. For example, Danmu often has the nature of directly responding to the content on the screen. As a result, they are often short, sentimental, and require context from the particular portion of the video to establish a full picture in analysis. This could potentially undermine the accuracy of my two-step classifiers. On the other hand, the fact that Danmu mostly relies on video context may suggest that some racial comments have been overlooked, if the content of the Danmu itself is not race-related, but its response to some racial content on the screen is. Given that most of the videos sampled are heavily related to racial content, the actual percentage of race-related comments may be greater than 9.58%.

Additionally, user comments on Bilibili, especially Danmu, were often phrased in such a way that they carry substantial sarcasm, humor, connotation opposite to denotation, words with similar pronunciation but different meanings, as well as unconventional idioms and slangs. These could be methods to express irony, play with memes, or avoid platform censorship. Although I did take these into account in the training data, such obscurity in the nature of Chinese linguistic expression may still undercut accuracy of my model.

### **Avenues for future research**

In terms of study on Bilibili and its Danmu specifically, it would be advised for future research to take into account of the video content when analyzing the racial inclinations of the Danmu. Since video title and description cannot always accurately capture everything that happened in the video, it would be helpful to include a video content analysis AI, which can automatically identify what is on the screen, and consider this context when analyzing Danmu that were sent at that particular time in the video.

However, it is also important to note that Bilibili is a platform that contains a significant Gen-Z and Chinese youth; therefore, to understand a full picture of racial situations in China, it would be advised to expand this research onto other Chinese social media platforms, such as WeChat, Weibo, QQ, Douyin, Kuaishou, etc. By diversifying the social media platforms, researchers can also diversify the user groups that have been sampled, to acquire a clearer picture of racial discrimination across most, if not all, of the Chinese population.

Moreover, field and offline studies can also be conducted through means such as surveys, to both Chinese people and Black immigrants living in China, to understand more personal concerns and ideas of the individuals directly associated with the intertwining racial situations in China.

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Charles Xu is the sole author of this research.

## Authors' contributions

CRedit: **Charles Qining Xu**: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Software, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Charles Qining Xu is a senior graduate of BASIS International School Shenzhen, China, and will shortly be pursuing studies at the University of California, Los Angeles. As a researcher, he primarily focuses on utilizing data science tools for the analysis of sociological, cultural, and policy-related issues. In the past, he has conducted racial studies field research in Kenya, where the process and results have been documented and published on notable international NGO, China Global Dialogue. He is also an enthusiastic and accomplished leader in various pursuits, including Speech and Debate, local government service, documentary production, and community volunteering.

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## Data availability statement

1. The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, C. Xu, upon reasonable request.
2. All data used in this research are collected on the day of December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2023. It is possible that some videos and comments have been removed since then.
3. Methods to collect the data have been explained under the subheading 'Data collection'

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