#ChinaMustexplain: Global Tweets, COVID-19, and Anti-Black Racism in China

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Abstract
One of the consequences of the emergence of COVID-19 has been the glaring racial and ethnic disparities that have defined the course of the spread of the virus. As a recent migrant-minority community in China, the Black community’s experience has been defined by vulgar racism, exploitation, and stigmatization. In the context of COVID-19, the Black community in China was again a target of multiple racial projects which sought to label their bodies as diseased and physical presence as a threat to the viability and safety of the Han majority. The global response was to mobilize online to expose how the Chinese government is systematically facilitating discriminatory policies against Black migrants in China. In the present paper, we explore how Twitter was utilized to mobilize awareness about anti-Black racism in China. We first present a brief history of African migration to China and then discuss the Han racial ideologies that are inspiring the anti-Black racism. We then use latent Dirichlet allocation as a topic modeling algorithm to extract underlying themes to discuss how anti-Black racism in the COVID-19 context was framed and subsequently challenged by the global community. Finally, we conclude with a brief discussion on COVID-19 and the future of the Black community in China.

Keywords
COVID-19, anti-Black racism, China, Han racial projects, African migrants

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Introduction

One of the dire outcomes of the emergence of COVID-19 has been the glaring racial and ethnic disparities that have defined the course of the spread of the virus. This has been true for all communities of color across the global system, including in China, where the Han majority has systematically targeted the Black community as being super-spreaders of COVID-19. As a recent migrant-minority community in China, the Black experience has been defined by vulgar racism, exploitation, and stigmatization. This is not surprising, as anti-black racism in China is embedded in Han-minzu racialist ideologies, which perceive Blackness as occupying the bottom of the racial totem pole (Dikötter, 1992; 1997). In the context of COVID-19, the Black community in China was again a target of multiple racial projects (Omi & Winant, 1994) that sought to label their bodies as diseased and physical presence as a threat to the viability and safety of the Han majority. The resulting actions led to wholesale banning of Black individuals from entering restaurants, engaging in business transactions, seeking medical attention in hospitals, renting apartments, and were forced into government-sanctioned quarantines (Marsh, 2020).

One response to this discrimination manifested on the social media platform, Twitter, which was used by the victims of the targeted attacks and activists alike to expose how the Chinese government is systematically facilitating discriminatory policies against Black migrants in China. The online mobilization has generated a tremendous outcry across Africa and the global community to hold China accountable. These online Twitter posts have not only framed the racialized experiences of Black migrants to the world but also produced simultaneous global responses to their lived reality in China under COVID-19. What overall themes can we derive from these public conversations on Twitter regarding anti-Black racism in China? How have the grievances of the Black community been framed in response to heightened Han racism in the context of COVID-19? In the present paper, we attempt to answer these questions by exploring how global Twitter mobilized awareness regarding anti-Black racism in China. We first discuss the history of African migration to China and then discuss the Han racial ideologies that are driving the anti-Black racism. We then discuss the topics that emerge as a result of our analysis of tweets using the natural language processing (NLP) technique of latent Dirichlet allocation (LDA) to extract the underlying topics of the analyzed tweets. Finally, we conclude with a brief discussion on anti-Black racism, COVID-19, and the future of the Black community in China.

Understanding Black Migration to China

Various countries in Africa and China initiated diplomatic relations within the first decades of the People’s Republic of China’s (PRC’s) founding. During this early period, Mao’s republic supported African liberation and communist movements that resisted colonial rule to gain independence. However, the Chinese accelerated their relations with African states in 1955, only after China actively pursued political allies to create an international united front against Western capitalist nations
In the 1955 Asian-African Conference, the Chinese government sought to solidify relations with Africa through policies that would be mutually beneficial, promote peaceful coexistence, and mount a firm opposition to colonialism (Shinn & Eisenman, 2012). The Afro-Asian People’s Solidarity Organization conferences in 1957 and 1960 further enhanced the relationship (Shinn, 2019). The PRC continued an anti-American, anti-capitalist, and anti-Western foreign policy outlook until the 1970s when the Communist Party gradually deserted certain ideological positions for those that were more pragmatic. It was the time that Mao met American President Richard Nixon to normalize Chinese-American relations to gain international support for admission into the United Nations, a permanent seat at the UN Security Council, a One-China policy in Taiwan, and support its opposition to the Soviet Union. African states played a crucial role in their ardent backing of these policies. As Deng Xiaoping initiated the open-door policy, China increased trade, investment, and cooperation with African states that switched from war and revolution to peace and development (Shinn, 1999). Prior to Xiaoping, the only Africans visible in China were diplomats but China’s economic and diplomatic shift attracted a significant number of African students to Chinese schools and universities.

China’s increased economic growth in the late 1990s forever changed African-Chinese relations. Along with the diplomats and students, merchants, entrepreneurs, and businesses from Africa started moving to China. The 1997 Asian financial crisis opened economic prospects for many Africans (Bodomo, 2012) and was further amplified by the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation conference in 2000. Chinese accession to the World Trade Organization in 2001 transformed the global market as Chinese industrialization, trade liberalization, and the embrace of economic globalization intensified the African-Chinese relationship (Shafaeddin, 2002). Part of China’s global economic strategies required the migration of business investors from different parts of the world to China and foreign economic policies focused on acquiring resources and selling Chinese products and goods to diverse markets. In the African context, African-Chinese trade exports reached 1.26 billion in 1992, however, since 2009, China has become Africa’s largest trading partner with the value reaching $192 billion in 2019 (SAIS-CARI, 2020). The Chinese imported cotton, manganese, oil, gas, and mineral resources from Africa. According to the Institute of Developing Economies (2020), China is also involved in infrastructure projects in 35 African countries. Military cooperation between the Chinese and numerous African countries has become stronger as the PRC uses its military to consolidate its interests. Consequently, African-Chinese trade has brought an estimated 1 to 2 million Chinese migrants to numerous states across the continent (Bodomo, 2020; French, 2014; Park, 2016).

China has also become a significant migration destination for Africans. Bodomo (2020) estimates that there are around 500,000 Africans who currently live and work in China and identifies several categories of migrants that often overlap: Short- and long-term students, professionals, diplomats, and official representatives, as well as short- and long-term traders. The increase of African migrants in China is due to several factors. Many Africans are no longer looking north as immigration policies
constrict legal forms of migration to the Americas and Europe. Therefore, many Africans focused on South-South migration to the Arab Gulf and Southeast Asia. China’s growing economy and substantially cheaper cost of living made it an even more common migration destination. The notable trend in African migration to China is the increased presence of traders who are currently the largest migrant category (Bodomo, 2020). Since the 2000s, major manufacturing cities such as Guangzhou have areas designated as “Chocolate City” by the locals. The continued presence of Africans in China is producing new racialized tensions exerted by the Han majority against the Black minority population. This Han racism is increasingly defining the lived experiences of the vulnerable Black migrant population in China. However, these experiences in the age of social media are also producing a global response wherein the Black migrant community in China is able to connect and raise awareness in their home nations in Africa and abroad to express their grievances and mobilize a response from within and outside the Chinese State.

**Chinese Racism Towards the Black Community**

To understand the vulgar racism experienced by Black migrants in China, one must delve into Chinese conceptions of race and racial identity. While many scholars have promulgated the perspective that racial projects only have European origins (Omi & Winant, 1994), the reality is that the experience of the Black community in China in the context of COVID-19 is a reflection of a deeply embedded racial project in which Han Chinese are believed to be culturally and racially superior to other ethnic minorities in China, including the Black migrant community (Dikötter, 1992). The term often utilized by the Chinese state to describe ethnicity and nationality is the concept of “minzu,” which is essentially defined by the homogeneity of a given group of people who may have a shared history, culture, ancestral bloodline (Dikötter, 1992; Joniak-Lüthi, 2015, P. 121). Sun Yat-sen, the father of modern China, advanced this belief in endowing the Han majority with superior racial qualities by stating that, “…the greatest force is common blood. The Chinese belong to the yellow race because they come from the bloodstock of the yellow race. The blood of ancestors is transmitted by heredity down through the race, making blood kinship a powerful force” (Dikötter, 1997, p. 4).

This racialized conception of group difference has been utilized by previous empires through to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in the contemporary context to racially “Sinicize” all officially recognized minzu’s towards a Han racial and ethnic identity (Dikötter, 1992; Joniak-Lüthi, 2015). The emphasis on the supremacy of Han Chinese culture and race is framed on the Othering of both non-Han, and non-European communities as barbarians needing civilizing drawing, on their imagined “history, blood, ancestors, culture, land, and minzu character” (Joniak-Lüthi, 2015, p. 121). Even chairman Mao critiqued this ideological framework by coining it “Han chauvinism” to describe the blatant racism and discrimination toward other ethnic minorities (Dikötter, 1992). This racial-ideological framework of Han superiority can also be seen manifested contemporaneously as the bedrock of the current CCP
genocidal campaigns against the Uyghurs in the Xinjiang province to cleanse Uyghur culture and identity and forcibly assimilate the Uyghur minzu into second class citizens (Buckley & Ramzy, 2020; Finnegan, 2020; Roberts, 2020). This same racial-ideological framework has also been the backdrop of the anti-Black racism that has undermined the presence of Black people in China since their early migrations and is currently defining their attitudes in the COVID-19 era. Starting back in 1986, African students marched in Beijing against racism, and again in 1989, around 2,000 Chinese students boycotted classes to protest Han student’s physical attacks on Black students for an African man dating a Chinese woman (Marsh, 2020).

The racial thinking that spurred the viral news items and video tweets showing Black people being kicked out of their apartments, not allowed into stores, restaurants, and hospitals, and forcibly targeted for quarantine is one that is embedded in Han racial ideologies that ultimately view Black people as inferior and disease-ridden (Dikötter, 1992). Even symbolic Blackness in Han culture reflects the identifier of the labor class who are labeled colloquially, “black-headed people” (Dikötter, 1992, p. 11). The negative portrayal of the Black community is sourced in a larger history where they were targeted and racialized in previous epidemics in fact, “race-making of people, viruses, and the places they share became a powerful means by which Chinese public health professionals made sense of infectious disease” (Mason, 2015, p. 2). At the height of the HIV-AIDS epidemic, African students were singled out as carriers of the disease as they “originated” from primitive societies whose “lack of moral fiber, in contrast to the virtues of socialism with Chinese characteristics” (Dikötter, 1997, p. 27). However, in contrast, the white race were “seen as contributors to China’s development, while Africans were viewed as uncultured suppliants” (Sautman, 1994, p. 424). This also shapes Chinese Han perceptions of the African continent and Black racial identity in which they view themselves not as exploiters, but in their ethnocentrism, as benevolent actors in a global racial hierarchy led by the “superior” European and American white race (Dikötter, 1992; 1997). In their examination of the well-being of African-Black migrants, Amoah et al. (2020) found that negative Chinese attitudes caused psychological distress on Africans through the confusion of their personal and social identity as black people, discrimination, and in the struggle to form enduring relationships with the locals. They also found that the media has also contributed to these negative attitudes by highlighting news reports on drugs, AIDS, illegal immigration, crime, fraud, and other offenses when mentioning African migrants (Li, Ma & Xue, 2009).

In the context of COVID-19, previous racial projects that identified the Black community with the propensity toward disease and violence were mobilized as they targeted the Black community as the source for the spread of the virus and a public health threat in Guangzhou and other cities with large Black minorities (Marsh, 2020). The turning point in the global media’s attention on anti-Black racism in China was the viral post of a local McDonald’s restaurant hanging a sign in the front door stating, “we’ve been informed that from now on black people are not allowed to enter the restaurant. For the sake of your health consciously notify the local police for medical isolation, please understand the inconvenience caused’
Such an act showed the normalization of discriminatory behavior in contemporary China, where Han owned stores often hang signs banning the entrance of Blacks, Uyghurs, and other minorities. The viral global reactions to the Black community’s online posts produced tremendous outrage on Twitter and mainstream new media outlets. Leading to several African nations raising concerns with Chinese ambassadors and tweeting their grievances to the public (Asiedu & Kazeem, 2020).

In an unprecedented step, the U.S. consulate advised: “African Americans or those who believe Chinese officials may suspect them of having contact with nationals of African countries to avoid the Guangzhou metropolitan area until further notice” (Chamber & Davies, 2020). In Africa, more than 300 non-governmental organizations called for the “immediate remedial action” over the “xenophobic, racist and inhumane treatment of Africans in China” (HRW, 2020). This global response not only shamed the Chinese government internationally, but it also showed the power of Twitter to raise awareness regarding the Black community’s plight in China. This mobilization revealed that racial thinking over COVID-19 is only one of many racialized experiences that shapes Black lives including racist and vulgar representations of Blackness in the media, immigrant pay gaps between Black and non-Black employees, and daily discrimination in housing, law enforcement, business, and in access to healthcare (HRW, 2020). Understanding the role of Twitter in response to Chinese racialized thinking surrounding COVID-19 will give us insight into the power of social media in collectively framing a response to expose Han anti-Black racism in the COVID-19 era.

Twitter and Anti-Black Racism in China

Computer-aided content analysis was used on Twitter data that looked at the treatment of Africans in the Chinese context in light of the rise of COVID-19. In using the LDA algorithm, a NLP technique to provide insight into communication patterns and trends, we are able to extract underlying themes from the corpus of tweets and hashtags relating to the Black experience in China, in the context of COVID-19. The utilization of LDA on Twitter is well-substantiated in the literature (Resnik et al., 2015) primarily because of its relative lucidity in output. It provides a series of keywords along with detailed information on the nature of the distribution and its importance within a given topic. This allows for a seamless process when extracting meaning from the text (Putri & Kusumaningrum, 2017).

Our preliminary analysis of tweets related to the treatment of Africans in China within the context of COVID-19 revealed that several prominent hashtags were utilized. Some of these hashtags included: #RacismInChina, #ChinailsRacist, #AfricansInChina, #stopchinaracism, #BlackLivesMatterChina, #BlackLivesMatter, #CCPVirus, and #BlackTwitter. We first mapped prominent keywords that were descriptive of the relationship between being Black in China in the midst of the COVID-19 crises, we then accessed Twitter’s application programming interface to query and extract tweets that contained content that were identified as relevant. After preprocessing the raw data, we extracted a total of 1,908 de-duplicated tweets.
with 10.4% of the total number of original tweets removed because they were either retweets or new tweets with the same text.

Our analysis using the tweets was divided into two segments: The preliminary analysis which produced three important discussion points and then the utilization of LDA. We first parsed through the tweets to identify common keywords and themes. The image below shows the top 15 most frequently appearing hashtags across the corpus of tweets. The graph provides information on which hashtags are occurring concurrently with the aforementioned keywords that were used to initiate the search for tweets (Figure 1).

The preliminary analysis of these designated tweets highlights three points that are worth mentioning. First, references to China and the CCP in conjunction with the discrimination reveal an indication that there is associated blame on the state of China for the discrimination that is being experienced by Africans in the midst of COVID-19. This may indicate the belief that anti-Black racism is systemic and expressed by the state. One specific tweet with the hashtag #blacklivesmatterchina states: “PolitiFact —Yes, #Africans are being evicted in #China amid fear of second #COVID19 wave #blacklivesmatterchina #BlackLivesMatter #COVID_19” (@DaltonCTeczon, 2020). This tweet also references discriminatory eviction practices by local Chinese against Africans due to the erroneous belief that Black bodies have a higher propensity to spread the coronavirus.

The second point that can be extracted from the various tweets is the troubling practice of hospitals and residential apartments turning African patients away due to racist beliefs that Blacks are coronavirus super-spreaders. One user tweeted, “Why can’t you receive a foreigner in your hospitals? If you don’t want foreigners in your country then stop giving them a visa. This dude is already sick and you’re heartless to treat him. RIP bro #china #discrimination #BlackLivesMatterchina #Covid_19” (@arnold_bellamy, 2020). The tweet is also accompanied by a video showing a physically ill Black man in the back of a car being rushed to the hospital. Upon arriving at the hospital, the driver of the vehicle hurries to a physical blockade acting as a barrier of the hospital, only to be turned away by the hospital staff, in spite of the begging and pleading of the driver. The driver is shown a few more times attempting to aid the ill man by rushing to other medical facilities, but to no success. Eventually, the video ends with the young Black man covered and presumably deceased on a gurney.

The third point in our preliminary analysis is the reference to Black Lives Matter, either the organization or the general descriptive statement. As a form of resistance to the institutionalized racism and oppression experienced by the Black migrant community, this reference may underlie the mobilization of global Black Twitter to raise awareness surrounding the racialized interactions in China between the Han majority and the Black migrant community. One tweet that makes this precise point is by user @Androidd19, who states, “Really hope the #BLACKLIVESMATTER will empower the #AfricanWarriors in #China to stand up to the Chinese government n the close-minded people blaming them for #TWDV19 [#TheWalkingDeadVirus19/ #COVID19] #BLACKLIVESMATTERCHINA #BLACKLIVESMATTERWORLDWIDE” (2020). Another example is a tweet that
Figure 1. Top 15 most frequent hashtags found in tweets related to “Africans,” “China,” and “COVID.”
proclaims, “Protest outside a Chinese Embassy, not a restaurant! #africansinchina #BlackLivesMatter #BlackLivesMatters #AhmaudArbery #AhmaudAubrey #ahmaudarbrey #SeanReed #McHaleRose #runwithmaud #runwithahmaud #BlackTwitter #BlackPantherParty #BlackPeople” (@Crow31Darkness, 2020). The tweet references and is in response to another tweet, which he is concurrently retweeting, by the conservative journalist @MrAndyNgo, which states provocatively and sarcastically, “‘Black Power!’ The New Black Panther Party held a protest today outside a Chinese-American restaurant in DC to protest China’s treatment of Africans. The restaurant has no affiliation with the Chinese government” (2020). A video is followed which shows a protest in front of a Chinese restaurant in what appears to be a group of individuals in black uniforms. The interesting item to note, once again, is the connection made between the discrimination faced by Black migrants in China, and the ongoing struggles faced by the Black community. Hashtags such as #AhmaudAubrey—which situates the critique of the Chinese government in the same vein as the tragic murder of Ahmed Aubrey by white men—further reinforce the deep connection between the global Black community and their struggles against White and Han supremacist ideologies. As we will see below, the underlying themes of oppression and Black solidarity can be captured from the corpus of tweets.

**LDA and Topic Modeling Analysis**

The next part of our analysis used the technique of topic modeling. Topic modeling, in general, refers to the process of identifying overarching themes within a corpus or set of documents. “LDA” is a NLP technique that has widespread application in machine learning. It uses a probabilistic approach to map individual keywords to generalized topics and attempts to couple them into coherent themes, providing an in-depth look into both the structure and meaning of the text. The LDA framework views each document as being composed of a distribution of topics, with each topic similarly being composed of a distribution of words. By making the assumption of a structural process in the development of the text, LDA uses variables such as the size of vocabulary, word frequency, specific words in each document, and the overall number of documents to create an output (Blei et al., 2003). LDA is a common technique utilized with a large corpus of texts and also smaller compilations, including those found in social media platforms such as Twitter, to extract underlying meaning, although there is some disagreement on the efficacy of the technique when dealing with shorter texts such as individual tweets (Ostrowski, 2015).

Once we applied our LDA algorithm, a series of four different topics were extracted from our corpus of tweets. Keywords for Topic 1 include, “Racism,” “African,” “Foreigners,” and “White.” Based on the highlighted keywords and the proximity of the “principal components,” which provide a smaller dimension to help with the comparison of these underlying concepts, we conclude that Topic 1 covered discussion on discrimination at a microlevel of analysis. This means that one theme that was common amongst the extracted tweets was the insight into the lived experiences and general reaction to the state of Africans in China amid coronavirus pandemic and their
discriminatory experiences felt in daily life. The convergence around the shock anti-Black racism produced tweets that highlighted the similarities between Han racial superiority and white superiority as interchangeable ideological forms in which its impact was experienced in the everyday life of being black in China. In one tweet, @theukimya comments on an Al Jazeera special highlighting Chinese anti-Black policies during the height of COVID-19 tweeting, “Interesting discussion with three Africans (one is a Ugandan med student in Wuhan) and one Chinese national discussing the anti-black racism happening in COVID affected China. The Chinese guest acts like a white person. Deny, deflect deny” (2020). In another tweet, @RichardSBlack1 states in full caps, “BLACK PEOPLE THIS WILL BE MY LAST POST FOR A WHILE, BUT BEFORE I LEAVE, I WANT TRY AND WAKE YOU UP ONE LAST TIME, YOU NEED TO REALISE THAT WE ARE AT WAR WITH RACISM THE WORLD OVER, IN THE UK IN AMERICA AND IN CHINA BLACK MEN AND WOMEN ARE BEING BRUTALIZED AND MURDERED BY STATE REPRESENTATIVES LIKE THE POLICE IN AMERICA AND THE POLICE IN THE UK, WE ARE BEING HUNTED BY RACIST INDIVIDUALS, WHEN ARE WE GOING TO WAKE UP” (2020).

Topic 2 consisted of keywords such as “Black,” “World,” “Chinese Virus,” “Xenophobia,” and “Taiwan is Not China.” Topic 2 shows that another underlying theme of the analyzed tweets was the expression of transnational grievances that involved the Chinese state, as indicated between the connection of keywords such as “Black,” “Hong Kong,” and “Xinjiang,” which is the focal point of international contention between the United States and the claims that China has committed Genocide in Xinjiang. Moreover, it highlights the connection between anti-Black racism with Chinese xenophobia in Xinjiang and Tibet and human rights violations in Hong Kong. The conflation of anti-Black racism points to the role of the state in institutionalizing discriminatory policies against Black people. This was also reflected on statements regarding anti-Black racism of Chinese workers and businessmen in Africa. In one tweet, @africandobah states, “The outrage about this is that #Africans endure #Chineseracism in China but also in their respective home countries where many Chinese live today. You’d think African leaders would stand up to #XiJimping, the seemingly quiet #dictator in search of an elusive glory” (2020). This tweet locates the problem of Chinese racism beyond the confines of China and into Africa identifying anti-Black racism as embedded in the practices of Chinese corporations and institutions based out of Africa.

Topic 3 contained keywords such as “Black Twitter,” “Coronavirus,” and “Black Lives Matter.” This topic specifically draws a connection between concepts connected with blackness and black movements and the coronavirus. Therefore, one interpretation of this underlying concept is the presence of global awareness to coronavirus in the Chinese context across the tweets that were analyzed. Many of the tweets that we analyzed showed the connection that individuals drew between the local mistreatment of African minorities in China, and the greater Black Lives Matter struggle, as a form of Black resistance to the institutionalized racism in China. In one tweet, a Nigerian citizen explains the global Black consciousness that the anti-Black experience
produced for the Black community. He states, “Nigerians in Nigeria are saying we are taking black Americans issues serious, yes we are. When Chinese were acting racism and xenophobic attack on Africans (Nigerians) in China. Black Americans stood for Africans. Even donated money and foods. What did Nigeria government did? (@kinghart23, 2020).”

Finally, Topic 4 contained key concepts including “China Must Fall,” “China Must Pay,” “Boycott China,” and “Wuhan Virus.” Topic 4 was the most reactionary and direct in its consequential manner. Due to this, one interpretation of the underlying concept is that the tweets that were analyzed containing a strong anti-Chinese sentiment encouraged organized movement mobilizations, given the mistreatment of Africans. In one tweet, @lu_wike tweets, “So much racism goes on in China every day. People are treated like animals and yet China is never confronted about it. This man needed medical attention; he did not deserve to die like this. Triggered” (2020).

Another tweet shows an African American woman divesting her business products from China because of the mistreatment of African Americans the title of the link of the article states, “After learning of racism in China, black woman formulates her own hand sanitizer; http://WashYourHandz.com” (@ABNewswire, 2020). In another tweet @PeteBedan argues as China’s largest trading partner, they should boycott Chinese products to force the government towards ending their discriminatory practices. He tweets, “African Governments should wake up now and figure out what Chinese people think of Largent trade partner. Africans we need to boycott Chinese made products” (2020). Another tweet throws the blame on African nations stating, “This is the kind of shit that happens when Africa OVERBORROWS, OVERSPENDS and OVELRELIES on #China #EximBank “(@BeingCharlie, 2020). Table 1 provides a breakdown of the topics along with keyword examples. Figure 2 uses the python package LDAavis to provide a multidimensional visual of the “intertopic distance map,” or the similarity and closeness between topics via their probability distribution. It also provides a look at the 30 most salient terms across the entire corpus (Sievert & Shirley 2014).

**Conclusion: Black-Chinese Relations, COVID-19, and the Future**

While the future is unclear regarding the conditions of Black migrants in China, their marginalized positions will most likely remain the same as the difficulties of the pandemic have exacerbated vulnerabilities, harassment, and social exclusion, while raising new challenges for Black migrants (Castillo & Amoah, 2020). The overall themes that we extracted from our analysis showcased the role of Twitter in promoting global consciousness and resistance to the racialized experiences of Black migrants in China during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our analysis further revealed how anti-Black racism is embedded in Chinese politics and society, facilitating the indiscriminate, lived racism on Black bodies and lives. We found that the impact of global Twitter, and the international coverage of these events posted online, not only empowered...
the Black community but influenced African perceptions of China and its contemporary role in Africa. One example was when, in a largely symbolic move, the deputy commissioner of the African Union (AU), Kwesi Quartey summoned the Chinese Ambassador and in clear terms stated that “Africa values its relationship with China, but not at any price. Further acts of brutality meted out to Africans will not be countenanced by the African Union and indeed all Africans” (AU, 2020). The Chinese Ambassador to the AU, Liu Yuxi responded that individuals identified in the social media posts carrying out racist and discriminatory acts, whether individuals or law enforcement, were either arrested or reprimanded. He went on to say that China will “use this as a lesson to improve relations with their African brothers” (African Union, 2020).

As a result of exposing the discrimination against Black migrants in China, the social media campaigns have increased pressure on African nations to crack down on Chinese activities and presence in Africa. One example is noted by Asiedu and Kazeem (2020), who cite parliamentary discussions on reciprocating evictions of Chinese nationals in Kenya, increased scrutinization of immigration documents for every Chinese national in Nigeria, and cracking down and arresting Chinese citizens involved in the Wildlife trade in Uganda. Despite the varied response from African countries, the circumstances of the Chinese in Africa are incomparable to the Black experience in China. Bodomo (2020) reveals the ongoing struggles and resilience of

Table 1. Breakdown of LDA-Derived Topics with Example of Keywords.

| Topic | Description | Example keywords |
|-------|-------------|------------------|
| Topic 1: Micro-level discrimination | Discrimination felt in daily life and the individualistic level by Black migrants in China amid coronavirus pandemic | Racism, African, foreigners, white |
| Topic 2: Transnational grievances | Transnational grievances that involve the Chinese state, as indicated between the connection of keywords such as “Black” and “Taiwan,” which is the focal point of international contention with the likes of the United States | Black, world, Chinese virus, xenophobia, Taiwan is not China |
| Topic 3: Global awareness | Connections are drawn between the local mistreatment of Black migrants in China, and the greater Black Lives Matter movement | Black Twitter, coronavirus, black lives matter |
| Topic 4: Reactionary | Reactionary and direct in its consequential manner, containing a strong anti-Chinese sentiment encouraging organized movement mobilizations, given the mistreatment of Black migrants | China must fall, China must pay, boycott China, Wuhan virus |

Note. LDA = latent Dirichlet allocation.
Figure 2. Visual of the “intertopic distance map” and the 30 most salient terms in the analyzed tweets, using the python package “LDAvis.” Proximity in the distance map is an indication of closeness in the probability distribution and similarity of topics, whereas the individual size of clusters indicates the prominence of the topic.
Black migrants forced to live at the margins of society, experiencing inequality in access to healthcare, cultural and linguistic difficulties, political and cultural marginalization, housing access and affordability, and incessant concerns with law enforcement. Along with these everyday struggles are the draconian immigration policies that purposely complicate the legal status of many Black migrants (Beech, 2012; Branigan, 2012; Lan, 2015; Li et al., 2009). Further research needs to be conducted to determine the long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Black migrant community and the serious implications it will have on their future status in China.

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