

Anti-Black racism in China: A decolonial investigation of racial hierarchy and resistance with Black English teachers

Racismo anti-negro na China: Uma investigação decolonial
sobre hierarquia racial e resistência com professores de Inglês Negros

Le racisme anti-noir en Chine: Une enquête décoloniale
sur la hiérarchie raciale et la résistance des professeurs d'Anglais Noirs

Zihuan Zhang*

Department of Sociological Studies, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, United Kingdom.

Abstract

This article aims to expose anti-Black racism in Chinese society by illustrating Black English teachers' experiences in the English language teaching (ELT) industry. Drawing upon eleven qualitative interviews, this article offers three findings. First, the racial hierarchy in China mirrors the temporal hierarchy constructed by Western colonialism in classifying cultures and peoples on a linear timeline. In detail, White people are placed on top, Chinese people are placed second, and Black people are placed last on the hierarchy. Second, such racial hierarchy reflects the essence of native-speakerism prevalent in the Chinese ELT industry. White supremacy underpins the illusion that Black teachers lack native-speaker status, giving rise to a sense of double consciousness in Black English instructors. Black teachers' expertise are sidelined and denied. Finally, diverse racial representations in pedagogical materials are vital for cultural exchange and epistemological infrastructure. Pluralising racial representations as an anti-racist education for Chinese students offers knowledge about non-White people when White supremacy-dominated racial discourses have been disseminated through prevalent media consumption. Black English teachers humanise non-White people through their English education for resistance against racism.

Keywords: China, decolonial theory, English education, anti-Black racism, resistance

Resumo

Este artigo tem por objetivo expor o racismo anti-negro na sociedade chinesa, ilustrando as experiências de professores/as de inglês negros/as no sector do ensino da língua inglesa (ELI). Com base em onze entrevistas qualitativas, este artigo apresenta três conclusões. Em primeiro lugar, a hierarquia racial na China reflete a hierarquia temporal construída pelo colonialismo ocidental ao classificar culturas e povos numa linha temporal linear. Em concreto, as pessoas brancas são colocadas no topo, as pessoas chinesas em segundo lugar e as pessoas negras no fim da hierarquia. Em segundo lugar, esta hierarquia racial reflete a essência do nativismo prevaletente na indústria chinesa de ELI. A supremacia branca sustenta a ilusão de que os/as professores/as negros/as não têm o estatuto de falantes nativos/as, originando-lhes um sentimento de dupla consciência. Os conhecimentos especializados dos/as

* **Correspondence:** Department of Sociological Studies, The Wave, 2 Whitham Road, Sheffield, S10 2AH, UK
Email: zhang197@sheffield.ac.uk

professores/as negros/as são postos de lado e negados. Por último, a diversidade de representações raciais nos materiais pedagógicos é vital para o intercâmbio cultural e a infraestrutura epistemológica. A pluralização das representações raciais, enquanto educação antirracista para os/as estudantes chineses/as, oferece conhecimentos sobre pessoas não brancas num contexto em que os discursos raciais dominados pela supremacia branca se disseminaram através do consumo predominante dos meios de comunicação social. Através do ensino da língua os/as professores/as de inglês negros/as humanizam as pessoas não brancas, com vista a uma resistência contra o racismo.

Palavras-chave: China, teoria decolonial, ensino de inglês, racismo anti-negro, resistência

Résumé

Cet article vise à dénoncer le racisme anti-noirs dans la société chinoise en illustrant les expériences de professeurs d'anglais noirs dans le secteur de l'enseignement de la langue anglaise (ELI). Basé sur onze entretiens qualitatifs, cet article présente trois conclusions. Premièrement, la hiérarchie raciale en Chine reflète la hiérarchie temporelle construite par le colonialisme occidental en classant les cultures et les peuples selon une chronologie linéaire. Plus précisément, les Blancs sont placés au sommet de la hiérarchie, les Chinois au deuxième rang et les Noirs au bas de l'échelle. Deuxièmement, cette hiérarchie raciale reflète l'essence du nativisme qui prévaut dans l'industrie chinoise des ELI. La suprématie blanche entretient l'illusion que les enseignants noirs n'ont pas le statut de locuteurs natifs, ce qui donne lieu à un sentiment de double conscience. Les connaissances spécialisées des enseignants noirs sont mises à l'écart et niées. Enfin, la diversité des représentations raciales dans le matériel pédagogique est vitale pour les échanges culturels et l'infrastructure épistémologique. La pluralisation des représentations raciales, en tant qu'éducation antirraciste pour les étudiants chinois, offre des connaissances sur les personnes non blanches dans un contexte où les discours raciaux dominés par la suprématie blanche se sont répandus par le biais de la consommation prédominante des médias. Par le biais de l'enseignement des langues, les professeurs d'anglais noirs humanisent les personnes non blanches afin de résister au racisme.

Mots-clés: Chine, théorie décoloniale, enseignement de l'anglais, racisme anti-noir, résistance

Introduction

This article presents theoretical and empirical findings that suggest China's racial issues should be understood in a decolonial paradigm by drawing upon Black English teachers' experiences of anti-Black racism in China. Existing research about racism in China subscribes to China-centred historiography and its methodological nationalism (Klein, 2012), which lacks a critical analysis of colonial impact in China. This article provides a synthesis that argues that coloniality in modern Chinese society manifests as epistemic racism, racial ideologies, and hierarchies.

Discourse of race in China

In the early 1990s, a historical investigation led by Frank Dikotter (1992) initiated the study of racism in China. Dikotter's consideration of Western colonisation in spreading racial knowledge was descriptive, failing to closely articulate how a power imbalance between the colonisers and the colonised could have implanted colonial and racialised thinking into Chinese thoughts of racism. His hesitation caused subsequent studies to exclude coloniality as an analytical unit in investigating the racial ideology manifested in modern Chinese society (Cheng, 2011; Foreman, 2020; Sautman, 1994). Coloniality, according to Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2007), persists long after the end of colonialism. It is a consequence of colonialism that

shows systems of power that define culture, labour, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production. The core of coloniality refers to racial hierarchies between the colonised and the colonisers, as well as the construction of global capitalism that controls labour and production. In this article, the racial structure in coloniality manifested in China will be studied.

As widely argued and accepted in academia, Western colonialism is the root of modern racism. Dikotter (1992) dismissed the possibility of harbouring crucial disproportionate military, economic, and political disparities between China and multiple Western colonisers. Dikotter insisted that the imposition of Western colonial ideas onto Chinese culture and society was hardly realised, as he asserts, “the influence of the West on the reformers, however, remains difficult to assess” (p. 65). This statement captured Dikotter’s problematic treatment of Western colonialism as merely “Western influence”, downplaying the detrimental impact of colonisation. This description conveniently avoids an analysis of power between the late Qing reformers and Western colonialists, enabling a narrative that the reformers carried out racialising projects of people by freely learning Western racial knowledge without any coercions. In fact, colonial cultures enjoyed epistemic privilege and were often made seductive for the colonised to desire and obtain (Quijano, 2007). According to Homi Bhabha (1984) and Anibal Quijano, the colonised might have been coerced to absorb the colonised knowledge and mimic the dominant cultures. Chinese survival was determined by the knowledge they were forced to obtain from the West (S. Wang, 2024). For example, learning English became a vital device for national survival and modernisation, even when the English language threatened Chineseness. Dikotter underestimated this power imbalance, deflected the historical impacts of colonialism, and shifted the responsibility of racialisation back to the Chinese own agency, consequently making the racialising project a manifestation of coloniality a self-inflicted Chinese tragedy. In detail, English education played a vital role in the process of racialising Chinese themselves and others, hierarchising English speakers and teachers. Consequently, English education is made to be a rich ground for examining historical and contemporary racial thoughts.

Dikotter’s (1992) theorisation is incomplete since he dismissed the importance of colonial imposition derived from asymmetrical power structures between China and Western colonialism. Thus, his theories open doors for considering coloniality in shaping racial structures and ideologies in China. Next, I will review existing literature to demonstrate that the legacy of colonialism has fostered symptoms of racial discourse in aspects of Chinese society such as the English language teaching (ELT) industry in China.

Racialised English education in China

Racism in the ELT industry has consistently caused harm to teachers (Aneja, 2016; Holliday, 2015; Leonard, 2019; Tupas, 2022). However, the extent to which anti-Black racism operates in China’s ELT industry has yet to be explored extensively. In this section, I want to highlight the absence of investigations on how Black teachers are disadvantaged and devalued in the rapidly developing ELT market in China which is dominated by Whiteness.

The English language has been made central to Chinese modernisation and economic competence in globalisation (Guo, 2013; Hu, 2009). English has been regarded by Chinese society as an important tool, especially among students and teachers. Moreover, the conditions of admission in postgraduate courses list English ability as strictly compulsory, making students receiving English as a superior language and an essential skill (Guo, 2013). Chinese English teachers use Western popular culture and media as teaching materials simultaneously illusions Western culture as more valuable. Chinese parents send their children abroad to secure symbolic, cultural, and social capitals due to believing Western education is superior (Tu, 2022). As a result, English teachers from native English-speaking countries who represent authenticity are highly valued and desired (Guo, 2013; L. Wang & Fang, 2020).

As much as it is resisted and protested, Chinese people are factually economically differentiated according to their abilities to speak English (L. Wang & Fang, 2020). Consequently, those who speak intelligible English are treated with higher value (Guo, 2013). Both individual life and the Chinese national modernising project are mutually aligned by pursuing the acquirement of English. This resonates with how Quijano (2007) considers the learning of the colonial culture enables enhancements of the colonised lives.

In the case of assisting Chinese modernisation by instructing English, foreign teachers are closely connected to English education in China by representing them as native speakers. Specifically, White English teachers occupy the most visible position that signifies the native-speaker status. Shuling Wang (2024) notes that Whiteness dictates China's ELT industry by privileging White over non-White teachers, following a blueprint designed by colonialism. Informed by her theoretical enquiry of the coloniality rooted in the English language, S. Wang notes that the English language is a race-making technology in spreading colonial ideologies and discourses. Based on the theoretical formation of Foucault (1975/1995, p. 194), technology is a neutral device fabricating realities for power to produce rituals of realities. S. Wang argues that the English language yields its disciplinary power to shape humans with racial ideologies that serve coloniality. In the process, this technology spreads ideas of race, setting the foundations for materialising racism and, thus, "race-making". By contrast, Shanshan Lan (2022) asserts that White privilege was rendered incompetent and precarious by China's domestic cultural hegemony. Both researchers ignored how Black teachers experience English education in China. This article then aims to investigate how anti-Black racism operates in the personal and professional lives of Black English teachers in order to study racism in China.

Temporality & coloniality

For arguing that racism in China mirrors a colonial implantation that took place in other postcolonial societies, this paper deploys a decolonial approach. Walter Dignolo's (2021) definition of race and racism set the foundation for this paper. Dignolo noted that 'race' as a concept itself is racist, since there is no 'race' beyond the concept of 'race'. In other words, race is not what there is about humans, but what one perceives there is. This means that race is an epistemic, rather than ontic, issue. I will use this epistemological definition of racism to examine racial ideology in Chinese society.

The concept of race was mobilised to classify humans based on eye colours, skin colours, language, religions, primitive or civilised, and developed/ underdeveloped (Mignolo, 2021). Racism therefore is constructed upon the classifications of races. The modern form of racism in current societies, according to Mignolo, constituted the Colonial Matrix of Power (CMP), which derived from the 16th century blueprint of colonial implantation of racism. In other words, as Quijano (2000) notes, there was no race and racism before the 16th century when European colonisation of the Americas commenced. The symptoms of modern racial classification consist of a dominant White people, and the subordinated non-White peoples, especially the Black race. White supremacy and anti-Black racism are specific forms of racism derived from Western coloniality. It eventually evolved into a racial hierarchy with superior White people and inferior others, with Black people at the bottom of this hierarchy. Similar ideas of racial hierarchy have also documented in China. With an internalisation of Chinese deficiency, Han Chinese put the White race on a pedestal, consequently establishing their proximity to Whiteness and subjugating Blackness at the lowest position in the hierarchy (Foreman, 2020; Shih, 2013).

A new discourse derived from colonialism also established the temporal understanding of Chinese society. Grounded in decolonial theory (Barlow, 1993; Mignolo, 2021; Quijano & Ennis, 2000), Marius Meinhof (2017) contends that a modern Chinese temporality is colonial because the colonial temporality is characterised by conceptualising peoples, cultures, and societies within a linear notion of progressing time, also central to the postcolonial critique of colonial conception of time (Bhabha, 1994/2012; Meinhof, 2017). This colonial temporality denotes that different stages of modernisation were outlined by a linear progression of time. A nation's economic and political shift can only be perceived as moving forward or backward measured by time. Consequently, a ranking of different cultures of nations was constructed in a temporal way, imagining "the time-lag of cultural differences", according to Homi Bhabha (p. 340). It inevitably implied a hierarchy where cultures that achieved modernity occupy the highest position, and the cultures not yet modernised come last. This hierarchy of modernity explicates locations of cultures on the timeline. China is placed in the middle of this linear timeline, behind Western modernity and ahead of the rest of the world. It might simultaneously demonstrate a hierarchy of peoples and races: Whiteness first, Chineseness in the middle, and Blackness last, from the Chinese perspective. Vocabularies of 'advanced', 'developed', 'backward', and 'underdeveloped' are often deployed for describing this hierarchy of modernity and racialising people accordingly. I will discuss this racial hierarchy in Chinese society in subsequent sections.

In summary, racial discourse in China should be analysed within a framework of decolonial sociology. A decolonial investigation offers the coloniality of knowledge and being for understanding the knowledge production as well as the formations of races, gender, and sexuality in China. A racial hierarchy emerges as an overarching theme from Mignolo's (2021) theory of the origin of racism, to the hidden structure of colonial modernity and temporality in China. This racial hierarchy puts Chinese people in between imaginaries of Whiteness and Blackness. Next, I will introduce and discuss my data collection methods.

Methods & methodology

This article reports a segment of my PhD project that investigates anti-Black racism experienced by Black English teachers in Shanghai, China. All participants were recruited based on one criterion: Black English teacher who has been living and working in Shanghai for at least one year. Initially, through a snowball sampling method, thirty Black English teachers shown their interests in this research and agreed to join a WeChat group for potential participation. However, in the end, eleven teachers were able to participate. Due to a lack of enthusiasm, schedule unavailability, logistical difficulties, and the disturbance of Covid-19 related constant lockdowns to their personal and professional lives in Shanghai, nineteen Black teachers in the group chat could not take part. I conducted eleven interviews with eleven participants, each participant was interviewed once.

The countries of origin of Sub-Saharan African Black teachers are not disclosed because their nationality might become identifiable and potentially breach anonymity and confidentiality, given that these African nationalities are not as common as the US nationals in the ELT industry. S. Wang (2024) identifies that English education in China is where most frequent and constructive interactions between Chinese and foreign people happen on daily basis. Black English teachers' unique experiences and expert knowledge intensify our conversations about how racism is felt, described, and understood. For addressing the research questions, the low number of participants and high volume of data collected offer what Malterud et al. (2016) conceptualise as 'information power'. It indicates that the more relevant the collected data is for the study, the fewer numbers of participants are required. This research compensated for the low number of participants by collecting as large, rich, and competent an amount of useful data as was feasible.

Geographical origin	Name (Pseudonym)	Gender	Employment	Years of experiences (at the time of research)	Date and the duration of interview
Black teachers from North America	Ash	Woman	Bilingual Elementary School	About 5 Years	30th April 2022, 02:18:13
	Charles	Man	Higher Education Institute	About 7 years	5th May 2022, 01:37:41
	Monica	Woman	Bilingual Elementary School	About 8 Years	2nd September 2022, 02:13:59
	Nancy	Woman	Bilingual High School	About 8 Years	22nd June 2022, 01:34:31
	Nola	Woman	Bilingual Kindergarten	At least one year	10th June 2022, 00:54:32
	Omar	Man	Commercial English Training Centre	About 6 Years	6th May 2022, 01:53:44
	Snohh	Woman	Bilingual Elementary School	About 5 years	8th June 2022, 01:33:19

Geographical origin	Name (Pseudonym)	Gender	Employment	Years of experiences (at the time of research)	Date and the duration of interview
Black teachers from Sub-Saharan Africa	Anna	Woman	Bilingual Kindergarten	More than 5 Years	29th June 2022, 01:17:05
	Dee	Woman	Bilingual Kindergarten	About 7 Years	30th May 2022, 01:49:59
	Ice	Woman	Bilingual Kindergarten	About 5 Years	13th June 2022, 01:01:18
	JB	Woman	Bilingual Kindergarten	At least one year	3rd June 2022, 01:22:57

Due to the travel restrictions during the pandemic in 2022, I could not travel from the UK to China. Participants were recruited remotely and all interviews were carried out via videoconferencing platforms, such as Zoom. Internet-mediated methods were evidently useful for a global recruitment of participants when I had limited access to long-distance travel (Quartiroli et al., 2017). Online interviews were particularly beneficial in researching sensitive topics like racism as my Black participants were afforded comfort in their chosen safe space, which was usually their own apartments. It facilitated the interviews to be conducted in a familiar environment, making it easier for Black people to discover private stories and recall memories (Quartiroli et al., 2017; Weller, 2017). The interview questions were prepared around both personal and professional lives of Black English teachers in China, focusing on their experiences of racism in these two settings. I coded the collected data according to the categorisations invented by Udo Kuckartz (2014), such as analytical category and theoretical category. I then produced several analytical and theoretical codes, for example, ‘anti-Black racism in workplaces’, ‘racial hierarchy’, and ‘Whiteness and White supremacy’.

The limitations of this research can be found in the lack of data from Black English teachers who are from anglophone regions other than North America and Sub-Saharan Africa; the fieldwork was unable to reach to Black teachers who are not from these two regions. Inquiries about their qualifications, native language status, and salary were not conducted due to concerns of confidentiality and protection of personal information, as these details could become identifiable. It is also observable that my participants are skewed towards Black women. It is not to suggest that Black women are more desirable in China’s ELT industry nor is it stating that Black women are more willing to come forward to speak against racism compared to Black men. Future research can seek a more balanced gender representation and distribution amongst the participants.

My identity as a Chinese student studying in the UK enabled me to interview Black English teachers in China. They felt a sense of familiarity as they teach and mentor Chinese students to study abroad as their profession. However, my participants did not treat me as one of their Chinese students, colleagues, or acquaintances who might perpetuate racism. Rather, my position was perceived to be someone who can understand and validate their experiences of racism. Ash, in particular, said it was a surprise to her that a Chinese person would care about Black experiences of racism in China. The way they told me their experiences did not resemble teachers instructing students, but more like equal parties in communications.

In addition, my membership as a PhD candidate at a UK higher education institute also grants me a sense of credibility that I am able to use English fluently and understand their perspectives and stories thoroughly. Based on these observations, I have been able to build strong rapport with my participants. In the following sections, I will discuss data collected from fieldwork during my PhD project, illuminating racism in China's English education industry to reflect the racial ideology and hierarchy in Chinese society.

Findings

Racial hierarchy & temporality & coloniality

A racial hierarchy that upholds White supremacy and worsens anti-Black racism has existed in China since the 20th century (Shih, 2013). In this section, I will discuss the colonial temporality that was installed in Chinese society and how it encapsulated the racial hierarchy shown in Black teachers' personal lives.

I want to present two testimonies of Anna and Omar on their encounters with explicit racial hierarchy. Anna recalled an attempted assault that she has not disclosed to anyone else:

I was actually coming from work. So, I'm literally putting in my earphones. I'm going to the subway, and these two guys walking behind me. So, one of them touches my shoulder, and then I'm thinking like, "why are you touching me?" And, he was like, "I just want [to]", I was like, "you don't touch somebody you don't know, you can't do that". And then he retaliates and says to me, "you're nothing in this world... In this world, the order is White people, Chinese and Black people. You are at the bottom of the list."

Similarly, Omar shared his observation of a hierarchy of racialised attractiveness in China's gay male community:

On the hierarchy of people who are treated well, you get White people first, and then locals second, and then people who are White passing third, and then it just goes down and down..., and then you get to the Black people.

The 'order' of races described in Anna's and Omar's accounts matches Shih's (2013) description of the European colonial legacy in China. She explicates a racial hierarchy where China's middle position coexists with and is comparative and relational to absolute White superiority and Black inferiority. This hierarchy exemplified in the narratives of Anna and Omar also mirrors racial classifications in other former colonies, such as India, the Philippines, South Africa, the USA, and Brazil, where Whiteness continues to occupy the top while Blackness continues to be at the bottom (Udah, 2017). China is not exempt from this global racial order. Quijano and Ennis (2000) specified how modern temporality in colonial discourse made the concept of time central to describing the colonised as 'backward' and 'primitive'. This forged ontological colonial difference, which legitimised the racial-temporal inferiority of the colonised. In other words, colonial differences were established and maintained on both racial and temporal notions of the inferiority of the colonised. Therefore, a temporal hierarchy is a racial hierarchy.

Anna's and Omar's experiences were representative of a China-specific yet globally connected form of anti-Black racism. Meinhof (2017) identified a temporality in the Chinese national modernisation discourse in which

China is always deficient compared to the West. China, in short, needs to ‘catch up’ in time. For the racial relations between White and Chinese people, Whiteness was placed above Chineseness. Moreover, for the racial relation between Black and Chinese people, Blackness is placed below Chineseness. According to Sullivan’s (1994, p. 442) readings of the 19th-century Chinese reformer Liang Qichao’s understanding of races, the Chinese and the White races were considered “historical races”. Whereas other racial groups, especially Black people, were considered “unhistorical races”. Ramon Grosfoguel (2007) reminded us that the hierarchy of superiority and inferiority is always changing. In the 19th century, the main narrative was to describe the inferior people as ‘people without history’. This discussion on the temporal and racial hierarchies between White, Chinese, and Black people breaks down the binary racial dynamics between the White and Black races. Chinese people who are themselves historically subjugated by White supremacy become perpetrators of anti-Black racism due to an idea of equating Blackness to inferiority.

An admiration for Western cultures (conflated with Whiteness) and a disdain towards non-Western others (conflated with non-Whiteness), specifically Blackness, is clear in the Chinese ideology of races. For example, Sautman (1994), in his quantitative survey of racial classifications of foreigners in the world view and episteme of Chinese intelligentsia and university students, showed that the word “backward” was usually utilised to describe Black African people. On the contrary, according to the survey in Sautman’s study, there was a pattern of surveyed individuals rating Americans, Western Europeans, and Japanese as the most “cultured” people. While Sautman’s survey was conducted thirty years ago, many recent studies demonstrated that narratives describing Black African people as “backward” with other harmful stereotypes of Blackness have persisted into the present (Castillo, 2020; Lan, 2016, 2019; Pfafman et al., 2015; Zhou, 2023). These negative connotations about Blackness rooted in coloniality and the devaluation and subordination of Black people in the Chinese racial hierarchy are constitutive of each other.

What was interesting in Anna’s story particularly was that the two Chinese men expressed their racist views in English, not in Chinese. Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2007) noted that the coloniality of being primarily concerns the lived experiences of coloniality and the colonial impact on languages. In other words, one becomes oneself because of one’s language. That chosen language has permitted access to a certain set of knowledge programmed into the language itself. Speaking a language obtains its knowledge. That is, speaking English discloses and absorbs knowledge in the English language. This knowledge in the English language includes what Mignolo (2021) conceptualised as epistemological racism, which would be taught through English instructions. It is, therefore, highly likely that the two Chinese men felt comfortable enacting anti-Black racism in English because they learnt that in English. I thus argue that this attempted racial assault committed by these two Chinese men towards Anna in Shanghai shows coloniality in Chinese society.

Drawing upon what S. Wang (2024) contended about the English language as a racialising technology in formulating categories and meanings of race and racism, particularly in China, the English language and its education has historically orchestrated racialised knowledge, such as White supremacy and anti-Black racism to be imposed on and propagated in Chinese society. As a colonial instrument, the English language racialised the Chinese episteme to ensure the birth of racial formations. With Japanese translations of

European colonial discourses (Meinhof, 2017), the English language was mobilised to spread racialised information in China historically. ELT industry still operates under the principle of White supremacy and the marginalisation and subordination of non-White teachers, continuing the mission of instructing racialisations of people in a mundane act of learning English.

In summary, the racial hierarchy in China is grounded in the same hierarchy constructed by the global White hegemony. With a national narrative of modernisation stages behind Western modernity on the linear timeline, under the same White supremacy, the Chinese were subjugated but still above Black people, so anti-Black racism is repeatedly reproduced. Colonial temporality produces racial hierarchy in China. Anna's and Omar's stories illustrate a crucial repercussion of the colonality of being, which is racialised knowledge as linguistic properties are taught in the ELT industry. It functions as a salient production continuously eclipsing Chinese racial episteme and being. The colonial discourse of racism was then commissioned through the ELT industry by each stakeholder failing to challenge the *status quo* of White supremacist practices.

Blackness & China's ELT industry

Following the understanding of how Black people are placed in the racial hierarchy in China, there is a need to articulate how Blackness is devalued, especially in the Chinese ELT industry. In this section, I will explore how anti-Black racism in China's ELT industry manifests as native-speakerism that resonates with the DuBoisian conception of double consciousness.

W.E.B Du Bois (2007) defines double consciousness in terms of how Black people have to perceive themselves from the perspectives of their own and of the dominant White majority in the US society. Du Bois articulates that a Black American cannot reconcile Blackness and American identity without being targeted by racism. In other words, Black people are rejected of their American identity which should always be White. Similarly, Black English teachers, who are native speakers of English, are rejected of the benefits and entitlements derived from being a native-speaker. It comes down to Black teachers being denied of being native speakers because the idea of a native speaker of English has been dominated and dictated by an image of a White English teacher (Tupas, 2022). Whiteness replaces native English-speaking nationalities as the forefront condition for English education.

For Black English teachers, their nationalities of English-speaking countries grant them a false sense of entitlement that they should be employed because the industry values native speakers. Yet, Black teachers often find themselves in predicaments caused by that same native-speakerism because it is not compatible with Blackness. In other words, their Blackness cancels out their native-speakerism status. But it is not a criticism against Black teachers as if their support of native-speakerism is unfounded. In many cases, native-speakerism is utilised for combating against unethical preferences of White teachers who might not be as experienced and qualified as Black teachers. Nola recalls that: "You'll see job ads and they'll ask for Eastern Europeans and Russians. Because they're White. Doesn't matter if they can't speak proper English". Native-

speakerism validates their observation of racial inequalities. Meanwhile, it is difficult to realise that native-speakerism is the root of their issues of how Blackness is devalued in China's ELT industry when Black teachers, especially those who are from North America, benefit from it simultaneously.

Therefore, Black English teachers who experience double consciousness in China's ELT industry tend to be supportive of native-speakerism because they think their own native-speaker nationality would become credible. However, their Blackness conflicts with native speakerist ideology in ways that native speakers of English must always represent Whiteness. If Black teachers desire employment, they have to show their proximity to Whiteness, such as their nationality of native English-speaking countries. Native-speakerism is thus racially essentialist because it subscribes exclusively to White supremacy that constantly marginalises and oppresses Black expertise and professionalism. Next, I will discuss anti-racist resistance in Black teachers' pedagogy.

Pedagogical resistance against racism

Although Black teachers face racialised marginalisation in the ELT industry in China, they are actors proactively striving for a more equal and diverse environment for their students. They do this in part by designing inclusive educational materials. In the last sections, I argued that those who allow the ELT industry to keep White supremacist pedagogy are those who oppress non-White, especially Black teachers. The English language as a race-making technology has continued to instruct racism to be installed during the process of learning knowledge mediated by English education (S. Wang, 2024). In wider Chinese society, anti-Black stereotypes were consumed by the widespread circulation of US media (Pfafman et al., 2015). Black English teachers nevertheless use their platform to resist ideas and practices of a singular episteme controlled by White supremacy. ELT has become at the forefront of confronting and redefining the racialisation of different people in China. Below I demonstrate and discuss Black teachers' autonomy in designing their own teaching materials and its pedagogical and racial implications.

Some participants have reported that non-White representations are absent in China's English textbooks. Snohh shared her opinions on China's English curriculum about race and racism:

I don't think they teach anything about race and racism. I've never seen anything in anything I've taught since I've been in China as a whole about racism, or race. I think they know about, like how people come from different countries.

Similarly, Ice said: "When it comes to race, I think it's something that they sweep under the carpet... I think it's something we should be incorporating in the curriculum". To address an imbalance of racial representations, Black teachers designed and incorporated more educational materials into their classes. For example, Nancy recalled that she had a particular pedagogy for exposing her Chinese students to racial diversity:

I make sure to expose my students to as much diversity as possible when it comes to, like, teaching materials... I make sure that there's a representation of a spectrum of people. That they see people from all walks of life.

Nancy's emotionality and empathy derived from her past experiences and motivated her to include representations of racial diversity for her students. For example, Nancy included non-native English speakers in listening exercises to expose her students to different accents and dialects. She incorporated English literature written by famous Black authors like Maya Angelou. Research has found that there is no critical examination of race in school education in China (S. Wang, 2024). Whiteness is inevitably the default definition of what the English language is, thus reinforcing the singularised racialisation of English speakers – being White only and perpetuating White supremacy in dominating the ELT market. Nancy's effort to incorporate non-White racial representations into her teaching was, for her, key in resisting White supremacy in English education.

According to Stuart Hall (1997) and his study of representations, language constructs meanings as it operates in a system of representations. Language thus works as a medium for thoughts and ideas to be represented in cultures. Representation, in turn, is “central to the process by which meaning is produced” (p. 1). A cultural identity has to be closely associated with cultural representations and knowledge produced for that given culture. For a cultural identity to be constructed, cultural narratives, stories, and memories need to be incorporated into mundane routines. Dahya and King (2020, p. 676) asserted that “meaning is made in relation to other, precedent, parallel, or similar multimodal texts. Power circulates through these complex media forms”. Whiteness represented by the English language has precisely relied on the same White cultural discourse to be spread in the ELT industry. In other words, White dominance in the ELT industry is constructed through its excessive representation, which in turn fostered powerful White dominance in English education. For the White supremacist structure in the ELT industry to be resisted, meanings and discourse constructed by non-White representations need to be constantly prioritised and pluralised. Language, which is the medium through which representations are disseminated, uses symbols to convey cultural identities, especially the diverse cultures featured in Nancy's English language classes. Ash suggests that Chinese people believe that someone who speaks English natively cannot be non-White. For her, any intervention in relation to the trajectory directed by White-only English education must include a broad representation of different peoples within pedagogical practices.

In summary, representations, in Hall's (1997) understanding, are key to establishing and constructing meanings and cultural identities. For a White representation dominating the ELT industry to terminate, non-White representations must be widely mobilised for a structural normalisation of seeing non-White races in educational content. It needs to be supported by the nature of English education as a race-making technology shaping the racialisation of the English language itself. Black English teachers and their autonomously designed educational materials could become front-line resistance forces, leading the navigation through White supremacist and anti-Black structures in the ELT industry and wider Chinese society.

Conclusion

In this article, I used decolonial theory as a lens to understand Black English teachers' experiences of racism in order to expose racism in Chinese society. I have shown how my participants experienced blatant racism

in a racially hierarchised Chinese society as Black people. Also, their experiences of double consciousness with native-speakerism in China's ELT industry can be encapsulated as a form of anti-Black racism. If the ELT industry indeed occupies a central position in disseminating colonial and racial ideology to its 400 million English learners in China (L. Wang & Fang, 2020), and if English education functions as a racialising technology (S. Wang, 2024), then the ways in which anti-Black racism pervades the ELT industry should be studied with paramount urgency. The ELT market is controlled by racial essentialist native-speakerism which inevitably upholds White supremacy over Black expertise. Paired with Western popular media circulations, negative stereotypes of Black people are ingrained into Chinese society (Guo, 2013; Pfafman et al., 2015). Black people then are entangled in the consequences of Chinese historical narratives about modernisation, where a linear notion of time upon which progressions towards modernity are racially classified. Black English teachers' experiences of racism in their professional and personal lives illustrate the racial realities in Chinese society, where racial temporality exists as evidence of coloniality. In Chinese society, which has been deeply anti-Black since its colonised history, Black people's resistance against racism can be shown in their efforts and endeavours in teaching and humanising non-White people in their educational materials. In conclusion, studying anti-Black racism in modern Chinese society through the ELT industry assists in emphasising the need to decolonise the field of racism in China.

Acknowledgements: I thank both Dr. Matthias Benzer and Dr. Lucy Mayblin for their feedback on this article. Without their tireless guidance and insightful comments throughout my PhD journey, I could not have completed this article.

References

- Aneja, Geeta A. (2016). (Non)native speakerhood: Rethinking (non)nativeness and teacher identity in TESOL teacher education. *TESOL Quarterly*, 50(3), 572–596. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.315>
- Barlow, Tani (1993). Colonialism's career in postwar China studies. *Positions*, 1(1), 224–267. <https://doi.org/10.1215/10679847-1-1-224>
- Bhabha, Homi (1984). Of mimicry and man: The ambivalence of colonial discourse. *October*, 28, 125–133. <https://doi.org/10.2307/778467>
- Bhabha, Homi (2012). *The location of culture* (2nd ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203820551> (Original work published in 1994)
- Castillo, Roberto (2020). "Race" and "racism" in contemporary Africa-China relations research: Approaches, controversies and reflections. *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 21(3), 310–336. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649373.2020.1796343>
- Cheng, Yinghong (2011). From campus racism to cyber racism: Discourse of race and Chinese nationalism. *The China Quarterly*, 207, 561–579. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741011000658>
- Dahya, Negin, & King, Wes Eli (2020). Politics of race, gender, and visual representation in feminist media education. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 41(5), 673–690. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2020.1769934>
- Dikotter, Frank (1992). *The discourse of race in modern China*. Hong Kong University Press.

- Du Bois, William E. B (2007). *The souls of Black folk*. Oxford University Press.
<https://files.libcom.org/files/DuBois.pdf>
- Foreman, Matthew Wong (2020). Racial modernity in republican China, 1927–1937. *Asian Ethnicity*, 23(2), 377–397. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14631369.2020.1792765>
- Foucault, Michel (1995). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. Vintage Books.
https://monoskop.org/images/4/43/Foucault_Michel_Discipline_and_Punish_The_Birth_of_the_Prison_1977_1995.pdf (Original work published in 1975)
- Grosfoguel, Ramon (2007). The epistemic decolonial turn: Beyond political-economy paradigms. *Cultural Studies*, 21(2-3), 211–223. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601162514>
- Guo, Yan (2013). Teaching English for economic competitiveness: Emerging issues and challenges in English education in China. *Canadian and International Education*, 41(2), 28–50.
<https://doi.org/10.5206/cie-eci.v41i2.9202>
- Hall, Stuart (1997). *Representation: Culture representations and signifying practices*. The Open University.
https://fotografiaeteoria.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/the_work_of_representation_stuart_hall.pdf
- Holliday, Adrian (2015). Native-speakerism: Taking the concept forward and achieving cultural belief. In Adrian Holliday, Pamela Aboshiha, & Anne Swan (Eds.), *(en)Countering native-speakerism: Global perspectives* (1st ed., pp. 11–25). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hu, Guangwei (2009). The craze for English-medium education in China: Driving forces and looming consequences. *English Today*, 25(4), 47–54. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266078409990472>
- Klein, Thoralf (2012). Rethinking the origins of “Western” imperialism in China: Global constellations and imperial policies, 1790–1860. *History Compass*, 10(11), 789–801. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.12002>
- Kuckartz, Udo (2014). *Qualitative text analysis: A guide to methods, practice & using software*. SAGE.
<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446288719>
- Lan, Shanshan (2016). The shifting meanings of race in China: A case study of the African diaspora communities in Guangzhou. *City & Society*, 28(3), 298–318. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ciso.12094>
- Lan, Shanshan (2019). Reconstructing Blackness in grassroots interactions between Chinese and Africans in Guangzhou. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 92(2), 481–508.
- Lan, Shanshan (2022). Between privileges and precariousness: Remaking Whiteness in China’s teaching English as a second language industry. *American Anthropologist*, 124(1), 118–129.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.13657>
- Leonard, Josie (2019). Beyond ‘(non) native-speakerism’: Being or becoming a native-speaker teacher of English. *Applied Linguistics Review*, 10(4), 677–703. <https://doi.org/10.1515/applirev-2017-0033>
- Maldonado-Torres, Nelson (2007). On the coloniality of being: Contributions to the development of a concept. *Cultural Studies*, 21(2-3), 240–270. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601162548>
- Malterud, Kirsti, Siersma, Volkert Dirk, & Guassora, Ann, Dorrit (2016). Sample size in qualitative interview studies: Guided by information power. *Qualitative Health Research*, 26(13), 1753–1760.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732315617444>

- Meinhof, Marius (2017). Colonial temporality and Chinese national modernization discourse. *InterDisciplines*, 8(1), 51–80. <https://doi.org/10.4119/indi-1037>
- Mignolo, Walter (2021). *The politics of decolonial investigations*. Duke University Press.
- Pfafman, Tessa M., Carpenter, Christopher J., & Tang, Yang (2015). The politics of racism: Constructions of African immigrants in China on ChinaSMACK. *Communication, Culture and Critique*, 8(4), 540–556. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cccr.12098>
- Quartiroli, Alessandro, Knight, Sharon M., Etzel, Edward F., & Monaghan, Molly (2017). Using Skype to facilitate team-based qualitative research, including the process of data analysis. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 20(6), 659–666. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2016.1275371>
- Quijano, Anibal (2007). Coloniality and modernity/rationality. *Cultural Studies*, 21(2-3), 168–178. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601164353>
- Quijano, Anibal, & Ennis, Michael (2000). Coloniality of power, eurocentrism, and Latin America. *Nepantla: Views from South*, 1(3), 533–580. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/23906>
- Sautman, Barry (1994). Anti-Black racism in post-Mao China. *The China Quarterly*, 138, 413–437. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741000035827>
- Shih, Shu-Mei (2013). Race and revolution: Blackness in China’s long twentieth century. *PMLA*, 128(1), 156–162. <https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2013.128.1.156>
- Sullivan, Michael (1994). The 1988–89 Nanjing anti-Black protests: Racial nationalism or national racism? *The China Quarterly*, 138, 438–457. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741000035839>
- Tu, Siqi (2022). In search of the “best” option: American private secondary education for upper-middle-class Chinese teenagers. *Current Sociology*, 70(6), 824–842. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00113921211034899>
- Tupas, Ruanni (2022). The coloniality of native speakerism. *Asian Englishes*, 24(2), 147–159. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13488678.2022.2056797>
- Udah, Hyacinth (2017). Racial hierarchy and the global Black experience of racism. *Open Journal of Social Science*, 5, 137–148. <https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2017.53012>
- Wang, Li, & Fang, Fan (2020). Native-speakerism policy in English language teaching revisited: Chinese university teachers’ and students’ attitudes towards native and non-native English-speaking teachers. *Cogent Education*, 7(1), Article 1778374. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2020.1778374>
- Wang, Shuling (2024). Racism in China’s English language teaching industry: English as a race-making technology. *TESOL Quarterly*, 0(0), 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.3336>
- Weller, Susie (2017). Using Internet video calls in qualitative (longitudinal) interviews: Some implications for rapport. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 20(6), 613–625. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2016.1269505>
- Zhou, Zhiqiu Benson (2023). Patriarchal racism: The convergence of anti-Blackness and gender tension on Chinese social media. *Information, Communication & Society*, 27(2), 223–239. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2023.2193252>