

COMMENTS & NOTES

Petty Annoyances? Revisiting John Emmanuel Hevi's *An African Student in China after 50 Years*

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This article reappraises John Emmanuel Hevi's "An African Student in China", a 1966 book that complained about Chinese racism towards Africans but has received scholarly criticism that, for instance, petty annoyances had been overly exaggerated. In an attempt to construct images of Africans in China during Mao's era and to re-analyse whether Hevi's work was truly based on "petty annoyances", the author, using declassified official files, studies the circumstances that Hevi and his peers confronted on educational campuses and in Chinese society.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary research regarding Africans in China focuses mostly on the post-reform era.¹ Records of Africans in Chinese society during Mao's years are limited, and John Emmanuel Hevi's *An African Student in China* is probably the most important volume.² Hevi describes the strictness of Chinese political control, the preferential treatment of Albanians, the arrests of Chinese girls for their friendships with Africans and, particularly, Chinese feelings of racial superiority over black Africans. The book ends with a description of the collective hunger strike and exodus of most African students due to the beating of a Zanzibari student by the Chinese in March 1962.

It can be hard to believe that the extremely socialist China fostered racism against Africans, especially during the 1960s when the Chinese, who were also coloured people, seemed dedicated to winning Africa's friendship. In addition, Hevi's book was intended to criticise the pro-Beijing policy of Ghana's president, Kwame Nkrumah, and such work during the peak of the Cold War easily attracted accusations of bias. Many

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¹ Philip Snow, *The Star Raft: China's Encounter with Africa* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1988); Barry Sautman, "Anti-Black Racism in Post-Mao Africa", *The China Quarterly* no. 138 (June 1994): 413–37; Michael J. Sullivan, "The 1988–89 Nanjing Anti-African Protests: Racial Nationalism or National Racism", *The China Quarterly* no. 138 (June 1994): 438–57; M. Dujon Johnson, *Race and Racism in the Chinas: Chinese Racial Attitude toward Africans and African-Americans* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2007); and Adams Bodom, *Africans in China: A Sociocultural Study and Its Implications on Africa-China Relations* (London: Cambria Press, 2012).

² Emmanuel John Hevi, *An African Student in China* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1966).

scholars suspected that Hevi's ability to present a fair view of China was compromised. For example, Frederick G. Robinson stated that Hevi's work "fails to comment on any positive Chinese accomplishments in the field of education or to point out any lessons, other than negative, political ones". Although Anthony Sampson believed that Hevi's account seemed basically honest, he still agreed that Hevi "exaggerates Chinese subtlety". Rene Goldman suspected that Hevi's work presented "superficiality and one-sidedness", and John J. Tierney said that "Hevi's tone is bitter and the denunciations harsh". Overall, W.A.C. Adie's opinion probably represents the most common impression of Hevi's work: "much of his book describes petty annoyances suffered by African students ... [which he] blames in a rather over-simplified way on color-consciousness". Thus, Hevi's work was "emotional and over-simplified".³

Based on declassified official files from China, this article appraises Hevi's book again. Studying the experiences that Hevi and his peers faced on campuses and in Chinese society, scholars can construct images of Africans in China during Mao's era, and re-analyse whether Hevi's work was based on exaggerated, emotional or over-simplified "petty annoyances".

ROOTS OF CHINESE ANTI-BLACK RACISM

Various theories seek to explain the origin of racism, highlighting everything from capitalism and culture to politics. Proponents of the capitalist explanation opine that capitalism creates a clear financial hierarchy that then provides the groundwork for a racial one.⁴ Although this explanation suits modern European history, it fails to account for the racism that existed over 2,000 years ago in Greece. Scholars that emphasise the role of culture in racism assert that because a society tends to have a collective understanding of the world, it also collectively separates the world into good and bad, suppressing some members to maintain its own goodness. Racism is thus culturally produced and racist attitudes may be formed as early as childhood.⁵ However, other scholars study the importance of politics in the formation of racism, but the causality there is less clear because politics can both increase and decrease racism.⁶

³ For Frederick G. Robinson's comments on Hevi's work, see *Comparative Education Review* 9, no. 1 (Feb. 1965): 120–1. For Anthony Sampson's comments, see the *Journal of Modern African Studies* 2, no. 2 (July 1964): 322. For Rene Goldman's comments, see *The Journal of Asian Studies* 24, no. 2 (Feb. 1965): 326. For John J. Tierney's comments, see *Pacific Affairs* 14, no. 2 (Summer 1968): 274. For W.A.C. Adie's comments, see *The China Quarterly* no. 21 (Jan.–Mar. 1965): 193–4.

⁴ Oliver Cox, *Castle, Class, and Race: A Study in Social Dynamics* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970), p. 6; Pinar Batur, "Just a Link in the Chain: Global Racism and the Concept of Blackness in Russia", in *Racial and Ethnic Economic Inequity*, ed. Samuel L. Miles Jr. and Bruce Corrie (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2006), p. 5.

⁵ Joel Kovel, *White Racism: A Psychohistory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 104; and R. Deborah Davis, *Black Students' Perceptions: The Complexity of Persistence to Graduation at an American University* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2006), pp. 111–2.

⁶ Carter A. Wilson, *Racism: From Slavery to Advanced Capitalism* (London: Sage Publications, 1996), pp. 20–4.

China's Confucian heritage has created a long history of perceiving anyone outside the Confucian cultural periphery as barbarians, and referring to them in pejorative terms, such as *fan* and *yi*.⁷ For example, one of China's most important world geographic volumes was written in the 13th century, was entitled *Zhu Fan Zhi* (*Description of the Barbarous Peoples*). As Frank Dikotter indicates, the absence of cultural pluralism in China resulted in political solipsism and cultural superiority, which meant that alien groups were measured "according to a yardstick by which those who did not follow Chinese ways were considered barbarians".⁸

The Chinese view of dark-skinned Africans was particularly damning. As early as the Tang Dynasty in the ninth century, African slaves were imported into China with the blacks integrated into the lowest level of the social hierarchy, namely slavery.⁹ In the 12th century, Zhu Yu's work "Pingzhou Ketan" depicted dark-skinned people eating raw food, and mentioned that if they learned to eat cooked food, they might finally understand the Chinese language. White-skinned barbarians were considered slightly superior to their dark-skinned counterparts because they at least cooked their food.¹⁰

During the Ming dynasty, mainly through Macao, China became more familiar with the European and North American enslavement of Africans, and African slaves sometimes fled into China. This knowledge confirmed the low status of Africans in the Chinese worldview, with black Africans becoming more engrained as a symbolic expression of slavery.¹¹ Therefore, in addition to "black barbarians" (*heiyi*), Chinese (mostly Cantonese) also called Africans "black slaves" (*heinu*), "devil slaves" (*guinu*) and "barbarian devils" (*fangui*).¹²

Traditional Chinese culture prized fair skin in its perceptions of both male and female beauty. The ideal man was a "white-faced scholar" whose freedom from labour implied high social status and a leisurely life. Urban Chinese have long associated the dark complexion of manual labourers, particularly peasants, with low economic and cultural status.¹³ Furthermore, in the Chinese language, and sometimes English, the

⁷ The words *fan* and *yi* have been generally perceived to mean "barbarians", although Lydia Liu argues that the meaning of *yi* was neutral. See Lydia Liu, *Clashes of Empires: The Invention of China in Modern World Making* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 31–70.

⁸ Frank Dikotter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), p. 2.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁰ Johnson, *Race and Racism in the Chinas*, pp. 14–5. Even today, for some, Chinese-speaking Africans are civilised people. Singapore's former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew explained that he had met ethnic Chinese who did not speak their native language and so "behaved like the Blacks". He cites this as his motivation to study Chinese. See *Lianhe Zaobao*, 27 June 2010, p. 6.

¹¹ Dikotter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China*, p. 17.

¹² Liu Yuanchao, p. 243. The meaning of "devil" (*gui*) is derogatory and expresses various degrees of hostility towards foreigners, treating them like "non-humans". See Sun Long-Kee, "Contemporary Chinese Culture: Structure and Emotionality", *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 26 (July 1991): 6.

¹³ Sautman, "Anti-Black Racism in Post-Mao Africa", p. 427.

words for the colour black are often associated with negative qualities. Ruthless and malicious individuals are said to be *heixin* — literally “black-hearted”. The mob is called *heidao*, translated as the “black society”, and *heihua* means “black language” or “bandit argot”. Probably due to the above-mentioned cultural aspects, Matteo Ricci, the founding figure of the Jesuit China Mission, found that “the blacks frightened the Chinese”.¹⁴

An increase in conflicts between China and Europe in the late Qing dynasty caused China to discard its initial impression of Western Europeans as barbaric. However, there was no similar socioeconomic force to temper the Chinese perspective of Africans. Worse, the Chinese were influenced by the Europeans to take on more negative impressions. For example, some Chinese scholars applied the traditional theory of eight trigrams to generate geographic reasons confirming that humans born on the African continent were generally ugly, stupid, animalistic, cannibalistic and filthy.¹⁵

When Darwinism became popular in China, some reform-minded scholars adopted Darwin’s theory to further entrench racist attitudes towards Africans. Yan Fu, who introduced Darwin’s concept of natural selection to China, ranked Africans as the lowest race of human beings.¹⁶ Liang Qichao opined that Africans were lustful of Caucasian women, slavish, backward, lazy and stupid, which made them an “inferior race”.¹⁷ Kang Youwei ranked Caucasians as the best race and wished to whiten all dark-skinned races through dietary change, migration and intermarriage. Kang found Asians sufficiently fair-skinned to merit improvement, but suggested mass sterilisation for Africans because “the progress of the beautiful race should not be obstructed by bad black seeds”.¹⁸

THE BEGINNING OF A BROTHERHOOD

Darwinism taught the Chinese about survival of the fittest, producing a sense of nationalism that valued anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism in modern Chinese history. However, there was a contradiction between China’s political agenda and the prevalence of “anti-black” thoughts. Anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist sentiments led China to praise Africa’s struggles against the European powers, despite its derision for the African race. China’s first act of support for black Africans happened in the 1930s when Italy invaded Ethiopia. China verbally endorsed Ethiopia’s anti-Italian

¹⁴ Dikotter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China*, p. 17.

¹⁵ Peng Kunyuan, “Africa in the Eyes of People of Qing Dynasty”, *Xiya Feizhou (West Asia and Africa)* no. 1 (2000): 61–2.

¹⁶ Dikotter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China*, p. 68.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 82; Liang Qichao, “Lun Zhongguo renzhong zhi jianglai” (On the Future of Chinese Race); and Song Dehua, “Xindalu youji yu Liang Qichao de Meiguo guan” (Trip to the New Continent and Liang Qichao’s American Views), *Journal of Jinan University* 17, no. 3 (July 1995): 83.

¹⁸ Kang Youwei, *Datong Shu (Toward World Unity)* (Shenyang: Liaoning renmin chubanshe, 1994), pp. 137–44.

efforts because it needed domestic and international cooperation against the Japanese invasion it was facing at home. During this time, some Chinese journals encouraged brave black Africans to kill white people, and even epitomised Ethiopia as “a super star that the whole world admired”.¹⁹

In the late 1940s, when the Communist Party tried to overthrow the Nationalist Party in China, forcing US troops to leave the country, it became part of a plan to sever the alliance between Chiang Kai-shek and Washington. Some left-wing media depicted the Chinese as having the same status as American blacks, arguing that American soldiers in China always avoided legal charges after physical conflicts with Chinese peasants or in the famous rape case of Ms Shen Chong. This behaviour was considered similar to that of whites in the United States, who seemed free to attack and rape black Americans.²⁰ Thus, both the Chinese and the blacks appeared to be oppressed by the whites. In other words, due to political reasons such as anti-colonialism, the Chinese could equalise and promote the status of blacks, shifting the relationship between Chinese and blacks, at least verbally, to one of brotherhood between people of colours.

Soon after the People’s Republic of China was established, both Washington and Moscow isolated Beijing. Beijing needed allies badly, so when African states were collectively yearning for independence in the early 1960s, anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist attitudes served as a platform to unite China and Africa. Mao Zedong, for instance, encouraged Africa to “be confident, and to look down on Euro-American capitalism. Imperialists are like dogs, but dogs do not suppress people, while imperialists do”.²¹ To help Africans defend against capitalists and imperialists, Beijing used its own limited resources to provide assistance in a very respectful way. As Mao told African allies, “[Assistance] is our obligation. It is not a big deal. I am sorry we give so little ... we will have your help when you rise up on your own.”²² This mutually respectful attitude set the basis for the general understanding of Sino-African relations. Beijing’s friendship towards Africa was so sincere that Chinese and Africans became racially equivalent. As Mao said, “[Westerners] say we Chinese are useless, we coloured people are useless, we are dirty, and we are not elegant. Our race seems to be the same with you Africans,”²³ and therefore, “in front of African friends, I feel very equal.”²⁴

¹⁹ Bin Xian, “Zhan ge” (War Song) *Yun Shen* 1, no. 5 (4 Apr. 1936). Original files are from D-0-627-20, Shanghai City Archives. The article uses “the grays” instead of “the whites”; Ai Zhouchang and Mu Tao, *Zhongfei guanxi shi* (*Sino-African History*) (Shanghai: East China Normal University Press, 1996), p. 200.

²⁰ Zhou Jianren, “Zhongzu qishi yu zhongzu zhuyi” (Racial Discrimination and Racism), *Daxue* 6, no. 3–4 (20 Aug. 1947). Original files are from D-2-2699-50, Shanghai City Archives.

²¹ Minutes, “Chairman Mao Zedong Meeting African Youth Representatives”, 12 July 1958, #108-00007-01, PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives (hereafter MOFAA).

²² Minutes, “Mao Zedong and Liu Shaoqi Meeting Guinea Ministers”, 5 Sept. 1965, #108-01436-04, MOFAA.

²³ Minutes, “Mao Zedong Meeting African Visitors”, 7 Mar. 1960, #102-00036-03, MOFAA.

²⁴ Minutes, “Mao Zedong Meeting Somali President Osman”, 23 July 1965, #108-01408-07, MOFAA.

However, politics did not switch cultural roots in such a short term because many Chinese civilians did not share their political leader's feelings of equality. In 1956, the city of Shanghai's committee of foreign services issued a memorandum indicating what kind of treatment black foreign visitors were reportedly experiencing. They were surrounded by Chinese who were shouting at them, and Chinese women not only refused to shake hands with them, but also kept their children away. As such behaviour left black visitors with "very bad impressions", the committee of foreign services asked all units to consider and ponder over how much black people had suffered as the result of colonialism. They urged the Chinese to be friendly, compassionate and polite to black visitors and to sympathise with them and support anti-imperialism and national liberalisation.²⁵ In summary, the Chinese were encouraged to be respectful and consider themselves equal to the blacks for political reasons. Thus, a combination of political brotherhood and social racism among civilians was the environment John Emmanuel Hevi faced when he went to China in November 1960.

CHINESE EDUCATION FOR AFRICAN REVOLUTION

In terms of realising anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism in Africa, a significant advantage to giving educational aid over other types of assistance was that education was cheap and effective. The PRC Foreign Ministry calculations were as follows: "each student's allowance per year is about 1000 [RMB]. 100 students per year total 100,000 [RMB]. If half of these 100 students dedicate themselves to revolution after their return to Africa, it will have significant impact to [our] revolutionary career in Africa."²⁶ This quote illustrates how Beijing's political agenda dominated the education that African students received, thus becoming the origin of many conflicts.

Although the African students were familiar with anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist rhetoric before their arrival in China, Beijing further classified them into three main categories according to their political accuracy. The first category comprised students who had "positive political views and strong anti-imperialist beliefs, are friendly to us, are unhappy about revisionist attitudes toward national liberalisation, and agree with our Party views in critical international issues".²⁷ The second category comprised students who "believe in anti-imperialism, are friendly to us, but are not very politically conscious, do not clearly understand revisionism, and do not care about politics". Lastly, the third category consisted of individuals who "are seemingly anti-imperialism and friendly to us, but do not reveal their real thoughts".

²⁵ Memorandum, "To Pay Attention to Black Visitors", Shanghai city's committee of foreign services, 8 Oct. 1956. Original files are from B255-2-90-91, Shanghai City Archives.

²⁶ Memo, "About Receiving Youth from Africa and Latin America", 9 May 1960, #108-00223-04, MOFAA.

²⁷ "Foreign Student Situation", 16 Apr. 1963, issued by the PRC Ministry of Education, in *Situation of Students from Cameroon and Other Countries in China*, 16 Apr. 1963 to 19 Nov. 1963, # 108-00874-03, MOFAA.

Beijing went to great lengths to categorise the African students' ideologies in such detail. Spies were planted among the students to keep records of anyone who failed to applaud when Mao Zedong appeared or speak against Nikita Khrushchev's revisionism, along with those who were sceptical about the achievements of the Great Leap Forward. Apart from these moles, Chinese students usually bluntly discussed political views with the African students, and the curriculum was overtly pedantic. Many lectures pertained directly to the Chinese Communist experience, reinforcing the messages disseminated in the classrooms. African students were also required to visit factory workers or revolutionary museums on weekends.

This tedious learning environment explains why Hevi failed to see "positive Chinese accomplishments in the field of education or to point out any lessons other than negative political ones". Hevi was not the only one making public complaints about political education. As early as June 1961, when Hevi was still in China, a Somali student named Abucar Hagi had gone home and narrated his educational experience in China to the media and lawmakers of his country.

Abucar Hagi reported being the first African student to flee China and return to Africa after a three-day hunger strike. He complained that the Chinese required African students to listen to political reports every day and prohibited them from commenting constructively. He said that Chinese students were not allowed to mingle with their African counterparts, except for those were assigned to monitor the African students' political inclinations. He accused Chinese language teachers of political brainwashing and reported that African students were required to publicly appreciate Chinese hospitality.²⁸

China's extreme focus on its leadership in the world revolution and socialist purity movement against Moscow and Washington might, like the traditional China analysed by Frank Dikotter, have generated a political solipsism and cultural superiority that prompted the examining and evaluating of Africans according to those who did not follow the Chinese ways. African students obviously disliked the political classes, and their disinterest made them appear dim-witted, causing the teachers to generally perceive that they were of "low culture, have poor memories, and lazy".²⁹ The African students' poor academic performance worsened their lot in the eyes of the Chinese due to the communist class struggle ideology. The Ministry of Education found that "many Chinese students and teachers apply our political framework to African students, condemning them of poor family background, backward political concept, dissolute lives, and inept behaviours; thus, they hold no common language

²⁸ "About Somali Student's Anti-China Leaflets", 12 June 1961, issued from the Committee of External Cultural Communication to the Ministry of Education, 23 May 1961 to 26 Sept. 1961, #108-00672-02, MOFAA.

²⁹ "Foreign Student Situation", 16 Apr. 1963, issued by the PRC Ministry of Education, *in Situation of Students from Cameroon and Other Countries in China*, 16 Apr. 1963 to 19 Nov. 1963, #108-00874-03, MOFAA.

with Africans”.³⁰ This disparity defied Mao’s illustrious pronouncements about Sino-African bonds.

Furthermore, the aforementioned politics deteriorated the reputations of African students. Contrary to Barry Sautman’s finding that the majority of the African students were from “elite background[s]”,³¹ due to a political eagerness to provide educational assistance and demonstrate its friendship with Africa, the PRC appeared to have selected students haphazardly. For example, from among 43 Somalis, only six had high school diplomas and the rest had only primary or secondary school education. Many of them had not even planned to study overseas; some were street hawkers and others simply decided to come to China on a whim.³² The Communist Party of China Central Politburo, in particular, indicated that the political awareness and quality of African students were worse than others.³³ This failure to screen students based on academic ability, coupled with poor pedagogy, ensured that the learners responded unintelligently. Therefore, while Chinese lecturers labelled Africans as stupid and lazy, Hevi found the Chinese to be paternalistic and racist.³⁴

ACCUSATIONS OF CHINESE RACISM

According to the Chinese archives, Hevi seemed to be very energetic, and clearly liked to freely express his opinion. He was never called lazy or stupid, but he did leave many records of his politically incorrect thoughts and behaviour. For example, he did not believe what he learned in school. To explore the “real” China, he left campus to talk to peasants by himself and even enjoyed a meal of corn and roast bird with some.³⁵ One of his politically incorrect statements shows that he was tired of praising Chinese anti-colonialism in the classroom, so he argued that China’s support of anti-colonialism was simply because China was newly independent, and that this support might prove short-term. The US, for example, forgot about colonial suppression after gaining independence over the course of a century. Secondly, he said that China had lured Africa because it needed primary resources for its industrial development. Thirdly, he

³⁰ “Situation Briefing”, 24 May 1961, issued by Foreign Affairs Committee of Beijing City, in *Situation of Students from Cameroon and Other Countries in China*, 14 May 1961 to 1 Dec. 1961, #108-00695-01, MOFAA.

³¹ Sautman, “Anti-Black Racism in Post-Mao Africa”, p. 413.

³² “Report of Somali Students’ Disturbance”, 7 Apr. 1961, issued by Beijing Foreign Language Institute, in *PRC Ministry of Education’s Opinion Regarding Somali Students’ Disturbance*, 9 Feb. 1961 to 7 Apr. 1961, #108-00672-05, MOFAA.

³³ “About the Report of the Work on Foreign Students”, issued by CPC Central Politburo, 9 Dec. 1963, East China Normal University Cold War Center, #HB1855-17-2549.

³⁴ Hevi, *An African Student in China*, p. 187.

³⁵ “Situation Report”, 12 Aug. 1961, issued by Beijing Foreign Language Institute, in *Situation of Foreign Students — Reported by Beijing Foreign Language Institute Foreign Student Office and Beijing City Foreign Affairs Committee*, 26 June 1961 to 12 Aug. 1961, #108-00770-04, MOFAA.

claimed that imperialists and socialists might coexist some day.³⁶ Surprisingly, Hevi's politically incorrect analysis of China's anti-imperialism might have correctly predicted the Chinese political changes after 1980.

Hevi did not trust China's ability to sustain the sentiment of anti-colonialism, probably because he felt that Chinese racism was no less significant than that of the colonialists. He told his Chinese teacher that that "there are two kinds of friendships. One is political friendship and China surely supports Africa's political struggles. The other kind is friendship in daily life, but I cannot feel it".³⁷ He complained that the Chinese treated European and African students differently, with European students enjoying a monthly allowance of RMB150 while African students only received RMB80. White students also encountered much more polite treatment when shopping in stores reserved for foreigners.³⁸

This might not be too far from the truth, because Abucar Hagi complained of similar issues before Hevi. He said that the African students were forced to live in small dormitories with poor sanitary conditions and that their monthly allowance was a paltry RMB80. In contrast, European students from Albania and Yugoslavia received a monthly allowance of RMB275 and lived in a huge and luxurious hotel named Xinqiao. Similar to Hevi's comments, Abucar Hagi concluded that even in communist China, racism existed.³⁹

Although Abucar Hagi claimed that he was the first student to return to Africa after the hunger strikes, two Kenyan students, Nginja Odiek Kabonyo and Kanau Ikama, had returned to Africa before him using similar methods. In November 1960, even before Hevi arrived, these two students brought their personal belongings and occupied the Foreign Students Office of the Beijing Foreign Language Institute, forcing the school to send them home. They not only complained about insufficient allowance, but also about inequality, indicating that unlike the whites and browns, they were not allowed to study in real universities. Nor were they given winter clothing for the cold weather.⁴⁰

The explanation from the Chinese for the different allowance, lodgings and curriculums was that different students were assigned to different programmes. However, off campus, these students still endured unabashed racism in their daily lives to

³⁶ "Situation Report", 20 June 1961, issued by Foreign Affairs Committee of Beijing City, in *About How African Students Arrange Press Conferences, Parades, and Assemblies*, 24 Mar. 1961 to 22 Apr. 1961, #108-00770-01, MOFAA.

³⁷ "Situation Briefing", 24 May 1961, issued by Foreign Affairs Committee of Beijing City, in *Situation of Students from Cameroon and Other Countries in China*, 14 May 1961 to 1 Dec. 1961, #108-00695-01, MOFAA.

³⁸ Hevi, *An African Student in China*, pp. 184–5.

³⁹ "About Somali Student's Anti-China Leaflets", 12 June 1961, issued from the Committee of External Cultural Communication to the Ministry of Education, 23 May 1961 to 26 Sept. 1961, #108-00672-02, MOFAA.

⁴⁰ *Kenyan Students' Situation*, 31 Dec. 1959 to 9 Nov. 1960, #108-00150-01, MOFAA.

the extent that they were made a spectacle as though in a zoo.⁴¹ The Chinese would encircle them on the street, pointing and shouting “black man, black man”. The treatment was no different for important political figures. When Ghana’s ambassador to China walked down a Beijing side street, the whole neighbourhood yelled “black man coming”. He was soon surrounded by the locals, who pointed at him shouting “his face is like bark” and “his head resembles a pig’s”.⁴² Although Hevi’s complaint about medical professionals blatantly asking if black Africans ever washed themselves cannot be confirmed,⁴³ some Chinese did associate Africans’ darker skin colour with ugliness and a lack of hygiene.

Among all of the racial disputes Africans experienced in China, interracial relationships were the most contentious. Kang Youwei’s notion that “the progress of our beautiful race should not be obstructed by bad black seeds”⁴⁴ rang out even in newly established communist China. If the blacks were considered filthy and ugly, a Chinese woman might receive special attention if she entered a relationship with an African. Hevi complained to his teacher that when he talked to a Chinese girl, a Chinese male student would approach her and say, “This is a black man from Africa. Do not talk to him”.⁴⁵ African students complained that the Chinese women they befriended or dated either disappeared or ended up in jail.⁴⁶ The following is an investigative report from the Foreign Affairs Committee of the city of Beijing regarding an event that happened to an African student’s girlfriend:

Peking University Nyasaland Student Banda (Henry Banda Kamwendo) brought back a Chinese woman [to the dormitory]. The guard stopped them and he fought the guard. [...] The woman, named An Kun, [...] had sex with Banda in Peking University dormitory. The Xuanwu police station will jail her for 15 days and then send her to labour-reform education.⁴⁷

Banda’s choice to fight was an expression of his anger, but his suffering after being separated from his girlfriend remains unknown. The pain of another Cameroon student, Muozhou, was well known. He went to China in 1960 and studied in Tianjin, where he met a girl named Fanlin in 1962. They sought permission to get married. As Muozhou did not leave China with Hevi and the majority of the other African students in 1962, it seemed obvious that he was politically friendly to China. Thus, for Muozou’s political loyalty, in November 1963, the Ministry of Education requested

⁴¹ “Situation Briefing”, 24 May 1961, issued by Foreign Affairs Committee of Beijing City, in *Situation of Students from Cameroon and Other Countries in China*, 14 May 1961 to 1 Dec. 1961, #108-00695-01, MOFAA.

⁴² “Teaching People How to Correctly Treat Black African Visitors”, 9 May 1961, #117-01299-01, MOFAA.

⁴³ Hevi, *An African Student in China*, p. 187.

⁴⁴ Dikotter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China*, p. 15; Kang, *Datong Shu (Toward World Unity)*.

⁴⁵ *Supra* note 41.

⁴⁶ “Investigation Report”, 28 June 1966, issued by Foreign Affairs Committee of Beijing City, in *Expelling Malawian Student*, 28 June 1966 to 5 Dec. 1966, #108-00220-01, MOFAA.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

that the provincial government grant them permission to marry if the couple decided to be together.

Records show that the couple refused to break up, but the provincial government continued to separate Muozhou and Fanlin. Muozhou went to the hospital in October 1964 for medical reasons and soon launched a personal hunger strike because Fanlin was prohibited from seeing him. They were still together after Muozhou was released from the hospital. Two months later, Fanlin was fired from her kindergarten job due to “inappropriate thought and behaviour”, and was forced to attend “re-education”. She was sent to Xi’an after re-education, where she developed mental problems.

Staying in Tianjin, Muozhou suffered many medical problems during these months, with his last record of April 1965 reporting that he was sent to Beijing’s Andin Hospital for treatment of serious mental illness. The other African students had many details and rumours about this couple. They said that the drugs the doctors gave Muozhou lead to sexual dysfunction, and that Fanlin’s family was arrested for this Sino-African romance, and that Muozhou’s mental illness was caused by Chinese racism.⁴⁸

Fights with security guards, mental illness and hunger strikes summarise many African students’ experiences in China. They were critical of the fact that never had there been any Chinese marriages to Africans, while it was common for whites to marry black Africans.⁴⁹ This explains why Hevi believed that Africans were not allowed to marry Chinese women, but Europeans and African-Americans were made an exception.⁵⁰

Hevi was probably wrong, considering that all marriages required permission from the state and relationships with foreigners resulted in great difficulties due to security concerns. Foreigners in China, black or white, were only allowed to marry Chinese citizens if they were long-term residents. One example was Clarence Adams, an African-American who surrendered to the People’s Liberation Army during the Korean War and chose to stay in China instead of repatriating to the US. The African students felt that Adams was an exception by virtue of his political significance, but they probably did not know that Adams’ marriage also faced difficulties not only from

⁴⁸ The information is based on “The Situation of Foreign Students”, 29 Apr. 1965, issued by the Ministry of Education, in *Situation of Cameroon Students and Part of Foreign Students Intend to Organize Student Union*, 27 Feb. 1965 to 23 Dec. 1965, #108-01133-02, MOFAA; “The Situation of Foreign Students”, 28 Aug. 1964, *Situation of Foreign Students in China*, 1 Feb. 1964 to 3 Oct. 1964, #108-01038-01, MOFAA; “Marriage Problems of Cameroon Student Muozuo and Fanlin”, 4 Nov. 1963, from the Ministry of Education to the Office of Foreign Services, Hebei province, #HEB1025-6-693-29, East China Normal University Cold War Center.

⁴⁹ “Situation Briefing”, 24 May 1961, issued by Foreign Affairs Committee of Beijing City, in *Situation of Students from Cameroon and Other Countries in China*, 14 May 1961 to 1 Dec. 1961, #108-00695-01, MOFAA.

⁵⁰ Hevi, *An African Student in China*, pp. 174–5.

the state, but also from his wife's family. Adam's brother-in-law, a dean at Wuhan University, reportedly told his sister that if she wanted to marry an American, she should at least choose one that was white.⁵¹

CHINESE TOLERANCE AND COMPROMISE

Schools often shrugged off the discrimination that African students suffered by saying that "the PRC is a socialist state. We have experienced imperialism before, so there is no racism".⁵² This dismissive attitude only angered and frustrated Africans living in China. Students soon learned that Chinese authorities cared only about politics, and so tended to neglect them until threatened. As the Chinese were not concerned about their problems, but only about the consequences that resulted, Africans portrayed in Hevi's book tended to settle issues aggressively.⁵³

The March 1962 demonstration was not an accident, but rather a collective eruption of African anger intended to be politically effective. Before this demonstration, there had already been numerous protests, sit-ins and small-scale hunger strikes against the Chinese treatment of Africans. Hevi indicated that of the 118 African students in China at the time he wrote his book, 96 were sent back to their respective home countries. This number has been accepted by some scholars,⁵⁴ but the Chinese data are slightly different. The official statistics show that there were 75 African students before the demonstration, and that 42 of them went back to Africa immediately after the event. Up until April 1963, there were still 29 African students remaining in China.⁵⁵ In terms of exodus ratio, Hevi might not be absolutely correct, but the data proves that the majority of African students were very eager to leave.

The Chinese were uncomfortable dealing with the aggressive responses of these African students. Table 1 lists the number of African students accepted by China annually.⁵⁶ Since China admitted 125 African students from 1959 to 1961, the fact that 75 African students remained in China before the demonstration implies that many Africans had left China through different, possibly hostile, circumstances before March 1962.

⁵¹ Della Adams, *An American Dream: The Life of an African American Soldier and POW Who Spent Twelve Years in Communist China* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2007), p. 87.

⁵² "African Students' Strike" (30 Sept. 1960), issued by the Beijing Foreign Language Institute, in *Briefing on African Students' Situation in China* (25 Mar. 1960 to 6 Oct. 1960), #108-00150-05, MOFAA.

⁵³ Hevi, *An African Student in China*, p. 215.

⁵⁴ Snow, *The Star Raft*, p. 199; Sautman, "Anti-Black Racism in Post-Mao Africa", p. 413.

⁵⁵ "Foreign Student Situation", 16 Apr. 1963, issued by the PRC Ministry of Education, in *Situation of Students from Cameroon and Other Countries in China*, 16 Apr. 1963 to 19 Nov. 1963, #108-00874-03, MOFAA.

⁵⁶ Zhongfei jiaoyu hezuo bianxiezu (Editorial Board of Sino-African Educational Cooperation and Exchange), *Zhongguo yu Feizhou guojia jiaoyu hezuo yu jiaoliu (Sino-African Educational Cooperation and Exchange)* (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2005), pp. 15–6. Other data show that about 70 African students were received from 1962 to 1966. See Wang Luxin, "Educational Exchange and Cooperation between China and Africa", in *Zhongguo yu Feizhou (China and Africa)*, p. 327.

TABLE 1
CHINA'S ANNUAL INTAKE OF AFRICAN STUDENTS, 1958–1965

Year	Number of Funded African Students	Number of Self-funded African Students
1958	0	0
1959	9	0
1960	95	0
1961	21	0
1962	1	0
1963	0	0
1964	10	0
1965	37	0

Note: No students were accepted until 1973.

Sources: Zhongfei jiaoyu hezuo bianxiezhu (Editorial Board of Sino-African Educational Cooperation and Exchange), *Zhongguo yu Feizhou guojia jiaoyu hezuo yu jiaoliu* (Sino-African Educational Cooperation and Exchange) (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2005), pp. 15–6; Wang Luxin, “Educational Exchange and Cooperation between China and Africa”, in *Zhongguo yu Feizhou* (China and Africa), p. 327.

We could assume that for revolutionary reasons, China suddenly decided to accept more African students in 1960 — 10 times the number accepted in 1959 — which was also the year Hevi arrived in China. However, the strategy of educating in the name of African revolution resulted in Africans being extremely disappointed in China, and the Chinese authorities soon became less keen to admit African students. The number of new African students dropped sharply in 1961, and with the largest African demonstration occurring in March 1962, the number of admitted students fell drastically in 1962 and 1963.

Beijing tried to soothe public anger by yielding to the material demands of African students. Unfortunately, accommodating Africans only led to accusations of squandering and avarice that defined the political mentality of the time. To maintain its African alliances, China had been responding to infrastructural and financial requests from African states that included unusual projects such as funding for construction of theatres and hotels. Meanwhile, Beijing tried to pacify its African student-guests who complained of small dormitory rooms and sparse wardrobes, the quality of food and most important of all, the monthly allowance.

For most Chinese in 1961, a monthly allowance of RMB80 was considered a generous amount for a student lifestyle. Most workers' monthly salary was around RMB50, and a Chinese student would typically only enjoy an allowance of RMB10 to RMB20 per month. Due to continual complaints from African students, Chinese locals responded in kind, criticising African students for being accustomed to an “extravagant way of life”⁵⁷ and for squandering their allowance at the beginning of the month, then borrowing from the school.⁵⁸ To them, the African students' food complaints, such as having eggs at every meal, were “very unreasonable”.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ “Situation Report”, 12 Aug. 1961, issued by Beijing Foreign Language Institute, in *Situation of Foreign Students — Reported by Beijing Foreign Language Institute Foreign Student Office and Beijing City Foreign Affairs Committee*, 26 June 1961 to 12 Aug. 1961, #108-00770-04, MOFAA.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

Nevertheless, Beijing's political agenda prevailed. Even though the Chinese were suffering through the Great Leap Forward, the state accommodated requests to further improve foreign students' standard of living. Beijing gave foreign students the freedom to dictate their menus, increased their monthly allowance from RMB80 to RMB100 and granted graduate students a stipend as high as RMB120. The announcement of the allowance increase, made by the director of the Beijing Foreign Language Institute, was laced with bitterness,⁶⁰ considering that the new stipend was more competitive than his salary.

However, as African students were fundamentally more upset about the treatment received from Chinese locals than the level of their stipends, the adjusted allowance did not resolve their frustration. Social attitudes towards their skin colour did not improve due to this RMB20 raise in allowance, and an attempt to buy cigarettes could still become a race-motivated fight, a hunger strike or an exodus for many African students. In fact, the stipend adjustment not only failed to alter African impressions of China, but also further degraded Chinese impressions of Africans.

Political concerns dominated Chinese responses to African students, and when African students boycotted the school to get better treatment, China compromised for the sake of "the friendship between the peoples of China and Africa".⁶¹ Even when students became violent, the school did not settle the issue legally, but rather acted in "the spirit of Sino-African friendship".⁶² Most Chinese at that time were living frugally, and those who dealt with African affairs very possibly felt that they were throwing their limited resources at a group of ungrateful people who only demanded more in return. Nonetheless, because preserving the glorified Sino-African friendship was the priority in the interest of political harmony, Chinese locals did not verbalise their misgivings.

CONCLUSION

At the beginning of the economic reform period in 1978, China's future was modelled on the rich and progressive West.⁶³ The Chinese no longer emphasised, as Mao had, China and Africa's shared image of poverty, filth and backwardness. Furthermore, a less politically controlled Chinese society meant that the Chinese could openly express their grievances. Considering Hevi's experiences in China, it should not be surprising that, in the anti-black riots of the 1980s, some Chinese refused to "feed the whole uncultured Africa with the results of our efforts"⁶⁴ or "allow any Negro to hang about

⁶⁰ Snow, *The Star Raft*, p. 198.

⁶¹ "African Students' Strike", 30 Sept. 1960, issued by Beijing Foreign Language Institute, in *Briefing on African Students' Situation in China*, 25 Mar. 1960 to 6 Oct. 1960, #108-00150-05, MOFAA.

⁶² "Briefing of Foreign Affairs No. 50", 18 June 1962, issued by Tianjin Foreign Affairs Committee Office, in *Somali Students' Performance in China*, 30 Apr. 1962 to 18 June 1962, #108-00286-01, MOFAA.

⁶³ Sullivan, "The 1988–89 Nanjing Anti-African Protests", pp. 438–57.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 445.

our universities to bother Chinese girls”,⁶⁵ complaining that “blacks were just apes from trees [who] should go back to their own country and keep their diseased and lazy selves at home”.⁶⁶

Capitalism may have played an important role in inciting Chinese racism against Africans during the 1980s, but similar racial tensions during the 1960s were mainly due to politics. Hevi’s experience in China provides a unique perspective of Sino-African brotherhood. Cultural disdain for Africans existed in China a long time ago, and although politics tried to suppress such racist attitudes when the PRC was established, African students continued to suffer social pressures. The involvement of politics not only resulted in greater educational difficulties for African students, but also further aggravated the extent of racism.

It is not very fair to criticise Hevi for “exaggerating”. His experiences in China forbade him from being “unemotional” when his president, Kwame Nkrumah, intended to ally with China. It was true that the majority of African students felt that the Chinese education system was overly political. Chinese society disrespected the skin colour of African students and these young people suffered far worse treatment compared their European counterparts. Hevi might not have understood Chinese marriage laws, but relationships between African men and Chinese girls did face barriers from both the state and society. The experiences of African students in China were far from “petty annoyances”.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Johnson, *Race and Racism in the Chinas*, pp. 48–9.