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Human Right violations and xenophobic attacks on African migrants in China during the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The African migrants in China are being subjected to precarious human rights abuse arising from the state repression and racial discriminations, which came to the spotlight during the Covid-19 pandemic. Although the international media bodies and the social media reported cases of xenophobic attacks on African nationals in China during the coronavirus outbreak, there exist inadequate empirical documentation and systematic analysis of the incidents by scholars. Thus, the study examined the nexus between human rights violations and xenophobic attacks on African migrants in China during the Covid-19 Pandemic. Methodologically, we adopted the state repression theory as our theoretical framework; ex-post facto research design; documentary method of data collection; and qualitative descriptive method of data analysis. The study found that China's disregard for the human rights of African migrants accounted for the xenophobic attacks on African community in China during the Covid-19 pandemic. The study recommended among others that there is

the need for Chinese state to implement legislations and policies that will protect and safeguard the human rights of African migrants in China.

Keywords: *Africa, China, African migrants, Covid-19 pandemic, human rights, xenophobic attacks.*

I. Introduction

The demography of African migrants in China has continued to rise in the past two decades. According to Lyons, Brown and Li (2008) and Kohnert (2010), the liberalization of China's economy in the year 2000 created more opportunities for African migrants who were willing to take advantage of the emerging international value-chains. Bodomo (2020) noted that Africans in China are comprised of diplomats and African governments' representatives, students, professionals and traders, both on short and long-term residence. According to Ruwoko (2020), China has been receiving thousands of African migrants with the highest numbers coming from Ghana, Nigeria and Zimbabwe. Similarly, Bodomo (2012) observed that the top five African groups in China included Nigerians, Senegalese, Malians, Guineans, and Ghanaians, with men accounting for about 82 percent of them.

Diplomatically, China and Africa have always emphasized the need to protect the fundamental human rights and freedom of their migrant nationals living in the respective regions in line with the general principles and objectives of Beijing-Africa cooperation. The Beijing-Africa cooperation is based on sincerity, friendship and equality; mutual benefit, reciprocity and common prosperity, among others (Embassy of People's Republic of China, 2006). During the 37th session of the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in March 2018, China and developing societies including African countries proposed a resolution "Promoting Mutually Beneficial Cooperation in the Field of Human Rights" which was adopted by an overwhelming majority (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights- OHCHR, 2018).

Notwithstanding China's positive postures on the issues of human rights at UNHRC, several reports have shown that the Communist State of China has continued to employ systematic repression to curtail the fundamental rights and freedom of people within its jurisdictions (United States Department of State, 2021). According to Amnesty International (2022), critics of Communist State of China, human rights activists, promoters of democracy, leaders of faith, journalists and

broadcasters, publishers, members of civil society organizations (CSOs), ethnic minorities, and others were among those subjected to either arbitrary arrest and detention or were among those who became victims of repressive legislations in China under the National Security Law. In China, African migrants also faced a wide range of xenophobic attacks (i.e., cruelty or hatred aimed at foreigners or strangers) which was amplified during the Covid-19 pandemic. According to Human Rights Watch (2020), African nationals in China face discriminatory treatments in the hands of security agents, the media and general public as well as in the areas of employment, healthcare and housing, among other realms of social exclusions. Others include coercive control methods, forced labor, arbitrary arrest and detention, torture and physical, mass surveillance, police harassment and extortion, random raids, seizure of passports and deportation (Branigan, 2010; United States Department of State, 2017; ABC News, April 20, 2020). There are also wider discriminations and stigmatization from the general public (James, 2020).

The outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic which originated from the Wuhan city of China in December 2019 brought to spotlight the vulnerability of African migrants to racism, local resentments and xenophobia in China. Resulting from the human rights violations associated with the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic in China, the African migrants suffered a number of degrading and inhuman treatments. Some of these include multiple Covid-19 testing, forced quarantining, social exclusions and evictions from the paid apartments and accommodations (Li, 2020; Sun, 2020). Notably, hundreds of African migrants in China were not only blamed for the second wave of coronavirus outbreak but were racially profiled as national threats and were subsequently subjected to various degrees of inhuman treatment (Li, 2020). Consequently, the African nationals became the top target of Chinese quarantine efforts (Sun, 2020), with about 98 percent of them being quarantined (BBC, April 17, 2020), erupting local resentments such as refusal of essential services to people with noticeable African connection. The African migrants in China suffered rejections at malls, bars and restaurants as well as arbitrary arrests and detention, deportation, and were rendered homeless by the security agents, landlords and hotel managers who evicted them from their paid apartments and accommodations (Li, 2020; Ruwoko, 2020; France 24, April 11, 2020).

Furthermore, Sui (2020) noted that the events of maltreatment of African residents in China in the year 2020 were part of the reaction to

the growing fear of second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic among the Chinese people but also built on long-standing hostility toward Africans in China. For instance, the 1988 to 1989 Nanjing “anti-African protests” exposed to the world how the citizens of China related with Africans, rather than what the Chinese authority expressed to African leaders and governments in meetings and documents (Robertson, 2012; Sui, 2020). These prevailing incidents of racism and xenophobic attacks on African nationals were exacerbated by the Chinese media rhetoric. In Chinese media, Robertson (2012) and Sui (2020) observed that Africans were often associated with derogatory words such as “black devils”, rapists, drug peddlers, HIV/AIDS carriers, unhygienic people, backward, lazy and primitive, among others. According to Li, Xue, Du and Xhu (2009) and Cheng (2011), the key role of Chinese local media is to create a negative racial coloration about African migrants in China and debase them as “sanfei” (meaning undesirable foreigners) who are guilty of illegal migration, drug and sexual offences, spread of AIDS, among other diseases, and therefore are threats in several ways to the Chinese national interests.

Consequently, the reported incidents of racial profiling and attacks on African residents in China during the Covid-19 pandemic sparked worldwide condemnation and diplomatic outrage. These reported violations of human rights and fundamental freedom of African nationals in China was seen a surprise considering the Africa’s long-established diplomatic relations with China. ABC News (April 12, 2020) and Li (2020) reported that a coalition of African diplomats in Beijing met with the officials of Chinese foreign ministry and condemned the disturbing stigmatization and discriminating experiences African citizens have been subjected to, and made their protest known to the China’s minister of foreign affairs demanding an end to these prejudices. The United States, other world leaders and human rights bodies condemned the obnoxious treatment of Africans in China amid Covid-19 crisis (Chambers & Davies, 2020).

While the human rights violations and xenophobic attacks on African migrants in China during the Covid-19 pandemic has drawn much attention in both the international news bodies and social media spaces, as we observed above, there exist inadequate empirical documentation and systematic analysis of the incidents by scholars. Against this backdrop, the study examined the human rights violations and xenophobic attacks on African migrants in China during the Covid-19 Pandemic.

II. Literature Review

Decades of resentments against African migrants in China have continued to attract a wide-range of scholarly discourses. Scholars of anti-black sentiments in China have explained the phenomenon either as an age-long event or a recent development following the influx of African nationals into China especially in its Guangzhou Province (Cheng, 2011; Lan, 2017; Huang, 2019; Castillo, 2020). Some scholars perceived racial discrimination against Africans in China as ideological (based on presumption of black inferiority) as the central authority failed to checkmate everyday racism from the Chinese public against the African migrants (Sautman, 2009; Mohan & Lampert, 2013; Kohnert; 2016; Lan 2017; Kohnert, 2020), while others documented several historical cases of racism and aggression against African students in China (Sullivan, 1994; Sautman, 1994; Sautman, 2009; Cheng, 2011; Kohnert, 2020; Amoah, 2021). The existing literature also revealed that African migrant traders were not spared by the Chinese racial postures towards Africans in China (Rennie, 2009; Amoah, 2021).

Additionally, some international migration scholars investigated the extent of social restrictions African nationals face on immigration issues in China, and linked the ordeals of African migrants to immigration crisis arising from an increasingly strict and corrupt visa system dominated by the Chinese middlemen (Xiang, 2013; Zhou, Shenasi & Zu, 2016; Huang, 2019). Another scholarly attempt by Seol and Skrentny (2004), Tsuda and Cornelius (2004), among others to understanding immigration challenges faced by African migrants in China is the alleged Beijing's reluctance to recognize itself as home for immigrants (Seol & Skrentny, 2004; Tsuda & Cornelius, 2004). Other scholarly investigations revealed attempts by the Chinese authority to demonize or dehumanize the African nationals by profiling them as criminals and carriers of diseases (Li, Xue, Du & Zhu, 2009; Li, Ma & Xue, 2009; Cheng, 2011; Chiu, 2017). Meanwhile, much studies have explored various discriminatory attitudes against African nationals in China in relation to access to medical and other social services (Hall, Chen, Latkin & Tucker, 2014; Bodomo, Liem, Lin & Hall, 2020). In terms of breach of contracts in interracial cooperative and interdependent business dealings, studies have shown that African merchants in China have suffered a number of mistreatments (Osno, 2009; Zhou, Shenasi & Zu, 2016). Also, symbolic discrimination of African passengers in China by

the Chinese taxi operators constituted another dimension of anti-African racism in existing literature (Li et al., 2009; Zhou et al., 2016).

Although the international media bodies as well as the social media reported cases of xenophobic attacks and racial abuses on African migrants in China during the Covid-19 pandemic, there exist inadequate empirical documentation and systematic investigation of these incidents of human rights violations by scholars. Against this backdrop, the study attempted to fill the research gap by examining the human rights violations and xenophobic attacks on African migrants in China during the Covid-19 Pandemic.

III. Theoretical Framework

Theoretically, the study adopted repressive state theory as a framework of analysis. Some of the earliest writers associated with the theory include Althusser (1971), Lenin (1971) and Kitzler (1995), among others. There is a growing body of literature which has utilized the repressive state theory in the interrogation of government-motivated human rights abuses and state brutality especially in authoritarian regimes. Some of these scholars that have contributed to the expansion of frontiers repressive state theory include Blinken (2021), Ezeibe, Iwuoha, Mbaigbo et al. (2022) and Ryan (2022), among others. The theorists posit *inter alia* that:

- A repressive state operates primarily by means of mental and physical coercion as well as violence (which may be latent and actual) to subjugate the citizens and people under its jurisdiction or subvert the rule of law by relying on the use of repressive state apparatus such as the army, the police, the judiciary, the prison system, and the media (Lenin, 1971).
- State repression is often associated with human rights violations during which the repressive state subjugates its citizens through intimidation and open violence (Ezeibe, Iwuoha, Mbaigbo et al., 2022).

Essentially, there is thus a nexus between the underlying tenets of repressive state theory and xenophobic attacks on African migrants in China during the Covid-19 Pandemic. Through repressive legislations and ‘strategic inaction’, the Communist State of China emboldened its law enforcement agencies as well as the media and general public to

violate the human rights of foreigners particularly those from African descent. As a consequence, several media reports showed how the African migrants in China were harassed and abused by the Chinese police and citizens under the watch of Chinese government during the Covid-19 pandemic. During this period, many African migrants were stigmatized and evicted from their paid homes and hotel accommodations, and were subjected to multiple coronavirus testing, denial of essential services such as access at clinics, malls, bars and restaurants (BBC, April 17, 2020; Li, 2020). Members of the African community also faced random police raids and deportation, arbitrary arrests and detention for no justifications (Li, 2020; Ruwoko, 2020). Many Africans were blamed for the second wave of Covid-19 pandemic in China and were subjected to resentments and stigmatization from the Chinese citizens and security officials.

IV. Methodology

The study adopted an ex-post facto design, also known as the after-the-fact research design. Accordingly, Kerlinger (1964) defined ex-post-facto design as a form of descriptive research in which an independent variable (X) has already taken place and in which a researcher begins with the observation of dependent variable (Y). The justification for our choice of this design is that those events which we observed (in this case, human rights violations and xenophobic attacks on African migrants in China during the Covid-19 pandemic) have already taken place.

In order to have access to relevant data, the study adopted a documentary method of data collection. Using documentary method, we collected and analyzed qualitative data through the utilization of secondary sources of data such as journal articles, books, official documents and media reports, among others. Data collected were analyzed descriptively which enabled us to provide detailed presentation, explanation and discussion of results or findings of the study. This is because, the secondary data generated for the test of our hypothesis were purely qualitative.

V. Results and Discussion

In this section, we examined the incidents of forced quarantine and social exclusion of African migrants in China during the Covid-19 pandemic under the following subthemes:

- Degrading treatment and forced quarantining of African migrants in China during Covid-19 outbreak
- Social exclusion and denial of basic services to African migrants in China during Covid-19 pandemic

Degrading Treatment and Forced Quarantining of African Migrants in China during Covid-19 Outbreak

Africans in China are considered to live at the margins of the Chinese society. This scenario has not changed much despite several years of resilience shown by the African migrants in China (Bodomo, 2020). Li, Xhue, Du and Zhu (2009) observed that the traditional role of the Chinese media is to profile African migrants in China as national threats. Also, for some members of Chinese general public, Africans are viewed as having the propensity to violence and posing risks to public health through spreading of diseases (Cheng, 2011). Thus, the above claims seemed to have provided the basis for the onslaught against the African migrants in China during the Covid-19 pandemic.

In spite of the data published by the office of the Chinese Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, which found Chinese citizens culpable for the imported cases of Covid-19 Pandemic in China (CNN, April 13, 2020), the African community was thrown into uncertainty resulting from mistreatment meted out to them over fears of spreading the new imported cases of coronavirus disease (Nnabugwu, 2020). An African community leader in China who spoke in anonymity with the BBC stressed that about 98 percent of African nationals in China were forcefully quarantined even when reports from some Chinese health officials exonerated them from imported cases of Covid-19 (BBC, April 17, 2020). Table 1 below summarized various incidents of degrading treatments suffered by African expatriates in the hands of Chinese security officials and general public during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Table 1: Incidents of forced Covid-19 testing without results; policed quarantining and local resentments against African migrants in China

Date of report of the incidents	Location of the incidents	Victims of the incidents	Nature of the incidents	Sources of information
11/4/2020	Guangzhou, China	9 Nigerians, 3 Angolans, 2 Nigeriens, and 2 DR Congolese	Local Chinese authorities profiled Africans as the source of the largest number of imported Covid-19 cases.	France 24, CNN, ABC News, etc.
12/4/2020	Guangzhou, China	Tony Mathias, an exchange student from Uganda	Accused of spreading of Covid-19 disease; tested for coronavirus several times without being given test results.	Agence France-Presse
12/4/2020	Chinese cities including Guangzhou's Yuexiu District	Unnamed African migrants	US Embassy Security in China reported that African migrants were blamed for second wave of Covid-19.	US Consulate General
13/4/2020	Unnamed Chinese cities	A Nigerian trader named Chuks and 15 other African migrants	A Nigerian trader named Chuks, along 15 other African migrants were forcefully quarantined for 14 days.	CNN
13/4/2020	An unnamed Chinese city	An unnamed Moroccan migrant worker	He was forced into a government isolation center,	CNN

			<p>spending 400 yuan (\$56) for every night spent in assigned hotel, and returned to his apartment after testing negative twice. He was later isolated for another 14 days simply because, Africans in the city were the scapegoat of lockdown measures.</p>	
13/4/2020	Shenzhen, China	A Senegalese man named Youssouf	<p>Youssouf, who was living with his Canadian wife in China was compelled to Covid-19 testing and quarantining just because he is an African, while his Canadian wife (who shared apartment with him) was spared.</p>	CNN
13/4/2020	Guangzhou	A foreign student of Guangzhou University, named Maano Gaasite from Botswana.	<p>She was subjected to multiple Covid-19 testing and quarantine despite having not left China for over six months, while students from non-African</p>	CNN

			nationalities at her hall of residence were spared.	
13/4/2020	In many Chinese cities	Unnamed large number of African migrants were forcefully quarantined without evidence of infection	Africans faced multiple Covid-19 tests without issuance of test results and were made to incur degrading treatments.	France 24
15/4/2020	An unnamed city in China	Thiam, an exchange student in China, from Guinea	Thiam was forcefully quarantined in his apartment. He told the Agence France-Presse that all the people he had seen tested were Africans, while Chinese and non-black foreigners were walking around freely but “if you are black you cannot go out”.	Agence France-Presse
15/4/2020	Guangzhou, China	4 Nigerians tested for Covid-19 and were forcefully quarantined	This was the result of Chinese media propaganda that 300,000 black Africans were setting up second wave of Covid-19.	Sui (2020)

16/4/2020	Guangzhou, China	14 citizens of Sierra Leone were forcefully quarantined	African diplomats in Beijing acknowledged that 14 Sierra Leone migrants forcefully quarantined.	ABC News
17/4/2020	Guangzhou, China	12 Africans including 5 Nigerians were forcefully quarantined	Among 13 new local cases, 12 Africans were allegedly traced to imported African cases.	Sun (2020)
17/4/2020	Guangzhou, China	5 Nigerians were forcefully quarantined	5 Nigerians who reportedly ate at the local Emma Food restaurant (owned by an African) allegedly tested positive for Covid-19, and the restaurant became profiled as the location of local infections.	Sun (2020)

29/4/2020	Different Chinese cities including Guangzhou	Unnamed African migrants	Report that the Chinese authorities subjected African migrants to multiple and compulsory Covid-19 testing, coupled with compulsory self-isolation for everyone with African contact irrespective of travel history and previous quarantine completion.	ABC News
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Sources: Compiled by the author from different media outlets and publications.

As shown in Table 1, the African migrants in China faced special scrutiny in a manner best described as xenophobia during the Covid-19 outbreak. Africans became earmarked for Chinese quarantine measures. Consequently, the general Chinese public became terrified that all African migrants in China were infectious and contagious, bringing an eruption of local resentment against the African expatriate (Sun, 2020). The reports in Table 1 showed that the African community, unlike other foreigners in China became victims of forced quarantine. In an interview with Tony Mathias from Uganda (an exchange student in China), he noted that he was “accused of spreading of Covid-19 disease by the Chinese officials; tested for Covid-19 multiple times without being privy to results; and incurred many degrading treatments in public” (Agence France-Presse, April 13, 2020). This was the experience of many African migrants in China, who were being tested for coronavirus several times without receiving the results of their tests, and were being abused, maltreated and discriminated in the public spaces (Nnabugwu, 2020). Just like Tony Mathias, a Nigerian migrant trader in China, simply identified as Chuks (for fear of reprisal from the Chinese officials), along with 15 other African migrants (without recent travel history and contact with infected persons) were forcefully quarantined for 14 days, and were

subjected to stigmatizations and resentments from the local Chinese people (CNN, April 13, 2020).

At the heights of xenophobic attacks against African migrants in China, ABC News (April 20, 2020) reported that Chinese authorities subjected African migrants to multiple and compulsory Covid-19 testing, coupled with mandatory self-isolation for everyone with African contact irrespective of travel history and previous quarantine completion. Thiam, a Guinean exchange student in China, who was forcefully quarantined in his apartment, told the Agence France-Presse, that “all the people he had seen tested were Africans, while the Chinese people were walking around freely but if you are black, you cannot go out” (Sui, 2020). On April 11, 2020, nine Nigerians, three Angolans, two Nigeriens, and two DR Congolese were arrested and forcefully quarantined, simply because, they were Africans (Sun, 2020).

Subsequently, all Africans in China were profiled by the local authorities as the source of the largest number of imported Covid-19 cases and thus became the top target of Chinese quarantine efforts, as the local Chinese people began to fear that all Africans in China were infectious and contagious, bringing an eruption of local resentment (Sun, 2020). As a result, bigotry and racial stereotyping against the African people became a commonplace in China (James, 2020). Also, the arrest and forceful quarantining of 14 citizens of Sierra Leon in China were acknowledged by the country’s embassy in Beijing. These abuses and repressive treatments sparked a diplomatic outrage from the African Missions in Beijing which demanded for the end of all forms of discriminations against Africans in China (ABC News, April 12, 2020). Though there were a handful of African migrants in China who tested positive for Covid-19, the state-sponsored anti-African media machination stroke up the rumors that 300,000 black Africans were setting up second wave of Covid-19 (Rui, 2020), which intensified the vulnerability of African migrants in the country.

Furthermore, the reports in Table 1 showed that the entire African community in China became the top target of forced quarantining and security clampdown, simply because a few number of African migrants tested positive for Covid-19 disease. For instance, as 5 Nigerians who reportedly ate at the local Emma Food restaurant (owned by an African) allegedly tested positive for Covid-19, the restaurant became profiled as the epicenter of local infections, including its owner, staff and other customers (Sun, 2020). Since this incident, Africans across Guangdong province were tested and some quarantined in their homes, while others

were ejected, despite having no recent travel history or contact with a Covid-19 infected persons. A foreign student of Guangzhou University, named Maano Gaasite from Botswana, told the CNN (April 13, 2020) that:

At 3 p.m. on Sunday, I received a WeChat message from my course administrator saying that I am required to be tested, even though I have not traveled out of China for more than six months. When I arrived there, I found that they were only targeting foreign students from Africa. Yet, there are foreign students from India (in the hostel I reside), but they did not invite them. They were just targeting our small African community. The officials took a swab from the back of my throat and said they would call if I had the virus. I never heard back.

In a related incident in Shenzhen, south of Guangzhou, Youssouf, a Senegalese man, who was living with his Canadian wife in China was compelled to Covid-19 testing and quarantining just because he is an African, while his Canadian wife (who shared the same apartment with him) was overlooked. From a conversation with Youssouf, CNN reported that:

At 1 p.m. on Wednesday, the Chinese officials visited the apartment which Youssouf was living with his Canadian wife in a compound lived by other foreign nationals. The officials knocked on the door and showed Youssouf a phone with his full details, including his name and country. They told him to visit hospital and get tested for Covid-19. Youssouf enquired if they wanted his Canadian wife to get tested. He was told they were only testing Africans. Meanwhile, both couples had not traveled out of China in the past 12 months. Yet, Canada has many confirmed cases of Covid-19 and is listed among high-risk countries by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (CNN, April 13, 2020).

Although many African countries ranked low on the global Covid-19 dashboard in contrast to high-risk countries from Europe and North America, yet African migrants in China were faced with heavy scrutiny, state repression and coronavirus-fueled racist attacks (James, 2020). These repeated biases in Covid-19 containment efforts that targeted only black foreigners in China, is a confirmation of hitherto observation that Africans are seen as “unwanted and undesirable elements” in China. Worried about the devastating anti-black racism during the coronavirus outbreak, an African migrant in China in a conversation with the BBC noted as follows:

With all this incident, the Chinese people have demonstrated racial prejudice against African migrants here in Guangzhou. I am aware of the white people and non-African migrants in my church who are not subjected to these degrading treatments- isolation and multiple Covid-19 testing. Quarantine facilities are like forced detention centers for blacks (BBC, April 17, 2020).

Figure 1 below showed an incident where some Chinese officials barged into an apartment housing African migrants to enforce Covid-19 testing and quarantining. Andrew, a black American migrant worker in China revealed that “his fear was that the Chinese police could show up at your door and tell you, you are under quarantine” (Chambers & Davies, 2020; ABC News, 2020).

Figure 1: Chinese police barged into the house of an African resident in Beijing



Culled from CNN (April 13, 2020).

Furthermore, CNN (April 13, 2020) narrated how the Chinese Police intruded into an apartment (see Figure 2 below) housing Smith (an American migrant) and her Moroccan boyfriend in Beijing, and tried to exonerate the American (Smith) from Covid-19 testing and subsequent quarantining, on a condition that she had to decide not to live in the same apartment with her African boyfriend, who had twice tested negative for the virus, and was still subjected to multiple quarantine, simply because he is an African.

Figure 2: Chinese police intruded into the house of an American lady sharing apartment with her African boyfriend in Beijing



Source: Culled from CNN (April 13, 2020).

Arising from a conversation with Smith, CNN (April 13, 2020) reported that:

Smith and her boyfriend went on holiday to Malaysia. Smith returned on March 17, 2020 and says she was asked by the Chinese officials to self-isolate at home for 14 days. Her Moroccan boyfriend returned on March 25, 2020 and says he went into a government isolation center, spending 400 yuan (\$56) for every night at an assigned hotel, and came out on Wednesday after testing negative two times to Covid-19. On Thursday, health officials visited the couple's flat and told Smith's partner, who chose to anonymous, to isolate at home for 14 days because all African migrants in the province were forcefully kept on lockdown. Smith confirms that an international school in Guangzhou where she works, was notified that all African nationals were meant to go into lockdown, and the school has several migrants from the South African sub-region.

CNN also spoke to several other Africans who were visited by Chinese authorities during the Covid-19 outbreak, and were told that they needed to quarantine at home for 14 days. According to the media body, the African community in China revealed that the police put

alarms on their front doors, which would alert officials if they leave home. There has been a push in Guangzhou to get the Africans out of the city, and enforcement of Covid-19 containment measures became an easy excuse to achieve this (CNN, April 13, 2020).

The announcement made by People's Government of Guangzhou Province that a Nigerian national at a Covid-19 ward had assaulted and injured a female nurse while reportedly attempting to escape from isolation center, which was circulated widely on social media worsened the disturbing and humiliating experiences African nationals were subjected to in China (Chambers & Davies, 2020). Again, the coronavirus-fueled racism and anti-African attitudes of the Chinese officials were exacerbated by the local resentments and media frenzy. For instance, James (2020) observed:

On April 6, 2020, Sanheli, a neighborhood in Yuexiu that is known as "Little Africa" due to its sizable population of African migrants, became the subject of a social media frenzy after a Weibo post claiming that Yaotai village, located in the neighborhood, would be completely locked down for 14 days. "Some specific groups of people will be targeted for testing during this period of time", the post read. In a typical Weibo comment, one wrote (in Chinese): "The black people in Guangzhou constitute a serious problem for the city. They are lazy and unhygienic. Many of them are drug addicts or thieves because they do not have much in their savings. I would not be surprised if a second outbreak of coronavirus disease occurred in Guangzhou.

This virulent social media racism against African migrants in China was largely unchecked by the highly censored Communist State of China, raising suspicions of state complicity in racial profiling and xenophobic attacks on Africans in the country.

Social Exclusion and Denial of Basic Services to African Migrants in China during Covid-19 Pandemic

Available evidence showed that the Chinese authorities and local people exhibited racism and discrimination against African migrants during the Covid-19 pandemic. Unlike the local Chinese people and non-African migrant-foreigners in China, African nationals were denied essential services at restaurants and bars, hotels and clinics, among other places during the coronavirus outbreak Tang (2020). Table 2 below summarized various incidents of social exclusion, discrimination and

maltreatments suffered by African migrant community in China during the coronavirus outbreak.

Table 2: Incidents of social exclusion and denial of basic services to African migrants in China during Covid-19 pandemic

Date of the incidents	City of the incidents	Victims of the incidents	Nature of the incidents	Sources
29/3/2020	An unnamed city	A Ugandan national- Kyeyune Derrick and his pregnant African wife in China	This pregnant African woman was denied entry to a hospital at Dongguan Guangdong province for a medical checkup.	Voice of America (VOA)
6/4/2020	Across many cities in China	Involved many African migrants in China	Seizure of African migrants' passports (with a typical case of an African, whose passport for no apparent reason was seized by the Chinese police while he was trying to get the metro), and threats of visa revocation, arrest or deportation, etc.	ABC News
6/4/2020	Across many cities in China	Involving several black Africans	Many Africans including Andrew (a black American) recalled denial of service by the Chinese taxi drivers (who drove off when	Chambers and Davies (2020)

			they saw passengers with dark-skin color). Africans also had issues with the Chinese authorities when riding on the metro.	
6/4/2020	Guangzhou, China	Unnamed blacks and African nationals	A blue sign was put at pizza restaurant written in English that showed pizza restaurants were only offering take-away to foreigners especially Africans.	ABC News
6/4/2020	China	Unnamed African nationals in China	Reports of Africans being refused entrance at restaurants	Chambers and Davies (2020); VOA
12/4/2020	Guangzhou, China	Tony Mathias, an exchange student from Uganda, interviewed by the Agence France-Presse on the 13 th of April.	Tony was accused of spreading Covid-19 and he could not buy food anywhere, as no shops or restaurants were willing to serve him.	Agence France-Presse
12/4/2020	Guangzhou, China	Unnamed Africans	Africans were blamed for second wave of Covid-19, and were barred from bars, restaurants and hotels by the	VOA

			Chinese police .	
13/4/2020	Guangzhou, China	Black Americans and African migrants	A US Embassy security alert reported that Chinese police instructed bars and restaurants to decline services to customers who seem to have African background.	US Consulate General
13/4/2020	Sanyuanli, China	African migrants	Local Chinese authority reportedly closed off an African restaurant (also known as African-Pot Restaurant) along with other businesses in Sanyuanli area of Guangzhou.	Kirton (2020)
14/4/2020	Guangzhou, China	African migrants	African immigrants told VOA they are being barred entrance to stores, detained and singled out to be tested for coronavirus.	VOA
14/4/2020	Wuhan, China	An Ethiopian migrant student in Wuhan, China, among others	He was denied access to public spaces including stores, mall, bars and restaurants.	Voice of Nigeria; Solomon (2020)
15/4/2020	Guangzhou	A black American named Andrew alongside	Andrew was denied basic social services, including prohibition of	ABC News

		others	Africans and blacks from being attended to at restaurants .	
17/4/2020	Guangzhou, China	African migrants	A sign displaced that at McDonald's restaurant in Guangzhou stating that black people are not allowed to enter the restaurant.	BBC
17/4/2020	Guangzhou	African migrants	Many homeless, starving and stranded Africans found roaming the streets in China as a result of police repression.	CNN
17/4/2020	Guangzhou, China	Homeless African migrants	Videos filmed by a member of one of the WeChat volunteer groups, reported by CNN, reveals Chinese police attempting to obstruct volunteers from giving alms to stranded African migrants.	CNN

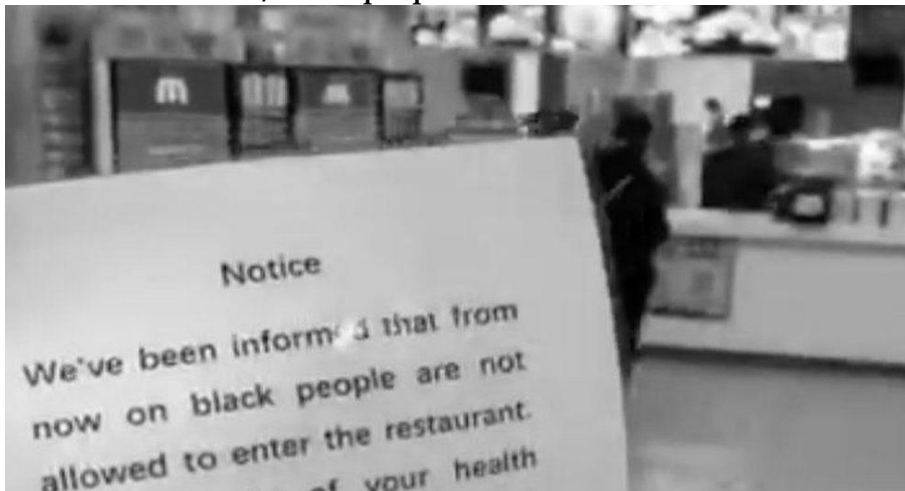
Source: Compiled by the author from different media outlets and publications

Specifically, Table 2 presented different incidents of racism and inhuman treatments meted out to African migrants during Covid-19 pandemic in China. Data presented in Table 2 showed that African people in China were being targeted and suffered various categories of social exclusions

and discrimination during the heights of Covid-19 pandemic. For instance, as part of the efforts to social exclusions and mass starvation of African migrant community, the local Chinese authority closed off a popular African restaurant (also known as African-Pot Restaurant) along with other businesses owned by Africans in Sanyuanli area of Guangzhou, even when the Covid-19 lockdown was eased up (Kirton, 2020). Relatedly, in a widely circulated video online, a sign was put up at McDonald's restaurant in Guangzhou, in China's southern Guangdong province, showing that African people were banned from entering into the restaurant. In fact, McDonald's staff was holding a sign (see Figure 3 below) that says:

We have been instructed that henceforth, black people are barred from entry to the restaurant; in the interest of your health, cautiously alert the local police for medical quarantine. Please, understand the inconvenience caused; police TELL: 110 (Sui, 2020; ABC News, April 12, 2020; BBC, April 17, 2020).

Figure 3: McDonald's restaurant at Guangzhou, China barred African/Black people from access to services



Source: BBC (April 17, 2020)

As part of anti-African campaign, the above racial posture against Africans/blacks at McDonald's restaurant was in line with the official directive from the Chinese police authority (US Consulate General, 2020). In the same vein, African-Americans reported that some businesses and hotels declined to do business with them during the

Covid-19 crisis (Chambers & Davies, 2020). Meanwhile, in a conversation with the ABC News, a Black-American resident in China, who chose to be named Andrew, and was a teacher in the southern metropolis of Guangzhou, told ABC News:

As the incidents of Covid-19 which emanated from China seem to decrease, and cases that the Chinese authority said were imported increased, being foreigner in China, and mainly being linked with African origin, meant feeling unwanted in some places. Andrew instructed ABC to use only his first name, as he and his employer are worried of the danger of victimization from Chinese authorities (Chambers & Davies, 2020).

Notably, Africans were being treated as patsy for Covid-19 outbreak in China. Available evidence showed that not only were Africans denied entrance to restaurants, they were also stigmatized as local people absconded from getting in the elevator with them or sitting beside them in the subway (Chambers & Davies, 2020). Several African nationals in China, including Tony Mathias (an exchange student from Uganda), Ade (a computing student from Nigeria), Chuks (a migrant trader from Nigeria), and Thiam (an exchange student from Guinea), among many others were not only used as scapegoat for the spread of second wave of Covid-19 but faced evictions from their paid accommodations, forced and multiple quarantines, and were also denied essential services through police prohibitions at restaurants, bars, shops, hotels, etc. (CNN, 13 April, 2020; ABC News, 20th April, 2020; James, 2020). In an interview with ABC News, Matt Slack (a white man from New Jersey, USA who has operated a chain of pizza restaurants in Guangzhou) disclosed that:

On April 6, 2020, his businesses were visited by the local city management. He was never notified officially, but his store staff disclosed to him that they were given a blue sign that they were required to show to customers. The sign was written in English and signaled that their pizza restaurants were only offering take-away. This message was targeted at foreign nationals, specifically for black people, even though Chinese citizens enjoyed their meals there.

Again, because many African migrants in China had become homeless and roaming the streets following evictions from their paid apartments and accommodations (see Figures 4 and 5 below), and denied access to basic services including food, several volunteer groups

emerged on WeChat, mostly dominated by scores of other foreigners in China, rallying around the displaced Africans, organizing food, facemasks and sanitation products for those left wandering the streets of China without a bed (CNN, 2020). Volunteers in Guangzhou give out food and supplies to Africans who were rendered homeless by the Chinese police. On this note, Su (2020) reported an encounter with a volunteer as follows:

I saw several videos, boys loitering outside, feeling hungry... I just have to support, to ensure that they eat food, Elo, 36 said. He made big batches of moi moi, a Nigerian steamed bean cake, and requested a Chinese friend to deliver them to blacks in Guangzhou, fearing that he would be targeted by Chinese officials if he went out.

Figure 4: Africans in China forced out from their accommodation during Covid-19 Pandemic



Source: BBC & Vincent (April, 2020).

Figure 5: Images of displaced Africans roaming the streets in China



Source: Su (2020).

Moreover, Katie Smith (not her real name for fears of reprisal from local authorities), an American living in China with her Moroccan boyfriend, volunteered food deliveries to the newly homeless and stranded African nationals in China during the Covid-19 pandemic. Smith observed how the Chinese police attempted to obstruct volunteers from reaching out to the helpless African migrants who were forced into the streets (CNN, April 13, 2020). The conversation between CNN, Katie Smith and other volunteers showed that Africans in China were being used as scapegoats during the Covid-19 pandemic. According to her:

As we drove down the street, we saw many African migrants wandering around. The police came and said they could not stay there. They are not letting them gather in groups. So, they were just walking up and down the streets with nowhere to go. As a black person, residing in China right now is quite scary (CNN, April 13, 2020).

Furthermore, Africans in China protested against discriminatory barriers and human rights abuses they faced during the coronavirus

outbreak even though restrictions on movement were eased (see Figure 6 below).

Figure 6: Chinese police face off with a group of Africans in protest blocking the entrance to the police station in Guangzhou



Source: Solomon (2020), Voice of America- VOA (April 14, 2020).

Meanwhile, videos posted on the media, photos and interviews, all painted the picture of harassments of black people in China by the police and local residents. The Voice of America (VOA) reported the incident of African immigrants in China being denied entrance to stores, detained and singled out to be tested for coronavirus (Solomon, 2020). According to Ghanaian businessman, resident in Shanghai, “it makes no sense; the Chinese police do not do this to any other skin color” (VOA, April 14, 2020). This racism and xenophobia against Africans in China were also confirmed by the Ethiopian migrant student in the city of Wuhan. According to him:

Things are getting out of hands here; racism is going at a high level now; I have even experienced it a lot in the past seven days... Even the people I know before are afraid of me now (VOA, April, 2020).

In one widely shared video, the VOA reported of a pregnant black woman denied entry to a hospital where she sought treatment and healthcare (Solomon, 2020). There were also instances the blacks/Africans were denied services by Chinese taxi operators. For

instance, Andrew (a black American) recalled when a cab driver drove off when he saw him, and has also had issues with the Chinese authorities when riding on the metro (Chambers & Davies, 2020). Throughout China, the people of African descent were highly unprotected and faced differing levels of mistreatment in relation to Covid-19 Pandemic (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Some Africans complained that police and local officials had molested them, and hospitals and restaurants denied them services. In reaction to human rights abuses of African community in China during Covid-19 pandemic, over three hundred human rights bodies and hundreds of human rights activists in Africa sent a protest letter to the African Union requesting for “urgent remedial action” over the inhuman treatment of African migrants in China (Kirton, 2020).

VI. Conclusion and Recommendation

China’s disregard for the protection of fundamental human rights of African migrants accounted for the xenophobic attacks on African migrant community in China during the Covid-19 pandemic. The breach of fundamental human rights of African migrants in China became boldfaced in the wake of Covid-19 pandemic, as the Chinese authorities blamed the African community for the second wave of Covid-19 outbreak. This provided the basis for the onslaught against the African nationals in China which elicited diplomatic protests and discussions from the African Union member states and condemnations from the global heads of government as well as human rights bodies. Without policies and institutional mechanisms to ensure dignity and decent living of African nationals in China, the future of China and Africa relations is likely to be in jeopardy.

Against this backdrop, the study recommends that there is urgent need by China to address the concern of AU members over unequal reciprocity in connection with China-Africa relations on the issues of human rights of their respective migrant nationals. This will ensure that the People’s Republic of China implements legislations, policies and measures that will protect and safeguard the fundamental human rights and freedom of African nationals and black community in general (which constitute the most vulnerable foreigners in China) in line with the international legal standards and best hospitalities given to Chinese nationals in Africa.

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