

## **CERS Working Paper 2015**

### **Racialisation in China**

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#### Introduction

It has been recognised that racism is often denied as being an integral part of Chinese culture by indigenous Chinese people (Law, 2012). Nonetheless, it is within this paper that this concept will be flawed. Moreover, this paper will challenge and propose extensions for critical race theory with the introduction of polyracism. Firstly, after considering various sources which attempt to contribute towards the definition of racialisation, an understanding of what constitutes as 'racialisation' will be generated. Afterwards, key terms surrounding racialisation will be taken into account, including the terms 'race' and Max Weber's concept of 'race identity'. In doing so, this will help to generate further ideas around what could constitute as racialisation. Moreover, there will be further developments alongside identifying processes of racialisation, including an attempt to contribute to the validity of the new and developing theory called 'polyracism'. This will be partly done by looking at processes of racialisation through a relational methodology. The first process of racialisation will be the origins of the 'yellow race' from a colour consciousness in Chinese antiquity. The second process will be the creation of the 'Han race', which stems from the origins of the 'yellow race'. The third process will be nationalism, with acknowledgement of the communist regimes. The fourth process will be the cultural genocide of Tibetans into Chinese culture, which will be referred to as 'sincisation'. The fifth process will then consider anti-blackness attitudes towards African minorities within China. After the processes of racialisation in China are considered, concluding comments will be made to the possibility of a de-racialized world, which will flaw the underpinnings of post-racial theory. By taking such steps, certain issues will be addressed. Issues stemming from these calls for concern include an attempt to support 'polyracism'. However, for the primary purpose of this paper, a detailed critical analysis of the processes of racialisation will be carried out in China.

#### Key Concept – Racialisation

Definitions of racialisation will be considered in depth, for which have been widely commented on (Law, 2012; Reid, 2004; Small, 1994). For example, Law (2012) explains that racialisation is "the dynamic process by which racial concepts, categories and divisions come to structure and embed themselves in arenas of social life" (Law, 2012, p.59). In addition, Reid (2004) explains how racialisation is in part "the use of categories that produce homogenised understandings of very diverse groups of people" (Reid, 2004, p.8). Moreover, Small (1994) recognizes the importance of taking into account the attitudes and interests of powerful groups of society, which take precedence over the attitudes and actions of those who are considered to be part of inferior 'races' (Small, 1994). From this wealth of information, some key assumptions can be made. Firstly, it can be assumed that 'racialisation' involves the processes of categorizing people into homogenous categories, despite there being diverse groups of people within a society. It can also be assumed that such processes of racialisation occur across different levels in everyday social life, for which can favour those with the greatest power in society, and thus do not favour

those who are deemed to be minorities. In turn, it could therefore be assumed that there is an intrinsic, racialized hierarchy within a society, which places those with the most power at the top of the racialized hierarchy, and those with the least power at the bottom of the racialized hierarchy.

### Key Concepts – Race and Race Identity

This understanding of racialisation can be enhanced by considering some further key concepts. For example, Law (2012) defines 'race' as "the social and cultural significance assigned to a group of people who are recognised as sharing common... characteristics and/or a common lineage of descent" (Law, 2012, p.3). In addition to the idea of 'race', Weber (1968) defines 'race identity' as "common inherited and inheritable traits that actually derive from common descent" (Weber, 1968, p.385). In turn, it can be suggested that those who identify themselves with a certain race involve them being identified with a group of people who are all descendants from a common lineage, and that there are no intervening races or lineages. These key concepts are important to further understand the processes of racialisation, because it can now be assumed that the creation of homogenous categories of people in a distinctive race are due to the idea that those people within that homogenous group are believed to have the same race identity, and that they all come from a common lineage of descent. In addition, it can be assumed that those who have the greatest power in society, and those who are considered minorities in society, are considered to be descendants from different lineages, and are thus considered to be of different races with different race identities.

### Polyracism

Further to addressing the processes of racialisation in China, there will be an integral attempt to support the validity of polyracism. Law (2014) explains that polyracism involves the denotation of "the historical development of multiple origins of racism in different regions and forms, as opposed to the monoracism arguments positing a linear diffusion of Western racisms" (Law, 2014, p.162). Moreover, Law (2014) attempts to demonstrate polyracism in the context of racism in the Mediterranean, and argues that multiple racisms by multiple people have created the contemporary Mediterranean region, and this is a product of the pre-modern relations between racial ideologies within the Mediterranean region which have created the underlying formations of racialized regimes elsewhere, including Southern Europe and North Africa (Law, 2014). In doing so, Law (2014) challenges the "regional vocabulary of critical race theory" (Law, 2014, p.2). Critical race theory has been widely recognized as a product of the normality of racism within American society, and how it is maintained due to white supremacy over blacks (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Yosso 2005). From here, important points can be made. It can be suggested that even though the critical race theory helpfully contributes towards the interrogation of racialisation by demonstrating how racism is an integral part of modern nation states, polyracism aims to extend the scope of its foundations. For example, polyracism aims to flaw the lineal assumption of the critical race theory, by demonstrating that racism is simply not confined to one location, nor is it due to white supremacy in one country. Polyracism aims to demonstrate that racism is not a product of Western modernity, but it has pre-modern and non-Western origins, and it has multiple origins around the world, with each country having its own unique expressions of racial discourse. In addition, polyracism aims to demonstrate that racism is relational in nature with other countries around the world, which means that racisms are not confined to one location but they have been shaped by racisms elsewhere in the world. Further sources could also support this notion. For example, Goldberg (2009) explains how

“racial ideas... and repressive practises in one place are influenced, shaped by and fuel those elsewhere” (Goldberg, 2009, p.1274).

### The Yellow Race and Colour Consciousness

The first process of racialisation concerns how the ‘yellow race’ stemmed from colour consciousness in Chinese antiquity. Law (2012) explains how from antiquity, there was a colour consciousness in China, with a lighter complexion deemed to be beautiful, whereas darker skin complexions were negatively valued (Law, 2012). Moreover, the idea of black being negatively valued was set out in the Five Classics of the Confucian symbolic universe, and early sources demonstrate that the Chinese equated Africans with blackness and slavery well before Westerners established themselves in China (Dikötter, 1992; Law, 2012). In terms of the ‘yellow race’, this has been recognised as a key component of Chinese culture and the ideas of race in Chinese society (Dikötter, 1992). Dikötter (1997) explains how ideologies of blood and a biological descent group from the ‘Yellow Emperor’ in China has formed a central part in the construction of China’s cultural identity (Dikötter, 1997). Moreover, Dikötter (1992) explains that “The Yellow Emperor is the great ancestor, [and that] all those who are not... the descendants of the Yellow Emperor... are exterior families” (Dikötter, 1992, p.117).

From this information, important ideas can be noted. It assumes that the Chinese distinguished themselves from those who were of darker skin complexions, and that they were descendants of the Yellow Emperor, and they were all part of a direct line of lineage, without any intervening, exterior lineages included. Moreover, by claiming that people can be of one direct lineage of descent from a common ancestor, and therefore a common race, they are homogenising themselves into one group of peoples, which therefore separates themselves from a diverse group of peoples in the world. This in turn demonstrates their unique ‘race identity’, because those of the ‘yellow race’ are all part of a common lineage of descent so that only those people can inherit their common traits. This suggests that those who are not part of this common lineage cannot inherit their common traits, because they are not part of their common lineage of descent. Therefore, it can be strongly argued that the case of the yellow race from a colour consciousness in Chinese antiquity demonstrates racialisation in China.

In addition, it could be argued that this idea of colour consciousness and the ‘yellow race’ supports polyracism. This is because this kind of categorisation of homogenous groups of people originated in China, which is a country that is not in the Western region of the globe. Moreover, the ideas of the yellow race and colour consciousness are also not a product of Western modernity, because they originated in China before the Chinese came into contact with Europeans, which also further demonstrates that racial discourse is a pre-modern concept in China. In addition to this, the case of the yellow race flaws the lineal assumption of the critical race theory, since it demonstrates that racism is not just between white supremacy and blacks, because the Chinese developed another racial identity that is uniquely distinguishable from whites and blacks, and they referred to themselves as the ‘yellow race’. However, and for the primary purposes of this paper, the notion of the ‘yellow race’ demonstrates racialisation in China.

### The Han Race

The creation of the ‘Han race’ has been widely recognised as a concept that stemmed from the origins of the ‘yellow race’, with those in the Han race being descendants from the Yellow Emperor (Chow, 1997; Law, 2012; Tsu, 2005; Zhao, 2004). For example, Tsu (2005) explains

how “people used the notion of a pure Han race [that was] founded by the Yellow Emperor” (Tsu, 2005, p.39). In a similar vein, Chow (1997) explains how revolutionaries like Zhang Binglin regarded the Han Chinese as descendants of the Yellow Emperor (Chow, 1997). However, and perhaps more importantly, Zhao (2004) claims that the ‘Han’ emerged due to a framed discussion of social Darwinism, and scholars like Liang Qichao responded to European notions of race, and claimed that the yellow race was dominated by those of the Han people (Zhao, 2004). Similarly, Mackerras (1994) explains how “the Han considered their own culture superior to those of the people living among or around them” (Mackerras, 1994, p.24). Moreover, Law (2012) explains that key figures like Sun Yat-sen stressed the importance of “the need for a strong (Han) race, [who were] warned of racial destruction and the need for race/nation survival and defence” (Law, 2012, p.104).

As a result, it can be assumed that the creation of the Han race was to further categorize themselves as all being descendants from the Yellow Emperor, which homogenizes themselves into one race identity, and considers those who are not part of the Han race to have a different race identity. In addition, with the introduction of social Darwinian influences, the Han race considered themselves to be superior to other races, and even at war with them for a struggle to survive against possible infiltration from other races. This enforces the ideologies of racial hierarchies, because it is assuming that there are other races that are not from the same superior common lineage line of the Han race, and therefore the other races were at a lower racialized hierarchical level in society.

Moreover, this information and the assumptions that can be made from it can in turn support polyracism. For instance, when the Chinese became familiar with European races, it could be argued that this was the dominant catalyst in the development of the Han race due to the perception of their survival against other races. This suggests that their racial ideologies were influenced and fuelled by elsewhere in the world, which supports the relational nature of polyracism. Moreover, social Darwinian influence from the West may also support the relational nature of racism. Even though it could be argued that, due to the Western influence of Darwinism, which could mean that racism is a product of the West, it must be recognised that the Chinese adopted the principles of Darwinism in the unique Chinese context of China’s survival of their own Han race. Therefore, this not only further enforces how racism can be relational in nature, but it also shows how it can originate in non-Western regions across the globe. In turn, this flaws the lineal assumptions of the critical race theory, because it suggests that racism is not just confined to one location. Therefore, this paper has continually supported polyracism, and the creation of the Han race also demonstrates racialisation in China.

### Nationalism and Communism

Nationalism will now be explored by considering communist regimes in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Nationalism in China was prompted for a variety of reasons, and was premised on racialized ideologies around the Han race (Sautman, 1997; Zheng, 1999; Zhao, 2004; Zhimin, 2005). This idea led the Han Chinese to want to overthrow the ruling Qing dynasty, who in the eyes of the Han Chinese, were considered to be non-Han Chinese, and the Chinese nation could not be built unless the Qing dynasty was overthrown (Callahan, 2004; Chow, 1997; Zarrow, 2005; Zhao, 2004). However, it is also important to recognise that not only was nationalism a part of internal factors within China, but it was influenced by other nations. For example, Dikötter (1992) claims that when the Qing dynasty collapsed in 1911, many came to view the notion of race as a concept to promote national unity against foreign aggressors (Dikötter, 1992). Similarly, Zheng (1999) claims that for key figures such as Sun Yat-sen, nationalism was to ensure the survival of the Chinese from foreign aggression, which meant that Chinese

nationalism had to be centred around the Han race, and based on traditional Chinese culture (Zheng, 1999). As part of further attempts to secure Han domination, Sun Yat-sen set up the Nationalist Party to oppose foreign imperialism (Zheng, 1999). Previous foreign threats are detailed by Zhimin (2005), who explains that China was invaded by people deemed to be non-Chinese, and that Western powers, as well as Japan, had almost destroyed the foundations of a long-lived Chinese world (Zhimin, 2005).

However, closely tied with Chinese nationalism is Chinese communism that ruled at the time when the Chinese generated nationalistic discourse for the survival of the Han race. It has been widely recognised that since the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) came into power in 1949, and thus founded the People's Republic of China (PRC) with Mao Zedong as the Chairman of the CCP, the CCP adopted their nationalistic discourse along Marxist-Leninist veins of communist thought (Mackerras, 1994; Smith, 1994; Zhao, 2000). Perhaps as importantly, Mao adopted a variety of communist ideologies from the Soviet Union (Smith, 2004; Zhao, 2004). The main link between Chinese nationalism and the adoption of communist ideologies is alluded to by Zhao (2000), who details how the nationalist sentiment involved loving the state, so that the obeying citizen would have love and support for China (Zhao, 2004).

Important points can be made from the Chinese nationalistic sentiments and communist regimes in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Ideas surrounding the aim to overthrow the Qing dynasty suggest that the Han Chinese were differentiating themselves from the Qing, because they believed that the Qing were not part of the Han race. In turn, this suggests that they considered the Qing to not be part of the same common lineal descent as the Han race. As a result, this demonstrates how the Han race racially categorized people due to their homogenous understandings of race identities of people among a diverse group of people. This idea could explain why the Han race wanted to overthrow the Qing, because they believed that the Chinese nation would not survive from foreign threat, which suggests that the Han race believed that they were superior to the Qing, and that the Han Chinese placed themselves higher on a racialized hierarchy than the Qing. The underpinnings of communism through Chinese society could further enforce the insistence of nationalism to be created by the government, because it meant that nationalism wasn't just public knowledge, but it was cemented in politics that governed the obeying citizen. In turn, this further demonstrates racialisation in China.

The relational aspect also supports polyracism. For instance, it can be assumed that it was foreign threat from outside of China that greatly prompted Chinese nationalism. As a result, this supports the relational methodology of polyracism and the relational underpinnings of racism across a global scale, because racialized, nationalistic discourse was being fuelled from elsewhere in the world. In turn, this flaws the lineal assumption of the critical race theory, because the case of Chinese nationalism shows that racism is simply not confined to one location, but it can be shaped by other nations across the world. In a different vein, due to such findings from the case of Mao adopting both Marxist-Leninist doctrines and Soviet Union policies, to arguably support racialized, Han-dominated nationalism, this also shows a relational account of influence from other countries from across the globe, which in turn further supports the relational aspect of polyracism. However, the case of Mao adopting communist ideologies in relation to nationalistic discourse being premised on a promotion of the Han race further demonstrates racialisation in China.

### Cultural genocide in Tibet

It is now that the processes of racialisation in Tibet will be considered. The nationalistic discourse being prompted by the Chinese Communist Mao regime had a domino effect upon

other territories and attitudes towards minorities in and around China. In the case of Tibet, the Chinese wanted to culturally assimilate Tibet into Chinese culture, which was premised on a unitary ideology based on a Han-dominated culture (Meisner, 1997; Neterowicz, 1989; Norbu, 2001; Powers, 2004). This form of cultural assimilation, which is arguably cultural genocide due to the aim to wipe out a whole culture, is referred to as 'sinicisation' by Law (2012), who defines 'sinicisation' as:

the aggressive, state-led, promotion of Han culture, language and identity, and the concomitant dissolving of the culture, language and identity of non-Han groups and the social disappearing of those groups into the mass of the Chinese nation (Law, 2012, p.97).

The notion of cultural assimilation in the case of China, which is arguably cultural genocide, will hereafter be referred to as 'sinicisation'. The forceful attitudes of the Chinese government have been widely recognized as a way of trying to integrate Tibet into a Han-dominated Chinese culture (Barnett, 2006; Law, 2012; Neterowicz, 1989; Norbu, 2001; Tong, 1998). For example, Norbu (2001) explains how the emergence of Chinese nationalism sought to integrate Tibet through unifying concepts of a Han-dominated state (Norbu, 2001). There have also been commentators recognising the use of propaganda in Tibet to try and affirm Han-nationalistic discourse on Tibetans, which is exacerbated by Han chauvinism that tried to undermine Tibetan culture and promote Chinese notions of cultural superiority (Powers, 2004). Moreover, Neterowicz (1989) points out that the actions of the PRC in 1987 continued nationalistic sentiments from 1950 when Mao declared the invasion and eventual subjugation of Tibet, which led to a war being waged against Tibetan culture in an attempt to remake Tibet in the Communist image (Neterowicz, 1989). Furthermore, despite Tibetans protesting and being faced with oppression, as well as rumours of a forced removal of the Dalai Lama, Chinese troops brutally quashed their protests by opening fire and killing many Tibetans (Neterowicz, 1989). Beyond the tragedies in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, racial sinicisation against Tibetans has evidently continued to persist in China into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with reports of human rights in Tibet being abused through Chinese discriminatory practises. For instance, there have been many accounts that recognise the growing rate of self-immolation protests as a way to demonstrate outrage against the oppressive policies enforced on Tibetans by the Chinese government (Levin, 2014; Wong, 2015; Wong and Yardley, 2013).

The continuation of the racially motivated oppression of Tibetans by the Chinese is very important to draw assumptions from when considering racialisation in China. Due to the actions of the Chinese against Tibetans being premised on Han-centred nationalistic discourse, they are therefore arguably exercising racialized ideologies, which have been exacerbated by nationalistically prompted Han chauvinism. In this case, it can be assumed that the Chinese nationalistic framework in the case of Tibet distinguishes the Han culture as being different from the Tibetan culture, and have therefore categorized them as not having intrinsic, homogenous understandings of the Han culture. It suggests that they are identifying the Han Chinese as being of a different common lineage in comparison to the Tibetans, and thus of a different race identity. Moreover, since the Chinese wanted to extinguish Tibetan culture and emerge Tibetans into a Han-centred culture, it can be assumed that they are proclaiming themselves to be superior to Tibetans. By combining all of these points together, they further demonstrate racialisation in China.

Due to the idea that the creation of the yellow race is an integral part of the Han race, and how the Han race is an integral part of contemporary forms of sinicisation, this shows the

continuation of racial discourse that has been shaped by pre-modern contexts. As a result, this also demonstrates the non-western influences of racial discourse in China, because such pre-modern contexts were created before the Chinese came into contact with the Europeans. In the case of Tibet, the Chinese are imposing their unique forms of racial discourse, which in turn supports that idea that racism has different, non-western origins around the world, and thus supports polyracism. However, for the primary purposes of this paper, the case of Tibet enforces racialisation in China.

### Anti-blackness and African minorities

The final process of racialisation to be identified is anti-blackness concerning African minorities and those of darker skin complexions, due to colour consciousness from Chinese antiquity. Many commentators have recognised various Chinese student protests over African students being in China (Cheng, 2011; Sautman, 1994; Sullivan, 1994). For instance, Sullivan (1994) comments on the Nanjing Anti-African protests, which included brawls and Chinese students vandalising foreign student's halls (Sullivan, 1994). Similarly, Sautman (1994) documents an incident in Shanghai in 1979, whereby there were violent confrontations between Chinese students and African students, after the Chinese students claimed that the African students were playing their music too loud during an examination period (Sautman, 1994). More contemporary forms of racism towards people of darker skin complexions and African descent can be evident in the case of Lou Jing, who competed in a talent show called '*Go Oriental Angel*', which sparked anger from indigenous Chinese people via online mediums with expressions of racial slurs (Cheng, 2011; Frazier and Zhang, 2014). Even though it has been demonstrated that anti-blackness in China has been expressed in different ways, the important point to make is that these cases shed light on the continuation of racial discourse in China, which in turn demonstrates racialisation in China. However, it has been widely recognised that nationalistic discourse and colour consciousness prompted these outbursts (Cheng, 2011; Sullivan, 1994). For instance, Cheng (2011) explains how cyber racism should be understood by taking into account the discourse of race and nationalistic sentiments in contemporary Chinese society (Cheng, 2011). In a similar vein, Sullivan (1994) explains that protests that exhibited hostility towards 'backward' peoples revealed the complex interaction between Chinese nationalistic sentiments and racial attitudes, but also another important cultural factor being placed on the lightness of skin colour (Sullivan, 1994). Moreover, Sautman (1994) explains how much of the racial hostility during the protests were premised on the idea that the image of blacks and thus Africans were portrayed as natural slaves from backward continents (Sautman, 1994).

With this information taken into account, important assumptions can be made. Due to many of the protests being premised on nationalistic discourse, and the colour consciousness that arguably echoes attitudes from Chinese antiquity, it can be assumed that there is a continuation of a deep historical Chinese view of people who are both non-Han, and darker skin complexions. Therefore, this demonstrates how the Chinese continually categorize people of darker skin complexions as being different from the Han Chinese, and how they were not part of their homogenous Han race. Due to these racialized underpinnings, it could be suggested that according to the Han Chinese, peoples of a darker skin complexion have a different race identity to the Han Chinese. A further important point to make is that, along with the case of cultural genocide in Tibet, racial discourse in Chinese society is not just isolated to historical events. It can be argued that contemporary Chinese society is rife with racial discourse, which in turn further demonstrates racialisation in China.

Moreover, because anti-blackness attitudes in contemporary Chinese society are arguably underpinned by pre-modern racial discourse with colour consciousness from Chinese antiquity, this shows how racism can originate in different locations around the world. As a result, this further supports polyracism.

### Concluding remarks and perspectives on a de-racialized future

Throughout this paper, processes of racialisation in China have been strongly argued through a detailed arsenal of evidence. The processes include the creation of the yellow race through colour consciousness in Chinese antiquity. The yellow race was then an integral part of the second process of racialisation, which was the creation of the Han race. The notion of the Han race underpinned the third process of racialisation, which was the creation of a unique Chinese nationalism that had communist underpinnings. The Han-dominated ideas that was arguably at the core of nationalism prompted the sinicisation of Tibetan culture into a Han-dominated culture. Finally, the racial discourse of colour consciousness from Chinese antiquity is arguably at the core of anti-blackness concerning African minorities in China. However, beyond identifying the processes of racialization in China, it would be valid to explore the potential of a de-racialized world. Commentators have taken pains to explore such a possibility, and have commented in similar ways (Fritz and Stone, 2009; St Louis, 2002; Winant, 2006). One key point raised is the importance of focusing on the individual to make a personal change, and that we need to not allow our racial identities subject us to oppressive attitudes towards other racial identities, if racism in the world is to dissolve (St Louis, 2002). Moreover, St Louis (2002) alludes to the idea that we must consider racism in terms of how it has been socially constructed, and how it is conducive in society, in order to uncover its discursive apparatus (St Louis, 2002). In addition, Winant (2006) helpfully raises the point that due to the social construct that racism is arguably built upon, and by reflecting upon racial formation theory, race is a flexible concept that has been reshaped through context and history, with the civil rights movement demonstrating a change in racial attitudes in America (Winant, 2006). In a similar vein, Fritz and Stone (2009) explain how the overall picture of a future without racism in America was open-ended, but does urge there to be a global change in perspectives about racism, as well as their being changes in social forces at home (Fritz and Stone, 2009).

In the case of a de-racialized China, there are important points to be made. The findings of this paper support the account of polyracism, and flaws the underpinnings of post-racial theory. Nayak (2006) delves into post-racial accounts, and acknowledges how they breach an established orthodoxy and provide an anti-foundational critique of race identity because of how it is only socially recognizable (Nayak, 2006). Furthermore, Law (2012) elaborates on what can be assumed from post-race thinking, as something that implies an aftermath of previous ideologies, and the discrediting of hierarchical forms of racism (Law, 2012). As a result, the findings of this paper strongly suggest that we do not live in a post-racial world, because despite the denial of racism in China, it is evident that Chinese society is rife with racial discourse. This is particularly evident in the case of Tibetans who are continually oppressed and often neglected of their human rights, and it is arguably in the cases of anti-blackness concerning African minorities in China. Therefore, Chinese society has not moved beyond racism, and post-race theory belies any claim that China has moved towards a post-racial world. In turn, post-racial discourse is not happening within China, and post-racial theory thus obscures the everyday racialized practises that continue to occur in China. It could therefore be argued that racism in China will continue to exist, unless everyone dissolves their racial ideologies in society. Moreover, this has to be done with a global perspective in mind, whereby other countries must replicate the dissolving of racism in their own societies, particularly because this paper has



demonstrated the relational nature of racism. This thus suggests that it would be difficult to eradicate racism, but it may be too simplistic to assume that it isn't possible. A final note in this paper would be a suggestion that despite the difficulties on a worldwide scale, there could indeed be a de-racialized world, but in order to attain such a world, there would have to be a worldwide consensus of eradicated racism in each individual society, and in each individual within that society.

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