

Gender Identity and Self-identity of Black Immigration Female Bloggers on Xiaohongshu Platform

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Abstract. This article examines the construction of gender identity among African American female bloggers in China, focusing on Rose, an African American blogger on the Xiaohongshu platform. Despite the growing relationship between China and Africa and the increasing number of African immigrants, African women in China still face marginalization on race and gender. The content of these bloggers aligns with China's mainstream policies, such as "Rural Revitalization" and "Belt and Road," but reinforces gender roles under patriarchy, binds women's value to domestic domains, and defaults them to unpaid labor and emotional service roles. In user comments, there are both affirmations of these bloggers' personal traits and attention to their skin color and racial identity. This phenomenon reflects the differences between relevant policy orientations and existing cognitive tendencies among some groups. Despite the formation of certain practical norms at the platform level and the bloggers' active efforts to secure development space, African female bloggers still face dual challenges related to gender and race in their actual development. The process of their identity construction is consistently influenced by multiple external factors such as observation, evaluation, and regulation, and they exist within this complex interactive structure.

Keywords: Black immigrants, Anti-Black sentiment, Feminism, Patriarchy, platformisation practice

1. Introduction

With the increasingly close relationship between China and Africa, nowadays there is still relatively little research on African immigrants in China, or the focus of research is on their language learning and work in China, while little attention was paid to the family roles of African immigrants, especially the gender identity of African immigrant women who are always in a vulnerable group [1]. Although international scholarship on racial issues is abundant, its findings are rooted in contexts distinct from China's national conditions, making it difficult to explain a key tension: the Chinese government's friendly stance toward African immigrants, contrasted with the lingering exclusionary attitudes some members of Chinese society hold toward this group. In the current era of rapid development of the internet and social media, social platforms act as an important way for African immigrants to be recognized by Chinese society and an inevitable choice for them to adapt to Chinese society [2]. This article focuses on today's highly platform-based Chinese society and

uses qualitative research methods to explore the gender identity and gender identification cognition of African black female bloggers on the Xiaohongshu platform. Specifically, it analyzes the video content posted by blogger Rose on the platform and the users' comments, in order to study how African black female bloggers on the Xiaohongshu recognize their own gender and how Chinese users on the platform perceive them.

2. Research background

Globalization and China's foreign policy have evolved significantly, with China shifting from a traditional labor exporter to a major destination for labor from Africa and Southeast Asia. This shift aligns with China's peaceful development diplomacy and the "Belt and Road" Initiative, which aims to boost development across Asia, Europe, and Africa. China-Africa relations have grown increasingly close since the 2000 strengthening of China-Africa cooperation and the "South-South" Cooperation Forum [3]. However, China's long-standing anti-Black sentiment has become more prominent in recent years, particularly online. Weibo users often depict Black people as "corrupt invaders," "criminal animals," or "evil souls." This rampant online sentiment fuels negative perceptions, conflicting with China's mainstream policies and current trends of population mobility and interracial marriage [4]. Transnational marriages between East/Southeast Asian and African countries are growing common, but Chinese society holds double standards: marriages between Chinese and Western immigrants are seen as progressive, while those between Chinese and Black people are framed as "illegal" or "inferior." This study explores the gender identity of African female immigrants and public perceptions using data from Rose, a popular African female blogger on Xiaohongshu [5-7].

3. Research findings and analysis

3.1. How do African American female bloggers on Xiaohongshu recognize their gender

3.1.1. The continuation of patriarchal gender stereotypes

As of April 8, 2025, in the 100 videos she has recently released, 96 of them are set against the backdrop of rural daily life, primarily describing her cooking process and capturing interactions with neighbors and relatives, as well as details about raising children. Almost every video aims to show how interracial families can still find warmth and happiness under less favorable material conditions, which is key to the popularity of her videos. However, it is clear that such videos confine women's entire roles and value to the home, assuming that the only way for women to realize their worth is through the kitchen, neighborhood, and bedroom. Focusing on the fixed roles women assume within the family, Simone de Beauvoir delves into how the marriage system binds women to their domestic duties: numerous women endure endless tiredness and grow old day by day in a battle that never yields victory (the labor of the housewife); she does nothing but maintains her current situation. The work women do within the family does not grant her autonomy; household chores are not directly useful to the society, which do not look toward the future, produce nothing, and contribute no value to human society. Instead, they place women under the authority of their husbands and children. This unpaid productive labor oppresses and exploits married women, yet society regards it as the natural duty and destiny of she.

If focusing on the social identity of black female immigrants in foreign countries, A Phizacklea points out that migrant women and men (a large number of whom are at the bottom of the society)

settle abroad to earn higher wages in more economically developed regions than their home countries. Immigrant men and women in China often engage in low-level production activities, reinforcing patriarchal oppression. Traditional Chinese society requires filial piety, reinforcing male dominance. Despite racial differences, friendship among women remains limited. African women's social relationships are severed by marital ties and racial differences, confining their social sphere within that of their husbands. This production does not face society, making it difficult to generate new social relationships, continuing to subordinate women to their husbands and children.

3.1.2. Attempts to cater to the interests of Chinese users

Her videos are renowned for their exquisite, authentic visuals and warm rural scenes, which conforms perfectly with China's main policies such as rural revitalization, beautiful countryside construction, as well as Belt and Road and China-Africa Cooperation. They have received widespread recognition and praise, positively promoting the beauty of rural landscapes and human sentiments of China.

In addition, she actively promotes the fine traditional Chinese culture in her own way. From the video she posted on August 24, 2024, this paper can see that the blogger and her female friends are dressed in traditional Chinese attire(Hanfu) to take artistic photos near traditional Chinese architecture. She showcases Chinese traditional culture through clothing, interviews, and festival customs, promoting cross-cultural exchange and demonstrating African immigrants' adaptation to Chinese culture.

The interactions between Chinese citizens and Black women differ from those with other foreigners, but these interactions are likely entirely driven by curiosity [8]. Her videos are not much different from many rural life videos shared on Xiaohongshu; her way of gaining attention and affection is by keenly capturing the unique cultural symbols of being an African immigrant, leveraging the novelty of Chinese audiences towards her. The harmonious family environment, industrious work atmosphere, beautiful rural scenery, and the psychological beauty of characters portrayed in her videos also effectively showcase the favorable social background of Sino-African relations. She perceives that she cannot perfectly integrate into Chinese society, so she chooses to use her uniqueness to attract the attention of online users. In this way, while gaining more likes, she actively promotes China's mainstream policies and excellent traditional culture. She does not force herself to become exactly like Chinese women through plastic surgery or using photo processing techniques to conform to the aesthetic standards of Chinese women; instead, she strive to present Black women's natural hair textures, clothing and other aspects in a way that feels non-threatening and natural, while sharing their lives with viewers. Considering that China has the largest social media market, estimated to have about 927 million users by 2020, photos taken and posted by Black people have already attracted a considerable number of viewers [9,10,11]. Therefore, the active promotion by African immigrant women and their adherence to platform trends may increase their platform traffic, attention and affection, even reducing their local marginalization status, such as by gaining economic benefits to empower themselves.

3.2. How do Chinese users on the platform view them

3.2.1. Reinforced gender stereotypes and the gaze on women under patriarchy

Many of her videos receive similar comments, praising her and her female relatives with words like "Good-looking", "virtuous", "gentle", "filial", "high emotional intelligence", "diligent and

hardworking". For example, on February 26, 2025, a comment reads: "...She's not the most striking beauty at first glance, but somehow I feel she has a great presence and is very capable, quite attractive"; under a video from February 20, 2025, the highest praised comment reads: "You whole family are very united, warm, orderly in age and respectful to each other. Your sisters-in-law get along well and often visit each other."

L Fekete points out that due to similar second-sex situations, women are more likely to view themselves as part of a community with other women. In fact, in patriarchal societies, women are indeed more easily deindividualized and generalized into a collective identity [12]. They are presumed to be "wives", "daughters-in-law", and "mothers". Their objectification as service providers and caregivers within the family is highly emphasized, their social roles and professional capabilities are confined to family. This not only erases the individual uniqueness and creativity of women but also attempts to define their social functions and gender roles through pre-established gender stereotypes. Rather than recognizing women had chosen their social identities, it is more accurate to say that patriarchal and male-dominated public perceptions have trapped women in positions chosen for them by men. The solidification of social gender roles always overlooks women's personal wishes and career aspirations, elevating individual choices among different women regarding family and work, marriage and childbearing and personal development into group obligations.

Similarly, the expectations and evaluation standards imposed on women are deindividualized, trapping them in passive, service-oriented roles. These standards often focus on appearance and character, limiting women's subjectivity and exploitation. These judgments are particularly cruel when applied to African immigrant women, who are often praised for their appearance but face criticism for their skin color, indicating racial arrogance and racial discrimination.

A comment on March 19, 2025, praised a Black woman's marriage to a Chinese internet culture, highlighting her value as a "receipt" for her husband. This patriarchal ideology in China perpetuates women's struggles and subordination, erasing their initiative and subjectivity. Women often face difficulties in obtaining privileges and residency rights, as they are often treated as commodities rather than equals [13].

The subconscious discrimination of African women among the Chinese public also has its roots. When interracial marriages between East Asian, Southeast Asian, and African countries began to rise, families with mixed Chinese-African heritage were described as illegal and inferior. In addition, African immigrant women are still seen as capable of solving China's "leftover single men problem", viewing African immigrants as a race inferior to local women [14].

3.2.2. Excessive attention, discrimination and misunderstanding of skin color

The system's top five comments on videos often criticize children's skin color, with some expressing strong genetic traits, while others criticize the child's appearance and lack of ink. Amos Ch'Nell argue that even without sexual innuendo, physical contact or racist jokes, merely constantly emphasizing the skin color of black foreigners through photos and videos means turning them into exhibits in a human zoo: creating psychological pain, even mental issues, keeping black foreigners constantly aware of their differences from locals [15]. Additionally, they may witness racial violence against other black foreigners on social media and evoke their empathy or experiences of being bullied, leading to symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder.

The malicious speculation about her child's skin color is even more despicable. For children of dark skin, it goes from a negative attitude towards their appearance to a negative view of their life value, while children of light skin face questioning of their bloodline all along without any reason,

which also reflects public's long-standing sexual defamation against Black people, including sexual slander comments about promiscuity and sexually transmitted infections. The media often portrays Black people living in China as a lower-class group and a serious social issue through "stigmatization related to sex, law and speech". Blacks are seen as uncontrolled and promiscuous immigrants from Africa, who are believed to transmit sexually transmitted diseases to Chinese people unidirectionally. Moreover, Chinese with intimate relationships with Black people are labeled as "sexual deviants", positioned as the primary victims and secondary transmission source of Black virus transmission [9]. Clearly, anti-Black sentiment is rampant in the online public sphere, making people extremely sensitive to skin color issues. In December 2024, a woman posted videos of her African relatives visiting China for family reunion, despite fluency and adaptation. Despite her fluency, the public viewed her as an inferior race, viewing her as a "abstract equality" based on her skin color. This mindset is similar to racial discrimination, as it severs her connection to her own race and family.

4. Conclusion

African immigrant families in China face mixed perceptions, with some facing negative evaluations and stigmatization, while others maintain harmonious relationships with Chinese relatives, demonstrating successful adaptation to patriarchal ideology. However, it is worth noting that this does not mean that they have been fully accepted by Chinese society; they still strictly obey and continue the patriarchal oppression the same as Chinese women. Their videos depicting family harmony are actually an attempt to rationalize and idealize the sacrifices women have made for their families. These videos, whether aimed at catering to the audience's preferences or due to their cognitive limitations, fully demonstrate that black immigrants still continue and reinforce patriarchal oppression happened in China. For an African immigrant woman, all discussions surrounding her are related to her family, indicating that her entire social identity is still inevitably linked to her family. For their children, being talked about their skin color inevitably when placing themselves in the eyes of local residents, indicating that they are still excluded by Chinese society simply because of their skin color. African immigrant women in China face racial and gender discrimination till now, regardless of whether they are aware or not, and their marginalization in society is inevitable. This essay discusses the experiences of African immigrants in China, aiming to provide psychological counseling and social security services, and address misunderstandings and malice towards African migrants.

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