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Farahdiba Rahma Bachtiar, Rafly

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Racism and Anti-China Sentiment in Australia

Farahdiba Rahma Bachtiar* , Rafly

Department of International Relations, Faculty of Ushuluddin and Philosophy, Alauddin Islamic State University
Makassar, Makassar, Indonesia

Abstract

This article discusses racism and anti-China sentiment in Australia. Racism is not quite popular within International Relations studies (IRs). However, this article aims to find how racism may become an exciting topic in IRs as racism has happened in many parts of the world and became widespread during and after the pandemic, including in Australia. Racism itself is not a popular topic within the study of IRs. Still, this research specifically seeks to explore the correlation between the rise of racism and the long Chinese history with Australians. This paper uses qualitative library research to focus on secondary data from previous literature and official websites. This paper argues that immigrants of Chinese or Chinese descent in Australia are, to some people, seen as second-class people. Despite being wealthy and educated like Penny Wong, discrimination towards their race is still their most significant challenge living in Australia. Covid-19 Pandemic has made the challenge more extensive and more robust. The problem is rooted in the racism that has happened and institutionalised since early Australian history. Nevertheless, although the White Australian Policy had abolished, however, racism which was reflected by the Anti-Chinese sentiment, has been continued to play a big part in Australia's foreign policy. It was reflected by the decision of the Australian government to call for an investigation into the outbreak of Covid-19 and Australia's accusation of violation of human rights by the Chinese government had done. Therefore, Australia must be open on this issue because it will help the country build better bilateral relations with its neighbours, including China.

Key Words

Racism, Anti-China Sentiment, Australia

1. Introduction

The phenomenon of racism has existed for centuries but continues to occur, develop and experience in different forms. Racism itself, according to Clair and Denis (2015), is a paradigm or ideology that considers one race superior or better than another. This superiority can be biological or cultural. Because of the superior assumption, race justifies or determines lower social treatment or position towards other racial groups. This racial phenomenon occurs across the world; the death of George Floyd in 2020 in the United States (Byanyima, 2022) and the Holocaust (Szocik, 2020) are just a few of the various cases of racism that have occurred in the world, especially against minorities.

Although racism is not a significant study in International Relations (IRs) and is often overlooked (Bianca Freeman, D.G. Kim, 2022), it has close relations with the study of International Relations in two contexts. First, racism drives the agitation and resistance that drives local activism to become transnational (Freeman et al., 2022a). Second, racism is often regarded as the source or cause of various wars in the world. It is because a critical element of

*CORRESPONDENCE Farahdiba Rahma Bachtiar | farahdiba.rahma@uin-alauddin.ac.id | Department of International Relations, Faculty of Ushuluddin and Philosophy, Alauddin Islamic State University Makassar, Jl. Sultan Alauddin No.63, Romangpolong, Somba Opu District, Gowa Regency, 92113, South Sulawesi, Indonesia.
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racial exclusion in IR is the emergence of the state itself. The state system born from the 1648 Westphalia Treaty, which ended the Thirty Years War and established the principles of statehood and European sovereignty, began various racial conflicts and violence (Zvobgo, 2020). In fact, according to Zvobgo (2020), the history of international relations has so far been obscured. It is because, through Westphalia, Europe saw the world as two separate parts, namely first, those that were modern countries and second, other areas that had to be included in the international system as civilised countries. It is illustrated by the various conflicts and wars in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East.

For this reason, tracing racism cannot be separated from how we understand the historical context of colonialism, which describes the conquest and exploitation of the world by one race against another. The conquest was based on and rooted in discourses and concepts centred on and sided with Europe and the West. These concepts implicitly and explicitly dichotomise the concepts of "advanced" with "underdeveloped" and "modern", which means the opposite of "primitive" concepts, and "civilised" against "uncivilised" concepts (Zvobgo, 2020). This has continued to this day through the white supremacist privileges in the United States and Europe (Bianca Freeman, D.G. Kim, 2022).

Like the US and Europe, white supremacy also occurs in Australia. Although data for 2019 showed that around 1.2 million people in Australia were of Chinese descent (Dr Soutphommasane, 2018). Anti-Chinese sentiment in Australia developed overtly through acts of racism and discrimination at the societal and government levels (Feng, 2016). In Australia, anti-Asian racism has taken root. From the late 19th century, laws limiting Chinese migration to Australia were passed and became the "White Australia" policy until the 20th century (GUNIA, 2022). It has been getting worse with the Covid-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic that has been happening globally had a terrible impact on racism in various countries, including Australia. There have been many incidents of racism against Asian Australians and international students. This incident seems to have been fueled by the racist assumption that people from China or those who look "Asian" are to blame for the COVID-19 pandemic. The report also notes that the problem of prejudice related to COVID-19 extends not only to the Asian community but also targets minority communities such as Jews, Muslims, people with disabilities, and others. It is exacerbated by the lack of efforts by the government and law enforcement to stop this hatred, resulting in racism during the COVID-19 pandemic (Mason, 2020). The Guardian also reported that there were at least 178 cases of racism that occurred in just two weeks, starting on April 2, 2019. According to the survey, most racist incidents were committed against women; foreigners directly committed 62% and 86.5% of racist incidents. In one case, a 15-year-old girl was charged by police for allegedly punching a 26-year-old woman in the face at Queen Street Mall Brisbane after he accused her of having Covid-19 (Naaman Zhou, 2020). Assumptions of racism "shifted" from targeting Asians to other ethnic groups. Jayashri Kulkarni, DirectorThe Monash Alfred Psychiatry Research Centre, said that at the pandemic's start, racism was towards anti-Chinese and those who looked like Chinese. It is a form of anger towards those considered not white Australians. Incidents of racism have occurred in various cities in Australia (Vrajlal, 2020). The target of racism also targets Aboriginal communities in Australia. A victim of racism even before Australia was founded, past trauma worried Aboriginal people about white Australians. Based on the Australian Reconciliation Barometer (ARB) report, more than fifty per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people believe that Australia is a racist country. The report also found that 60 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people had experienced at least one form of prejudice in 2019, up from 43 per cent in 2018 (Knowles, 2022).

Based on the previous explanation, this paper aims to explore how racism exists and develops in global society by taking the case of Australia during and after the Covid-19 pandemic. The fact that there is a lack of IR literacy discussing this topic motivates researchers to study further and understand more deeply how racism affects and is affected by relations between countries. The case of Australia is critical because the country is multicultural, with a historical background of colonialism and deep-rooted racist discrimination. A discussion of what happened in Australia during the COVID-19 pandemic and the soaring rates of racism towards minority communities, which in this study refers to "first nation people and the people of colour, also the immigrant" (first nation, people of colour and immigrants) is crucial because the authors assume it plays a significant role in shaping Australia's domestic and especially overseas. Unlike other research on racism, this article attempts to understand racism and anti-Chinese sentiment from the perspective of IR studies and their relation to state foreign policy, in this case, Australia.

2. Literature Review/Analytical Framework

Theoretically, race is a social construct used to classify people. Race is constructed as a system of hierarchical human groupings to identify, differentiate, and marginalise various groups of people across countries and regions in any part of the world. According to Vence L. Bonham Jr., JD, race is a political and social construction. Racial categorisation has been used historically and ultimately builds a hierarchy that results in acts of racism (Vence L. Bonham Jr., 2023). Meanwhile, Professor Audrey Smedley argues that race is a culturally structured, systematic definition of how to view, understand and interpret reality (Smedley, 2003). Furthermore, according to Markus Hazel Rose, race is a social representation created to compile social groupings related to physical appearance to create and maintain power hierarchies between groups and maintain a system of 'privileges', especially between white people and people of colour (Moya & Rose Markus, 2010).

Meanwhile, racism as a phenomenon describes events in the world regarding hostilities between groups based on physical differences. Two world events popularised this term. The first was used as propaganda against anti-Semitism and racial genetics targeting Jews in Germany in the 1930s and during the Second World War. The second came from US civil rights activists during the 1960s. Activists see the political independence of former colonies in Africa and Asia as a 'hollow gift' that does not change the economic dependence of newly independent countries on their former colonial powers (Forum & Relations, 2009).

Three theories build on literacy and pre-existing literature on racism. First is "cultural racism", which sees racism as transmigrating through culture. It means that racism is embodied in norms, ethics, beliefs and values that are almost the same throughout the world. Second is the "institutional level", which views racism within the scope of organised institutions that form racial hierarchies and segregation of society. Even this is considered systemic racism, where knowledge production and educational institutions are also considered to perpetuate racism (Delatolla et al., 2021). Third, "individual racism" occurs at the individual level but not because of innate, but because of specific reasons such as they are formed, taught and so on. These three interrelated theories mutually support one another (Bowser, 2018). So as to build and perpetuate a racist system in a systematic and structured manner.

Racism in the international sphere is prominent in shaping contemporary International Relations theories. As IR has so far been understood, it is clear that many values, practices and policies reflect and are supported by institutions of power, especially power by the state. For more than a century, researchers and social scientists, in general, have argued that race and racism are among the most essential factors in world politics. Prominent anti-racist scholars such as WEB Du Bois published a thesis in 1915 entitled "Worlds of Color" in his statement, the

problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the colour-line – the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea". Dubois assumes that in the 20th century, the direction of international politics will discuss more about race and racism. The new face of modern imperialism is reflected in today's democracy (Alexander Anievas, 2015).

This racism itself can be understood from various perspectives in IRs because it is very strongly correlated with discussions of war and peace which are the core of International Relations studies. From the Realist view, race and racism are not important topics. This approach perpetuates white supremacy, which exalts the state in the international system. However, what is more, exciting but contradictory is the argument that post-World War II decolonisation and independence are considered to have removed international colour barriers. Because in one country, there are various people of various races (Freeman et al., 2022b). According to the Realist argument, this proves that the debate about race does not conflict with the conception of the nation-state. On the contrary, it supports diversity.

For Liberalism, being civilised has specific standards that measure the good and bad things about a country, such as upholding human rights and democracy. This measure is based on the perspective of the nation-state, where the majority are white people. On the other hand, the non-white majority society is imagined to be living under an unfavourable and undemocratic government that requires stability and economic progress. Therefore, these countries are considered deficient and need assistance. It ultimately leads to a view of feeling superior.

The Realist Paradigm is challenged by critical IR theorists who see that race, as so far in IRs, cannot be reduced to a topic rarely discussed because it causes discomfort. Topics related to race are also in the view of critical theory, not topics far from IR studies or not interesting compared to other topics in international relations (Bianca Freeman, D.G. Kim, 2022). Discussing race will encourage non-white majority countries to threaten their status quo (Bianca Freeman, D.G. Kim, 2022). Thus, the reality of international relations has always been dominated by Western narratives, and white privilege has become vital in the international political and economic system. The global capitalist system is strong evidence of how domination and privilege continue to colonise poor and developing countries.

Racism, in the view of constructivism, is considered to have a significant influence in building perceptions of threats to foreign parties, competing visions of national interests, and foreign policies chosen by a country (Bianca Freeman, D.G. Kim, 2022). Because of racism, the state sees other parties as a threat, which then influences the goals of its national interests and its policy choices in interacting with other countries. Even according to Reus-Smith in Bianca Freeman, D.G. Kim (2022), racial hierarchies provide a crucial source of legitimacy for unequal global orders, giving rise to "intersubjective understandings of the appropriateness of identity to roles". In other words, good or bad indicators will become a tool for certain countries to justify their behaviour in the international system.

3. Research Method

This research uses a qualitative approach using Australian case studies and is carried out using the literature study method. This qualitative research method aims to understand and interpret a behaviour or social interaction. Qualitative research tries to find the meaning, process and context of behaviour or social interaction (Bakry, 2019). Qualitative methods explain the ideas that involve all participants and researchers as subjects in constructing reality, this research is based on values, not facts, and this research is empirical and scientific. The data source is obtained from previous literature data and is secondary data.

4. Results and Discussions

Colonialisation by Europeans to indigenous people in various regions, such as Asia, Africa and Australia, significantly impacted their colonies. In the Australian context, during the British colonial period in Australia, events occurred, "*no man's land*". At that time, the British carried out a racial cleansing which caused the Aboriginal population to decline rapidly. British colonialisation seized the Aborigines' rights, took their children to become white citizens, and indoctrinated them to forget their original identity. This event was called *the "stolen generation"* (Scholars et al., 2009). Discrimination and segregation against Aborigines through government policies before and after Australia became a nation-state in 1901 kept happening.

This history began when Australia became a destination for world exploration in the 1800s to 1980s. The discovery of gold prompted various explorers to come to Australia. It continued with the arrival of various immigrants, including Asian immigrants, predominantly the Chinese minority. Many Chinese and other Asian immigrants come because of the mining areas in Australia. Nevertheless, after settling in Australia, they realised the mines were less promising than they had imagined. So Chinese immigrants moved to the coastal cities of Australia, some to the smaller towns, and westward. Like the story of Chinese immigrants worldwide, this move has brought success to many of them. Chinese immigrants are among Australia's most prosperous, bringing economic benefits to Australia (Cadzow & Laurent, 2018). Some people of Chinese descent in Australia have even become figures, such as the heart transplant pioneer Victor Chang who was named the Australian of the Century in 1999 (The Australia-China Story, 2020). Now Australia even has a Minister of Foreign Affairs of Chinese descent. This descendant was obtained from his father's side. His father was of Cantonese Chinese descent and was recruited to work on tobacco and timber plantations and in tin mines by the British North Borneo Company (Simons, 2022).

Anti-Chinese prejudice grew with the success of Chinese immigrants in Australia. It even started way back from the end of the 19th century. At that time, Chinese migrants faced restrictions related to immigration, settlement and work in Australia (Atkinson, 2015). Immigration Restriction Act 1901, otherwise known as the White Australia policy issued by the Australian government in 1901, aimed not only to limit the number of non-white migrants to Australia but also to deport 'unwanted' migrants already in the country. This policy experienced its dynamics. In the 1950s, non-white immigrants began to be openly accepted as citizens with conditions after 15 years of residence in Australia. However, it was not until 1966 that the policy of accepting immigrants of colour began (National Museum of Australia, 2022). However, it was not until 1973 that significant change occurred when the Labor government under Whitlam definitively eliminated The White Australian Policy and replaced it with a multiculturalism policy (National Museum of Australia, 2022).

The multiculturalism policy is still carried out today by the Australian government. This ultimately impacts the fact that out of Australia's population of more than 21 million people, approximately 43 per cent were born overseas or had parents who were born overseas. Indigenous Australians are estimated to number 483,000, or only about 2.3 per cent. Besides, more than 15 per cent of Australians speak something other than English at home. The average population in Australia is immigrants from various parts of the world, especially Europe and Asia (Australian Embassy, 2023). With these facts, Australia is now a very multicultural country. Australia is even considered unrivalled in diversity (Amnesty International, 2021). It shows that the transformation of the diversity of Australian society is quite significant after the policy.

The multiculturalism policy must be distinct from the policies initiated by the Whitlam government. Under the Whitlam Administration, racial prejudice and policy remnants of White Australian Policy were deleted. It was done by passing laws prohibiting discrimination based on

race (Whitlam Institute, 2022). Pride in multiculturalism is one of Australia's mainstays in its foreign policy. Malcolm Turnbull and many other Australian prime ministers consider Australia the most successful multicultural country (Home Affairs, 2017). Australia's success as a multicultural country comes from research showing that immigrant children in Australia achieve better average outcomes than Indigenous Australian children. It is important because, according to research conducted by the OECD, the successful integration of immigrant students is an essential indicator of a country's success in its education system and equity as well as broader social cohesive policies (Rajadurai, 2018).

As a multicultural country, as previously stated, many Australian immigrants originate or are descendants of parents born in other countries. China is the country of origin of Australia's second-largest migrant community, which makes up around 2.5 per cent of the total population (Mercer, 2020). To that end, Chinese Australians have made significant contributions to the development of Australia and have also fostered people-to-people relations with China (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2020). Most of the Chinese descendants in Australia are from distinguished families. Unsurprisingly, the Chinese urban elite grew and spread across Australia. From the beginning, they were wealthy and influential figures in the Chinese community. Many belong to the Christian elite and have been educated in colonial schools (Zhang, 2018).

Unfortunately, this gave rise to anti-Chinese sentiment and an increase in racism in Australia. An Australian survey of over 3,000 people showed that 80% of Asian Australians had reported experiencing racial discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic. This research was published as Australia commemorates 45 years of the Racial Discrimination Act (Mercer, 2020). Anti-Asian bias is closely related to various socioeconomic factors, including political affiliation, age, gender, employment status and income (Kamp et al., 2022).

Acts of racism are getting stronger after the Covid-19 pandemic occurred. Asian Australians were sometimes physically abused, threatened with weapons, spat on, and told they could not enter the premises because "Asians must stay indoors" (Naaman Zhou, 2020). Erin Wen Ai considered these incidents to Chew, the Australia Asia Alliance community organiser, who said that racism in Australia is quite worrying. It is because anti-Chinese ideas are no longer considered racist because they are normalised in various media (Zhou, 2020). The situation in Australian society itself is also getting worse. Racism is no longer just an ordinary discrimination case. Li even said that anti-Asian racism has gone from being an ordinary joke in schools to a dangerous threat because it relates to people's beliefs, values, and alliances about who can be trusted and who cannot (GUNIA, 2022).

Furthermore, according to the survey results of the Asian Australian Alliance and Chiu (2020), cases of racism in Australia do not just happen. However, they are part of a broader negative view of people of Asian origin in Australia. At the start of the pandemic, China's Ministry of Culture and Tourism issued a travel warning to its citizens, stating that "due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, racial discrimination and violence against Chinese and Asian people in Australia have experienced a significant increase" (Asian Australian Alliance & Chiu, 2020).

Various incidents of racism show that Australian citizens of Chinese descent are still often seen as second-class citizens. Their loyalty to Australia is also in doubt. They have to try harder than white Australians to reach society's best office or position. If they criticise the government, they are considered pro-China, which is dangerous for regional stability. This is not without reason. Many Chinese immigrants still develop intensive relationships with families in Mainland China (mainland China).

Racism, as discussed in international relations studies, does not only have social and domestic context implications but also on relations between countries. In the case of Australia,

this is reflected in the mindset of the Australian government regarding international politics, which often sees China in an unfavourable light. Australia's negative views also make the relationship between the two incompatible and suspicious of each other regarding the military and fundamental values (Yang, 2023). In the context of democracy, for example, Australia accuses China of cases of human rights violations in the Xinjiang region. It was exacerbated by comments from Australian officials such as Liberal Senator James Paterson, who outspokenly criticised the Chinese Communist Party. He said that Australia needed to equip itself to defend democracy, sovereignty and freedom in a dangerous world (Doherty, 2021). It was exacerbated by Australia's decision to lead an investigation into the spread of Covid-19, which cornered China. It strengthens Australia's bad image towards China. China has vehemently rejected the move. Since then, China has issued trade sanctions with Australia, and a trade war between the two countries began with an anti-dumping investigation into Australian wine imports (Packham, 2020). China even considers Australia to do a "series of misguided actions" by Canberra (Wan, 2023). It shows that the strong negative perception of China is still present and intense in recent years.

So is the Australian people's view, "Chinese leadership is a threat to the rest of the world." Even the Pew Research Center also found that China poses an economic or military threat to some Australians. Perceived economic threats include "tuning countries by lending", using "trade sanctions to coerce their way or taking revenge", or simply "manipulating the economy" (Christine Huang, 2022). According to the author, this negative view cannot be separated from the intense racism that has taken root in Australia. However, the long history of racism cannot be removed from the country's social, economic and political context. Even though the efforts to build a multicultural Australia are also considerable, at the government level, it is difficult to say that acts of racism at the grassroots level are two different things. What is happening in society reflects the current superiority mindset and the view that China or people of Chinese descent are a threat to white society.

Therefore, although unpopular, the Albanese government's efforts should be maintained. It is to strengthen Australia's position and role in the region. In addition, Australia, as a liberal country, also has noble values to uphold human rights. It is, for example, illustrated by Australia's involvement in drafting and signing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and various aid programs provided to various countries (Parliament of Australia, 2021). In addition, regarding China as one of the major powers in the region, it is an essential partner for Australia. China is Australia's leading export destination, the largest source of imports, the largest market for agricultural goods and a significant source of foreign direct investment. China is Australia's sixth largest foreign direct investor, with 44 billion AUD in 2020. In recent years, Chinese investment has expanded from mining to infrastructure, services and agriculture (The Consulate General of The People's Republic of China in Perth, 2022).

A better outlook, improved anti-Chinese sentiment and decreased cases of racism in Australia against Asians, especially of Chinese descent, only subsided after the election of Albanese as prime minister in May 2022, even though Scott Morrison accused Albanese of being Beijing's preferred candidate because of his softer figure towards China (GUNIA, 2022). It was later reflected by Albanese's more open and peaceful strategy towards China (Yang, 2023). One included his decision to choose Penny Wong as its Foreign Minister (Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs, 2022). The election of Penny Wong is undoubtedly a signal to improve relations with China. In that context, Wong shows a difference in her leadership pattern. Unlike previous administrations, she did not place Australia at the forefront of the conflict with China (Simons, 2022). Domestically, Wong is also committed to strengthening multiculturalism and reducing

racism. Wong said that "experiences of prejudice and racism undoubtedly shaped my will to try to make things right (SBS News, 2023)."

5. Conclusion

Therefore, Australia needs to understand that the issue of race will be its most formidable challenge to survive in international politics. Not only because all around are countries of different races, but in its domestic area, Australia is facing a crisis related to racism. For this reason, Australia must be able to place the issue of race at the centre of its foreign policy studies so that the country can be more open in mapping and starting to avoid the perception of threats that Australia has so far been very racist against surrounding countries. It must start within Australia and then be reflected in its foreign policy. For this reason, Australia needs to be able to openly bring the conversations and narratives about race as an essential topic in the context of its bilateral and multilateral relations, not to use it as a tool, but to boldly express the still intense racism in the mindset of its people; thus the segregation that has been built will be easier to solve. It will help Australia act more fairly and, most notably, because the country has claimed to be the most successful multicultural country in the world.

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