

Problems of Anti-“Alien” Racism among Conservative Chinese

Part Eight: Cantonese Dialect Supremacy and Intra-Racial Discrimination against Fellow Chinese Speaking Mandarin or Other Dialects

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Wednesday, May 19, 2021**



China’s Guangdong Province used to be the last bastion of anti-Manchu resistance by Han-Chinese feudal regimes and, when British tried to set foot in China, they used to complain that among all cities of China they had visited, Guangzhou, the

capital city of the Guangdong Province, was the most unfriendly and xenophobic one. During the Republic of China period, Guangdong Province was a de facto separatist mini-state ruled by local warlords and resisting the central government in Nanjing headed by Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, Mao Zedong's government launched a strong political campaign (the "Anti-Regionalist Campaign in Guangdong Province") to eliminate regional separatism and xenophobia among Cantonese, including conducting "re-education sessions" for local Communist Party members and removal of those found guilty of discrimination against non-Cantonese speakers from other provinces from positions of leadership; this did improve the relations between Cantonese and non-Cantonese quite a bit; however, the deep-rooted regionalist and xenophobic mentality cannot be eliminated by political means alone; it must be solved through economic and cultural integration. When I came to the United States in 1986, I stopped in Guangzhou; to my great surprise, the policemen on the street are reluctant to speak Mandarin, the official national language; on Sunday, I went to a local Protestant Church, and found out that the pastor spoke Cantonese instead of Mandarin; this is very unusual in China because in other places in China, people always speak Mandarin in public spaces, as encouraged by the government as a "civilized" or "patriotic" behavior. This convinced me that culturally and linguistically, Cantonese have made very little progress since the founding of the New China; instead, they continued to live in the warlord period of the Republic of China deep in their mentality. This sad situation has been improved in the last three decades after China's economic reforms started by Deng Xiaoping with strong support from Xi Zhongxun, the father of Xi Jinping, China's current President. Xi Zhongxun was a strong advocate of middle-of-the-road moderate politics inside the Chinese Communist Party; his ideological orientation deviated a lot from Chairman Mao's Leftism or his "Leftist" interpretation of Marxism; thus he has been jailed or put under house arrest for 10 years (1966-1975). In 1968, when Xi Jinping was 15 years old, he was detained several times due to political issues related to his father; and starting in 1974, Xi Jinping apply for a membership in the Chinese Communist Youth League and Chinese Communist Party for more than ten times, but his application was rejected for several times due to political issues related to his father. The Xi family was restored to honors by Deng Xiaoping several years after the death of Chairman Mao. When Xi Zhongxun worked as the First Secretary of the Provincial Committee of the Chinese Communist Party in Guangdong, he promoted integration of local economy with that of other provinces of China, with overseas ethnic-Chinese communities, and with foreign nations, resulting in Cantonese-speakers moving to other areas of China and having no choice but to speak Mandarin in order to conduct business, and non-Cantonese-speakers to move into Guangzhou in increasing numbers, in a drastic and radical change in population composition in the City of Guangzhou, which the British complained against as the "most xenophobic city of China," such that nowadays, non-Cantonese-speaking residents are more than 60% of population in Guangzhou; therefore, even the most diehard regional separatists and Cantonese-dialect ethno-centric Chauvinists in Guangzhou have to speak Mandarin in order to enjoy life in their once xenophobic city. Thus, with the soft means of economic integration, Xi Zhongxun has

accomplished what both Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek and Chairman Mao have not accomplished using hard means of the barrel of a gun or the political stick of “Re-education sessions” and demotion, that is, to get Cantonese regionalists to start speaking Mandarin in public space and to respect Chinese of other ethnic groups. The conflict between the majority of Chinese people who speak their own ethnic dialects or languages among their own circles but Mandarin as a convenient way of inter-ethnic communication on the one side, and the die-hard elements of Cantonese Dialect Supremacists who still believe that Cantonese Dialect should be made the national language of China and all people who live in Guangzhou should learn Cantonese Dialect continues even after China’s moves towards globalization. In July 2020, the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) Guangzhou Committee, in a written proposal to mayor of Guangzhou Wan Qingliang, suggested increasing Mandarin programming on Guangzhou Television’s main and news channels, so as to facilitate communication among diverse dialectic groups living in Guangzhou. This multi-cultural proposal immediately irritated the die-hard elements of Cantonese Dialect Supremacists, who mobilized two thousand protesters, according to estimates of the Radio Free Asia (0.013% of Guangzhou’s total population of 15,305,900) to suppress the proposal, on July 25 and August 1, on the street and at the People’s Park in the City of Guangzhou, without first registering the event with the local police station, shouting xenophobic and nativist slogans against multi-culturalism and against the existence of non-Cantonese residents in Guangzhou, such as “Defend Cantonese Dialect” and “Outsiders out of Guangzhou” (“outsiders” refer to non-Cantonese speakers from other areas of China or from Overseas Ethnic-Chinese Communities). Due to lack of popular support, these xenophobic and nativist protesters failed in their attempt to impose Cantonese Dialect Supremacy on non-Cantonese speakers in Guangzhou. Independent scholars in China and in the Overseas Ethnic-Chinese Communities generally believe that the principal causes for the phenomenon of Cantonese Dialect Supremacy include (1) the “revolutionary” propaganda made by the Alliance of Chinese, the forerunner of the Chinese Nationalist Party, before the 1911 anti-Manchu Rebellion, which branded Mandarin as the “jindaluyu” (“金鞑虏语” or the “Language of the Manchu Barbarians”), and promised the wealthy Cantonese-speaking merchants in China and abroad that after the “revolution,” Mandarin will be abolished and Cantonese will replace it as the official national language; this was a fund-raising tactic; but after the 1911 anti-Manchu Rebellion that led to the founding of the Government of the Republic of China under President Yuan Shikai, Mandarin was preserved as the sole official national language due to the fact that over 50% of Chinese spoke the Northern Dialect which is the basis of Mandarin and that Cantonese is spoken by only a minority of Chinese. However, die-hard Cantonese Dialect Supremacists disagree with this outcome; they claim that Mr. Sun Yatsen, the founder of the Chinese Nationalist Party and its “National Revolution,” spoke Cantonese, therefore, Cantonese should be made the official national language of China; this is obviously an ideologically-oriented partisan demand that the overwhelming majority of Chinese people will never accept; this demand is very similar to the claim made by the former Soviet Union that since Vladimir Lenin spoke Russian, then Russian language should be learned and spoken in all Communist countries in

Eastern Europe, Viet Nam, Mongolia, Cuba, as the so-called “language of the international working-class;” after the collapse of the former Soviet Union, the use of Russian language is dwindling in Eastern Europe and other former Soviet satellite states, and even discarded by peoples of Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania, Estonia, and other former Union Republics under Bolsheviks’ control. The outcomes of the Cantonese Dialect Supremacists shall be no different from the fate of the Soviet Russian Language Supremacists. (2) In the modern history of China, during the Nationalist-dominated Republic of China period, Canton Province was ruled by the para-Marxist General Chen Jitang (陈济棠) and his followers, who made Canton Province one of the most progressive and prosperous province of Nationalist China through extensive investment in public sector economy, in education and welfare facilities, but did not submit to the rule of the central government in Nanjing under Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek (in fact, in the beginning of the Chinese Communist Party’s Long March or retreat from Southern China to Northern China, General Chen Jitang secretly provided weapons and medical supplies to the Chinese Red Army while playing a game of resisting the later in order to please Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek; this fact is now declassified at the website of the Communist Party of China at <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/85037/8457633.html>); these warlords made Canton Province a de facto independent fiefdom or a state-within-a-state; after the founding of the People’s Republic of China, the regionalist mentality of the warlord period survived the political campaigns of the new government, and Cantonese Dialect has been used by a small minority of residents of Guangzhou nostalgic of the “good old days” of the Nationalist regime as a convenient political tool to challenge the rule of Mao Zedong’s Communist Government by the hardline supporters of the Nationalist Party’s Ancient Regime, to discriminate against non-Cantonese speakers in Guangzhou, and to maintain their privileged position in local communities; and the same group of Cantonese Dialect Supremacists are xenophobic against “aliens” or “Devils from the Ocean” (visitors from Europe and North America, and of course, “Black Devils” or “niggers.” This regionalist and xenophobic mentality constitute the cultural foundation of anti-African racism in Guangzhou.



Figure 3A. A “Defend Cantonese Dialect” protester arrested in Guangzhou after getting into violent behavior during an otherwise peaceful demonstration. Source: Defending Cantonese Dialect at the People’s Park (保卫粤语—人民公园) available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HWNLIMEtUH0>.



Figure 3B. Hundreds of police sent to the “Defend Cantonese Dialect” protest scene to maintain law and order. Source: Defending Cantonese Dialect at the People’s Park (保卫粤语—人民公园) available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HWNLIMEtUH0>.

The above-mentioned intra-racial discrimination of the hardline Cantonese Dialect Supremacists against fellow Han-Chinese speaking Mandarin or other dialects is doomed to failure. It is an important part of modern Han-Chinese racism against the “Aliens;” which is the psychological foundation of the sporadic outbursts of anti-African racist incidents in Guangzhou; it is very similar to the situation in South Africa before the abolition of the Apartheid, when the Dutch-speaking White supremacists tried to raise their Afrikaner language to the status of the national language and to overthrow the status of the English language as the spoken language of all Southern Africans, White, African and Asian alike. Racism and discrimination of any sort, including those disguised as an effort to defend a local dialect, have no future because they are essentially attempts to preserve the unqualified privileges of a tiny minority against the convenience of many to freely communicate ideas and to conduct free trade in the marketplace; it is a legacy of Middle Age feudalism, not a feature of modern capitalism under globalization.



Figure 3C. “Defend Cantonese Dialect” protesters shouting anti-Mandarin and anti-“Outsiders” slogans. Source: *Defending Cantonese Dialect at the People’s Park* (保卫粤语—人民公园) available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HWNLIMEtUH0>.