



CHICAGO JOURNALS

The  
Wenner-Gren  
Foundation

For Anthropological Research, Inc.

---

On the Concept of Race in Chinese Biological Anthropology: Alive and Well

Author(s): Qian Wang, Goran Štrkalj, Li Sun

Source: *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 44, No. 3 (June 2003), p. 403

Published by: [The University of Chicago Press](#) on behalf of [Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/374899>

Accessed: 05/07/2011 20:28

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=ucpress>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).



The University of Chicago Press and Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Current Anthropology*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

# Discussion

---

## On the Concept of Race in Chinese Biological Anthropology: Alive and Well

QIAN WANG, GORAN ŠTRKALJ, AND LI SUN  
*School of Anatomical Sciences, University of the Witwatersrand Medical School, Parktown 2193, South Africa (qwang@tamcd.edu) (Wang and Štrkalj)/ Department of Geosciences, University of Texas at Dallas, Richardson, Tex. 75080, U.S.A. (Sun). 15 XI 02*

Kaszycka and Štrkalj's (CA 43:229–36) survey of the attitudes of Polish biological anthropologists toward the concept of race showed notable differences from those revealed by similar studies in the United States. Our own survey, conducted with a Chinese sample, revealed more such national differences.

We examined the status of the concept of race in China through a survey of articles in *Acta Anthropologica Sinica*, China's only journal of biological anthropology. From the journal's inception in 1982, 78 issues were published up to the end of 2001. Four of them were dedicated to topics not concerned with human variation. In the remaining 74 issues, of 779 articles 324 (41%) were directly related to the study of human variation. All of these papers were written in Chinese with an abstract in English, and their authors were palaeoanthropologists, human biologists, forensic anthropologists, anatomists, and geneticists. We assume that the attitudes toward race expressed in their publications reflect the general view of this group of scientists.

To determine whether the concept of race was utilized we used the criteria developed by Cartmill (1998:654) in a similar survey of articles published in the *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*: " 'Racial categories,' as defined here, include traditional racial taxa ('Australoids'), self-contradictory geographical descriptions ('Australian Europeans'), ethnic identifications inferred by the researcher by just looking at the people, and any groupings in terms of supposed historical origins rather

Permission to reprint items in this section may be obtained only from their authors.

than observable characteristics." When we applied Cartmill's approach to the Chinese sample we found that all of the articles used the race concept and none of them questioned its value. Since these active researchers are also members of the teaching staffs at various educational institutions, it is very likely that this attitude will be transmitted to the next generation of Chinese scientists.

The results of the Chinese survey contrast dramatically with those obtained from similar studies in Poland (Kaszycka and Štrkalj 2002) and the United States (Littlefield, Lieberman, and Reynolds 1982, Lieberman, Stevenson, and Reynolds 1989, Lieberman and Reynolds 1996, Cartmill 1998, Lieberman and Kirk 2002). In these two countries there has been a shift (albeit different in each) toward a nonracial approach to the study of human variation, with the younger generation apparently being more likely to adopt this approach. This shift does not appear in China, where race seems to be accepted as "natural" by all generations of anthropologists. There are probably many reasons for these differences, but some of the main ones are to be found in the different historical, social, and political contexts in which science is practiced (for China, see Dikotter 1992).

## References Cited

- CARTMILL, M. 1998. The status of the race concept in physical anthropology. *American Anthropologist* 100:651–61.
- DIKOTTER, F. 1992. *Discourse of race in modern China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- KASZYCKA, K. A., AND G. ŠTRKALJ. 2002. Anthropologists' attitude towards the concept of race: The Polish sample. *CURRENT ANTHROPOLOGY* 3:229–36.
- LIEBERMAN, L., AND R. C. KIRK. 2002. The 1999 status of the race concept in physical anthropology: Two studies converge. *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* suppl. 34: 102.
- LIEBERMAN, L., AND L. T. REYNOLDS. 1996. "Race: The deconstruction of a scientific concept," in *Race and other misadventures: Essays in honor of Ashley Montagu*. Edited by L. T. Reynolds and L. Lieberman, pp. 142–73. Dix Hills: General Hall.
- LIEBERMAN, L., B. W. STEVENSON, AND L. T. REYNOLDS. 1989. Race and anthropology: A core concept without consensus. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* 20:67–73.
- LITTLEFIELD, A., L. LIEBERMAN, AND L. T. REYNOLDS. 1982. Redefining race: The potential demise of a concept. *CURRENT ANTHROPOLOGY* 23:641–47.