

Analysis of the situation and root causes of racial discrimination among Asian Americans during the COVID-19 epidemic

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Author contributions

Sylvia Liu and Qing-Xian Liu designed and wrote the manuscript. Qing-Xian Liu reviewed the paper and finalized it.

Competing interests

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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Abbreviations

COVID-19, coronavirus disease 2019; CDC, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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Abstract

Looking back on the U.S. epidemic situation the past two and a half years. The Trump administration's previous policy of "non-resistance to the novel coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)" resulted in the loss of control of the COVID-19 (coronavirus disease 2019) epidemic, rising deaths, and economic shrinking. Behaviors such as racism and xenophobia against Asian descent have become increasingly apparent in the United States and globally. When people are struggling to cope with the raging epidemic of the COVID-19 epidemic and are eager to return to normal life and work as soon as possible, the recognition of human universal values and mutual respect among various races are particularly important. Racism and xenophobia have caused a series of inequalities. The COVID-19 epidemic pandemic requires special attention and vigilance. On February 12, 2021, the new U.S. President Biden, in his video congratulating the traditional Chinese New Year, addressed racism, harassment and hatred. U.S. President Joe Biden said, "This is completely wrong. Everyone, regardless of their race. Whatever the language, background, religion, or language they speak, they all deserve equal treatment and due dignity. "It is hoped that the new US President (Joseph Robinette Biden) can eliminate the "white supremacy" racism and promote equality and harmony among all races. This paper analyzes the historical roots of racial discrimination in the United States, especially the suffering of Chinese Americans.

Keywords: COVID-19; Asian American; xenophobia; racism

Background

In 2020, when the global epidemic broke out, the Trump administration transferred the responsibility to China in order to transfer the insufficiency of the fight against the epidemic, incited the people to slander Asians, and racial hatred and violence against the Chinese were endless. Andrew Yang, a Chinese-born American, once participated in the U.S. Democratic Party's 2020 primary elections. His views on "basic income for all people" and other issues sparked controversy. He finally announced his withdrawal from the presidential election in February of that year. Feeling the unfair treatment of Asians during COVID-19 (coronavirus disease 2019), Yang Anze published in the Washington Post on April 3, "We Asian Americans are not a virus, but we can be part of the antidote", the article disclosed that while shopping last week, he observed three middle-aged people talking, and he noticed that one of them glanced at him instantly, and his eyes were full of strange and accusing eyes. As a result, a feeling that Yang Anze hadn't had for a long time suddenly came to his mind. That is, he was "a bit ashamed" of being an Asian. Yang Anze felt that the man regarded him as a virus and regarded us Asians as the "shame of fighting the epidemic" in the United States [1].

On May 2, 2020, Australia's "Daily Mail" website published a title entitled "Reveal: The truth about the mysterious 'compassionate flight' of the Boeing 747 from Wuhan to Sydney. The urgently needed medical supplies were delivered by the Coronavirus Transmission Center. All goods were returned to the original aircraft". The article said that Mr. Yuan tried to sell a batch of medical supplies to the Australian government in the early stages of the coronavirus pandemic. The mainstream media in Europe and the United States have reprinted it. Mr. Yuan stated that he is not trying to profit from the freight, but intends to donate it to the local community. The Daily Mail unreservedly apologized to Richard Yuan and confessed his mistake and withdrew the article. On June 24, the mainstream Australian media, Seven News, publicly apologized for discrediting Chinese businessmen's anti-epidemic charity activities. On August 22, the British "Daily Mail" apologized again [2], and the "New York Times" subsequently apologized. So when Western media reports, they are groundless and without objective facts. They may take huge legal risks and moral flaws. Why are they still happy with such incidents? A senior media person who has been immersed in the Western discourse system for many years said the general attitude of Western media reporters towards China or Chinese: The editor in charge of the publication saw a Chinese-Australian businessman arrange the delivery of personal protective equipment during the pandemic. Immediately concluded that he was doing bad things. This attitude is too common in mainstream media. It is not only prejudice, but also racism.

The epidemic and racial discrimination

During the pandemic, racial prejudice persisted in the United States. By late April 2020, the New York City Human Rights Commission had received 248 reports of harassment and discrimination. More than half of the victims were of Asian descent, and Asian faces were often seen. It is thought that carrying the virus will be contagious [3]. It is true that some people have carried out unfriendly words and deeds against Asians, accusing Asians of bringing the virus to the United States, and numerous incidents of harassment or harm against Asians continue to occur. As Asians born in the United States, they are worried about the social conflicts they may have caused by racism and xenophobia against Asians during the period of COVID-19. When malicious racial labels are adopted, it will intensify inter-racial segregation and even lead to ethnic antagonism [3]. There is evidence that these racial labels stimulated or intensified anti-Asian hatred during the COVID-19 pandemic. The health crisis prompted the public to overreact to Asians in their emotions, behaviors, and attitudes [4], from worrying about the disease to inducing them. Increasing xenophobia, public opinion has shifted from condemning Chinese and Asian Americans to discrimination that now regards racial labeling or Latino as carriers of

the virus, leading to "black life expensive" and street shooting incidents that have triggered endless riots across the country.

On August 13, 2020, the US Department of Justice announced that Yale University discriminated against Asian Americans in the undergraduate enrollment process, which violated the US bill of rights of 1964 [5]. For centuries, when the idea of racial discrimination was rooted in American society, especially those who were forced to be on the Yellow skinned Asian Americans, what kind of consequences would it bring to Asian Americans in the current COVID-19 epidemic pandemic? What are the deep reasons for racial discrimination in epidemic period? It's worth thinking about.

As of 1:30 pm, July 21, 2022, according to data from the Johns Hopkins University Medical Coronavirus Resource Center [6], the cumulative number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 epidemic worldwide has exceeded 566,728,199, and the death toll has exceeded 6,380,703. Since the end of January, countries have announced the number of infected cases every day through different channels. Faced with the updated value, humans feel helpless and frustrated. It is conceivable that every time people concerned about the epidemic wake up from their sleep in the early morning, the changes in COVID-19 around the world are hitting the people who are hopeful every day through the media text and audio-visual form. It is not only touching the fragile nerves, but also more. It is the deepening of fear. The current situation in the past six months since the outbreak of the epidemic shows that the number will be higher tomorrow, the disaster will be more serious, and we will be more afraid [7]. For those who have experienced or are experiencing COVID-19, this pandemic is not only the pain of the disease, but also the small life and the fear of death. People outside the epidemic area are living in panic and anxiety every day.

In this pandemic, man-made disasters have aggravated disasters and grief. Since the first report of the COVID-19 in Wuhan, China, anti-Asian sentiment has risen sharply around the world. People of Asian descent around the world are living in fear of discrimination, targeted alienation, and lingering nightmares. From March 19 to April 24, APPPC (Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council) reported 1,500 discrimination cases in 45 states [8]. These complaints cover a wide range of behaviors ranging from verbal harassment to being avoided in public to physical attacks. Most of the complaints involve verbal harassment/abuse, even against children and the elderly.

In addition, some serious acts of violence have been publicly reported or exposed, such as attacks that harm Asians. This is not only aimed at Chinese Americans, but also those Asians with different traditional beliefs, who have also been victimized by racism. Asian women often face more and worse discrimination [9]. As of 1:30 pm, July 21, 2021, the cumulative number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the United States [6] was 90,046,834 and the number of deaths was 1,025,741. Forcing the new U.S. President Biden to declare the anti-epidemic priority after he officially took office on January 20, 2021. On January 30, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a pandemic of a global infectious disease. According to the changes in the COVID-19 epidemic, the Trump administration of the United States only announced a national emergency response to the new coronavirus on March 13. However, due to ineffective governance, the epidemic has spread throughout the United States, and Trump's ruling team has been criticized or blamed by all sectors of society. What's interesting is that Trump, who ignored the epidemic and allowed natural herd immunity, was recruited. On October 3, he tested positive for nucleic acid and was sent to a military hospital for isolation and treatment.

"China virus," scapegoat speech and racial hatred

In order to divert the public's attention, Donald J Trump worked with conservative elites ("elites" broadly refer to political and media elites: presidents, administrative officials, political and party officials, members of Congress, journalists, cable TV presenters, etc.) to carry out the epidemic. Racial vilification, and Trump deliberately changed the name of COVID-19 by WHO in public as the "Wuhan virus" and "China virus," using both "virus" and "Kung Flu" (Kung Flu) to

demonize China People and other Asian Americans are a source of threats and dangers [10]. In fact, this is a familiar political tactic used by politicians. The purpose is to make some people maliciously use derogatory terms to become openly "legalized" [11]. Searching for "Chinese Virus" on Google, the speed of "Chinese Flu" and "Kung Flu" is similar to the speed of searching for "Coronavirus" and "COVID-19" on the Internet, and reached a peak during the epidemic period. The impact on the public is evident. Although the World Health Organization has nomenclature rules for diseases [12], human infectious diseases should not be based on geographic location (for example, Middle East Respiratory Syndrome, Spanish influenza, Japanese encephalitis), person's name (for example, Cruzfeld-Jacob disease), Chagas disease), animal or food types (such as swine flu), avian flu), culture, population, industry or occupation (such as miners, nurses) as references, not to mention terms that incite excessive fear (such as unknown, Fatal, epidemic). Therefore, the WHO determines that the naming must use general or specific descriptive terms, such as clinical symptoms, age group or severity, causative pathogen, and year of first discovery.

How to treat the discrimination against Asians in American society during the COVID-19 epidemic pandemic? These issues should be analyzed and discussed in the context of American history, social structure, and political power. In fact, there has been a long history of using epidemics to discriminate against a certain minority in the world (the United States is only a typical example). For example, in 1892, Jewish immigrants were accused of being the culprit of the typhus outbreak and were quarantined. Even if they arrived in a certain place by the same boat from the epidemic area, the Jewish immigrants were kept in isolation for much longer than the Italians on the same boat [13]. This is the racial discrimination at the time. When ineffective governance or the terrorist situation is out of control, causing public outrage and possibly affecting the stability of the regime or the market, look for a "Groundless" charge, and treat those minorities that are difficult to constitute the influence of the regime or elections and are not relevant, as scapegoats. The uncontrollable outcome of the spread of the COVID-19 epidemic and the ultimate fear of possible death is passed on to these scapegoats and get rid of the plight of the rulers themselves. This is not uncommon in American history. Research on the theory of "political scapegoat" shows that finding a scapegoat for the disastrous results of ineffective governance is the inherent driving force of those in power to strengthen political control and shirk responsibility [14].

What needs to be explained is that the "Chinese virus" has become the spoken language of the American leaders, and blames the Chinese government, the Chinese people and Chinese Americans [15] for the mistakes caused by the ruling mistakes. These xenophobic words and deeds will be related to infectious diseases. The impact of the epidemic on non-U.S. Asian ethnic groups may be more of a political strategy, because the pathogen comes from outside, which also increases people's fear of foreign countries, especially Asian countries [16], resulting in proper defense control. To convince people that they are safe, and to look at the soaring polls of the current president in the early anti-epidemic period, we can understand the true purpose and "political achievements" of finding a scapegoat.

Because the United States initially closed the border by prohibiting air traffic in some Asian countries, and ignored the prevention and control of COVID-19 epidemic in its own communities. The United States has always believed that these measures aimed at foreign countries have effectively protected their own people, and the idea of gratitude for the government's efforts to avoid external threats is in the public mind. Because the information that people get is that if a pandemic such as COVID-19 epidemic occurs, viruses imported from abroad will infiltrate into the human body, so that the body can not resist and lose the defense capability. The follow-up results are very terrible. The unknown image of the alien virus brings a intimidation effect to public psychology. The ingenious words that link coronavirus with Asians directly affect the level of social anxiety (worry about coronavirus), as well as the direct and indirect (through worry) related discriminatory behavior and policy blindly following attitude

[17]. It has really achieved the desired effect.

The historical roots of racial discrimination

Asian descent, especially Asian Americans, have an extraordinary image in the eyes of white people. They seem to have weird cultural ideas. They dare to eat any strange and terrible animals and plants, so they may be dirty or suffer from unknown diseases. The diseases of the United States have hidden risks to the health of local white people. These prejudices have always existed in American history and appeared from time to time. Western countries regard Asians as inferior. This kind of discrimination has a long history of discrimination. As early as 1882, the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed to prevent Chinese citizens from immigrating to the United States or acquiring American citizenship. During the Second World War, American-Japanese Americans were even confiscated or forced to sell their property. The law was not abolished until 1943 [18]. The reason is that China, Japan, and most parts of the eastern hemisphere are rooted in Asian society, culture and religion. These are the differences with white people [19].

Chinese immigrants have also been stereotyped as vectors of foreign culture and dirty acute diseases. Chinese immigrants in Chinatown were portrayed as unscrupulous, lying and treacherous, ignoring American health laws and acting recklessly, posing a serious threat to the health and well-being of white Americans in San Francisco [20]. In the 19th century, the Chinese were regarded as an ethnic group that "ignored personal hygiene and environmental hygiene, bred and spread diseases, thereby endangering the welfare of the country and the nation". Public health officials often accused Chinese immigrants of "stinking and disgusting". The main source of pollution. On March 19, 2020, Texas Senator John Cornyn explained the reason for calling the new coronavirus a "Chinese virus": "Chinese people eat bats, snakes, dogs, and animal-like food culture." [21], intensified the racist metaphor about the Chinese. The COVID-19 (or SARS-CoV-2) pandemic has created a timely environment for racial stigma. The stigma and prejudice against groups (especially Asian groups) have risen, trying to blame this phenomenon on Those groups related to virus carriers [22]. Throughout history, the absurd notion that these Asians of different races have caused harm to American whites is solidified in the minds of some whites, and it is not a new view that has emerged during the current COVID-19 pandemic.

What is puzzling is that, on the one hand, Asians are regarded as an "industrial and intelligent" ethnic minority who believe in low-key hard work with the purpose of changing their destiny, and some people have achieved varying degrees of success in work and economics [23]. On the other hand, Asians are regarded as permanent foreigners, never fully worthy of American status, but have always been regarded as outsiders and foreign threats [24]. Perhaps it can be said that economically Asian people are only used to create social wealth, and politically restricted and statusless second-class citizens [25].

Analysis of the Causes of Racial Discrimination

Some people may hope that the COVID-19 epidemic can change society and become a balancer of unfairness. Reality has smashed this naive idea, because the bad influence of racialization has not disappeared with the epidemic, but has increased in some areas. The 2019 Nobel Peace Prize winner Abiy Ahmend called for sympathy for Asians, especially Chinese, who have suffered discrimination during difficult times. He said: "As a global community, we are each other's guardians. Let us not let fear take away our humanity" [26]. In order to resist the invasion of online racists, the label "I am not a virus" (presented in French and Spanish at the same time) has begun to circulate on Twitter [27]. Representative Judy and Grace hosted a group of well-known Asian-American officials to participate in a discussion on racial stigma as their representatives. They believed that the anti-Asian sentiments that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic were racist-motivated behaviors [28]. Combining some stereotypes that discriminate against Asians with cultural wisdom for dialogue is a basic element for civil servants to govern with a socially

equal perspective. It is also essential for minimizing stigma, overcoming stereotypes and reducing aggressive behavior [29]. This is not only the attitude of the people, but also the wisdom of the rulers to treat ethnic groups fairly and not to be politically manipulated.

The current pandemic of the COVID-19 has had a revolutionary impact on people's way of life and work. It raises questions about re-examining interpersonal relations, social relations and moral reconstruction. The network connection between individuals, local communities, and overseas has changed the new meaning of the global village and may affect human life in the years to come. Although we firmly believe that the epidemic will eventually disappear, the suspension of navigation, closure of the country, panic and isolation, the suffering of loved ones, pitying each other with the same illness, watching and helping each other, and facing the epidemic together are expected to bring the emotional and psychological distance between people of all countries to a certain extent. Everyone is connected through the epidemic reality of this infectious disease [25]. But it is undeniable that all the injustices that usually exist, including racial discrimination, are not reduced or disappeared at this extraordinary time because of social distancing restrictions. It is just that these social problems that existed in reality or precipitated temporarily will only promote. They appear in time or the situation gets worse.

It must be noted that not everyone has experienced this pandemic in the same way, because our life experiences were different before that. Similarly, due to economic pressure, some countries hope to resume work and resume production as soon as possible to develop the economy and improve people's livelihood. Moreover, even though the vaccine is already on the market but not widely vaccinated, the epidemic prevention and control efforts are reduced in advance, social distancing restrictions are lifted, and the flow of people is bound to increase. Resulting in another pandemic at the end of 2020 and early 2021, and the number of subsequent infections has further increased. For example, the secondary epidemics in the United Kingdom, Sweden, Australia and other countries have repeated. During this period, many infected people will have mild or asymptomatic symptoms. Under the media's rendering, people will turn to other non-health related characteristics (such as race) to identify who may be infected or potential carriers. In the absence of evidence, imagine that these people are contagious and take hateful or discriminatory attitudes towards them. These increasing trends of prejudice against systemic racism derived from centuries-old stereotypes of Asian descent are disturbing [30].

Oppose racial discrimination and advocate racial harmony

Accordingly, if we do not pay attention to the lack of racial equality that existed before the pandemic, then even after the pandemic is over, we will not be able to establish true equal relationships and harmonious lives among all ethnic groups with each other [31]. 8 people (including 6 Asian Americans) were killed in a serial shooting at a massage shop in Atlanta, USA (the owner is a Chinese American) on March 16, 2021. A 39-year-old white man was on the streets of San Francisco the next morning. Assaulted an 83-year-old Asian-American man and was subsequently counterattacked while boxing a 76-year-old Chinese-American woman. Racial violence aroused anger and unity among Asian Americans. On March 20, hundreds of people gathered in San Francisco to condemn racial violence against Asian Americans [32]. According to statistics from Stop AAPI Hate (stopaapihate.org), there have been 3,800 incidents of harassment, verbal attacks and violence in 50 states since 2020. Anti-Asian sentiment has intensified, and New York State has committed crimes against Asians. A surge of 883%. Under pressure on March 20, the White House lowered its flag at half-mast to mourn the victims of the Atlanta shooting. The gun attack in Atlanta is just a miniature of the serious racial discrimination and hatred against Asian Americans in American society. In a video congratulating the traditional Chinese New Year on February 12, 2021, Biden admitted: In addition to the suffering of the epidemic, the loss of lives and livelihoods, we also see another tragedy: racism, harassment, hatred, targeting Asian

Americans People and Pacific Islanders, this is completely wrong, this is a stain on our national character.

In a society with deep-rooted racism, cultural assimilation and rich knowledge and wealth are not immune to racism. Therefore, we must face up to the huge differences and serious inequalities between people, strive to narrow the gap, build equality, fight against hatred and xenophobia, and unearth and eradicate the root causes of racial discrimination. Countries including the United States need to stop demonizing ethnic tactics or impulsive behaviors of the people, reduce the mutual use or calculation between countries or ethnic groups, realize ethnic equality and integration with the simple concept of universal values, and create the happiness for all ethnic groups life.

Supplement

The U.S. State Department informed that from August 1, 2021, students holding F/M visas during the epidemic will no longer be affected by the "entry to the U.S. ban" and can fly directly to the U.S. Afterwards, a large number of international students stranded abroad rushed to the U.S. In the United States, from the new semester beginning in September, they have experienced American life, campus culture and face-to-face courses. On October 25, 2021, US President Biden signed the presidential announcement, announcing the withdrawal of international air travel restrictions against non immigrants since November 8th last year from the eastern time of November 8th. Those non immigrant international travelers who meet the 3 requirements of "valid full vaccination certificate, 72 hours before boarding a negative test report and personal information to the United States". It is allowed to enter the United States through airports to promote the safe resumption of international travel activities. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) official website issued a statement saying that from June 12, 2022 at 12:01 EST, all international passengers entering the United States will no longer need to be tested before boarding, nor need to show the new crown Test negative certificate [33]. American society, economy and culture are gradually recovering. It is hoped that people of all ethnic groups (especially Asians) can live in a society full of racial inclusiveness, reduce or even eliminate racial discrimination and coexist peacefully.

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