

Title: Yellow Peril Redux: How the COVID-19 Pandemic is Fostering Racial Discrimination Toward Asian Americans

Name: Nobuko Adachi

Affiliation: Illinois State University

In the Mid-March, April, and May 2020, I was in Ocala Florida, Franklin, Tennessee, and Normal Illinois, and noticed several local Chinese restaurants had closed down soon after some states enacted a stay-at home order. It turned out that not several, but numerous, Chinese restaurants, including many of which being mainly take-out even in a normal period, were closing completely, putting up signs like “Due to the coronavirus outbreak we are temporally closed. We will open again when we can.” On the other hand, other restaurants, such as Mexican and Italian establishments were providing food for their customers by adopting, at first, take-out and, later, new ad hoc ways (like curbside service). I wondered at that time why Chinese restaurants were completely closed instead of staying opening for business with take-out or home delivery, which had been their specialty prior to the epidemic. Was it only in the Midwest, or other places? Was it only Chinese restaurants, other Asian restaurants as well? What about restaurants of other ethnic groups whose ancestors’ homelands were severely suffering with Covid-19?

In April, 2020, a team of several people and I started calling various Asian restaurants—such as Indian, Chinese, Korean, and Japanese—and Italian and Mexican restaurants all over the United States to find out who was open and who was closed. It looked like no matter what the state or size of town—for example, small towns like Springfield, South Carolina; Hamilton, Montana; and Brunswick, Maine; or large cities like New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles—small family-run restaurants were more frequently closed than those run by big chain restaurants. Alec Schaer (2020), who participated this project, stated in his presentation at the Midwest Conference on Asian Affairs this year that this finding was exactly opposed from what he expected. He thought big chain restaurants might have closed, while family-owned small restaurants would continue staying in business. He argued that this was because larger restaurants might have more liquid capital than family-owed restaurant, and could “weather the storm.” On the other hand, small-business owners—having little or no emergency capital—would have to do anything to survive, even having family members and school children helping

their parents work in their restaurants (with even the toddler children sitting in the restaurant's corner waiting for their parents to finish work). Although these Chinese restaurants with closed signed posted on their doors did not answer our phone calls, Ma (2020)—a Chinese national and US grad student—reported that during this time these restaurants often still ran their business by word of mouth, fulfilling orders for those who knew how to contact them, with using Chinese-based apps like WeChat. Schaer (2020) and Ma (2020) concluded that racial issues, in addition to financial and health factors, needed to be consider to explain these restaurant closings.

James Stanlaw (2020) has described instances of racism toward people of Asian descent in the United States during the current pandemic. According to the Pew Research Center, “About four-in-ten Asian adults said it has become more common for people to express racist views toward Asians since the pandemic began.” (July 1, 2020). In fact, a Green Bay, Wisconsin, newspaper reported that one Chinese family restaurant had “China Virus” graffiti painted on both the shop windows and its delivery van. Furthermore, many local newspapers in the United States have reported that Asian Americans and Asians in the United States have endured physical and economic abuse at the hands of their classmates, neighbors, and fellow citizens. For example, in New York City, an Asian woman was kicked and punched in a Manhattan subway station, and a Chinese American man was followed to a bus stop, shouted at, and then hit over the head in front of his 10-year-old son. In Texas, an Asian American family of three were almost killed by a man at a Sam’s Club store. In the San Fernando Valley in California, a 16-year old Asian American boy was bullied by his classmates in school who accused him of having the coronavirus, and was sent to the emergency room. By July, 2020, 58% of Asians and Asian Americans said they had been victims of racially insensitive incidents, as can be seen in Table 1.

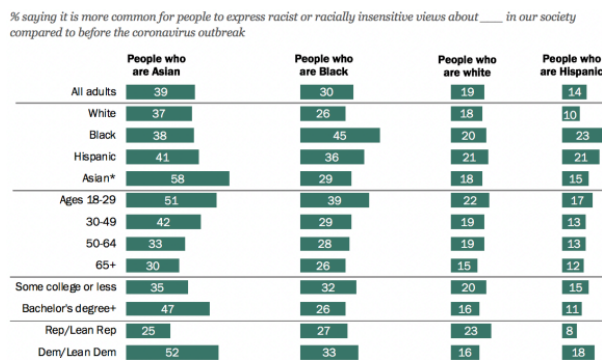


Table 1: More Asians feel they are targeted racial harassments than the prior to the Pandemic

(Ruiz, Neil G. Juliana Menasce Horowitz and Christine Tamir, July 2020)

Racial incidents against Asians and Asian Americans have been spiking, along with the number of non-Asian Americans feeling frustration and depression due to the stay-at-home orders during this period (due to things like school closures, lack of socialization, and business failures). These seem to be directly or indirectly correlated (Table 2).

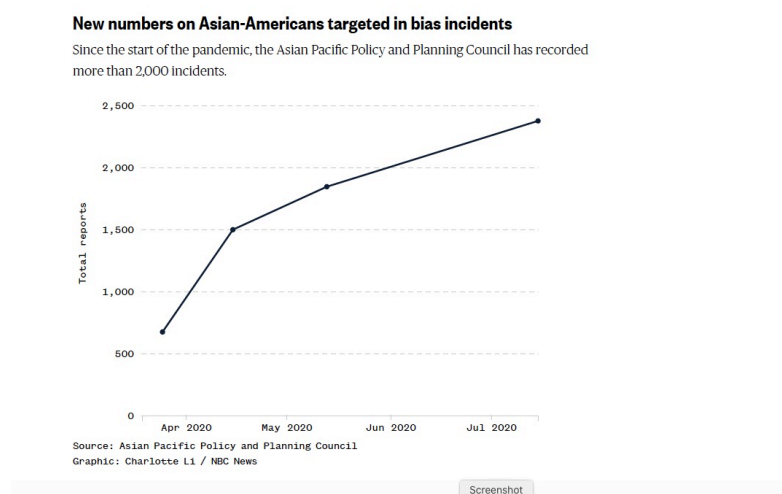


Table 2: Incidents of bias toward Asians and Asian-Americans (Ruiz, Neil, G. Juliana Menasce Horowitz and Christine Tamir, July 2020)

Asians and Asian Americans have been worried about racial incidents due to mainstream society feeling mask-wearing as a symbol of Asian-ness. As seen in Table 3, 68% of them worry about what others will think if they were wearing masks. (Regardless, Asians and Asian Americans are among the most socially conscientious: 80% were wearing masks all or most of the time in public, and 9% at least some of the time).

% saying they worry ____ that other people might be suspicious of them because of their race or ethnicity if they wear a mask or face covering when in stores or other businesses

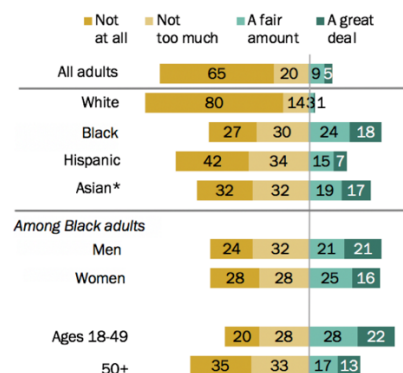


Table 3: Anxiety of Mask Wearing (Ruiz, Neil G. Juliana Menasce Horowitz and Christine Tamir 2020).

For some reason, however, these incidents of racial insult and violence against Asians and Asian Americans have not drew the attention of many Americans, regardless of some of them being inconvenienced by Chinese restaurants being closed. Today, the Black Lives Matter movement has affected the consciousness of all of mainstream America, and the movement has even spread internationally. There have been continuing demonstrations about “black and brown” people being racially targeted. However, for the most part, Asian America has not been part of this discussion. I argue that we must ask why so many Americans—even those who are avid supporters of Black Lives Matter—are not aware of, or cognizant of, the equally valid racial problems faced by Asian Americans in the United States today.

One possibility is found in a documentary film, “Rabbit in the Moon.” This film deals with the social and political issues of Japanese and Japanese American experiences during World War II. It was a winner of several awards, including the 1999 John O'Connor Award for best historical documentary and an Asian American Media Award. The film’s producer, Emiko Omori, argued that one reason why mainstream America is not so outraged over Asian American discrimination is that it is not felt to be “not bad enough.” For example, contrasting the Japanese American internment experiences in World War II to that of what the Jewish people experienced in Europe during the same period during the Holocaust, the general American attitude is that this is a false equivalence, and defies comparison. As a result, people have not seriously confronted issues of Asian American racism. Today, again people see Asian and Asian American

discrimination as not being “bad enough” when compared to the problems black and brown racism.

But, why don’t Asian Americans vocalize their concerns? Are the current problems solely due to current pandemic? Or is it the continuation of the Yellow Peril scare, or the stereotypical “perpetual foreigner” image that mainstream American society has held toward Asian Americans ever since the 19th century? These questions are important for us to consider and analyze. Why are Asian Americans not in the discourse on racism spoken by either most “minority” activists or by the mainstream majority? To fully understand the nature of racism in America, this question needs to be seriously addressed.

In an attempt to examine these issues, first I will look at how Asians and Asian Americans had been viewed historically, and examine how the stereotypical images of Asian Americans being “foreigners” could be playing a role in their discrimination during the pandemic crisis. I argue that such a stereotype is emphasized and reified by many American political leaders, and is carefully embedded in notions of a neo-Yellow Peril. This, of course, is often done for political expediency: blaming a “Chinese” virus instead of accepting responsibility for governmental mistakes or failures. The word “Chinese”—as a noun or an adjective—becomes a scapegoating symbol of blame, deflecting attention away from domestic crises. And “Chinese” becomes expanded to include all Asians and Asian Americans (Kandil and Yam 2020).

Creation of “Foreigner” Images in the United States

Asian Americans are constantly seen as foreigners in the United States regardless if they were born, raised, or educated in the United States. Historian Ronald Takaki, a third-generation Japanese American and University of California, Berkeley, PhD, summed up his life experiences in the following anecdote:

Often my fellow white students would ask me: “How long have you been in this county?” “Where did you learn to speak English?” They did not see me as an “American.” I did not look American and did not have an American name. They saw me as a foreigner. But my grandfather had sailed east to American in 1886, before the arrival of many European immigrant groups. (1998: 347)

Even when Takaki mentions he was an American, he was seen as a foreigner throughout

his whole life in the mindset of many in the United States. Regardless of his being an English native-speaker, according to Takaki, he received comments on his English again and again from people whose English was no more native than his. This type of unconscious (or perhaps, conscious) harassment today is called microaggression – a subtle, but commonly occurring, racism (Sue 2010). Tuan (1999) acknowledges this social situation by referring to Asian Americans as being “forever foreigners.”

Filipino sailors started arriving in the coast of California already in the mid-1500s, and other Asian immigrants (such as Chinese and Asian Indians) began arriving in the United States around the mid-1800s. Thus, Asians arrived in the New World no later than many European immigrant groups, as Takaki mentioned in the above quote. However, Asian Americans are always seen as new-arrivals. No doubt part of the reason for this is that they were excluded from holding US citizenship in the first federal citizenship law, the Naturalization Act of 1790. This legislation was extremely narrow in scope; it granted citizenship only to “free White persons” of “good moral character.” Although the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868 redefined the qualification of citizen from “free white persons” to “All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof,” the phrase “good moral character” has remained in the American imagination until this day—whether implicit or explicit.

Lapp (2012, 1572) argues that although the Founding Fathers and their heirs wished to protect the nation from having “disruptive” or “dangerous” people in the community, the texts have been interpreted very ambiguously. In other words, what kind of morality constitutes “disruptive” or “dangerous” behavior? Or conversely, whose morality is it, that is “good” or upstanding? These things have been contingent on criteria depending on whom you are talking to and which period you are talking about. Around the turn of the nineteenth century, the political leaders of the United States were descendants of white, western Europeans, whose morality was based on Christianity. These elites saw people who were not white, spoke non-European languages, and had non-Christian beliefs as non-moral, i.e., as “disruptive” and “dangerous.”

This European-ethnocentric view is reflected in the US government’s policy in the early 1900s toward none-Christian immigration. In other words, the United States government discriminated against East Asians, such as Chinese and Japanese, on the basis of phenotype, language, and religion. We see this in such things as the so-called Gentlemen’s Agreement of 1908 and the Immigration Act of 1924. We see this discrimination in the prohibition of Japanese

immigration to North America in the 1920s, resulting in the Japanese government encouraging mass-emigration to Brazil in the 1930s, instead. Although the Japanese government could not change anyone's physical features, to minimize social friction, they provided Portuguese language classes for emigrants and encouraged them to convert to Catholicism, the national religion of Brazil (Adachi 2017).

After the Fourteenth Amendment to the US Constitution in 1868, the requirements for citizenship changed from “white free men who resided in the United States more than two years” to “All persons born or naturalized in the United States.” However, the legal specifics regarding the holding of citizenship was not made clear. In 1895, after traveling to China for nine months, the US-born Wong Kim Ark was denied reentry to the United States because he was no longer recognized as an American citizen. After a three-year legal battle, by a 6–2 decision by the Supreme Court in 1898, Wong Kim Ark finally regained his US citizenship. However, the notion that race was really the underlying issue can be seen in the dissenting opinion of the Supreme Court written by Associate Justice Melville Fuller. The dissenters argued that under the Fourteenth Amendment, citizenship should not be granted to “the children of foreigners, happening to be born to them while passing through the country” (US Supreme Court, *United States v. Wong Kim Ark*, No. 132, 1898, <https://caselaw.findlaw.com/us-supreme-court/169/649.html>, accessed 20 May 2020). If the majority opinion prevailed, they argued, then even children “whether of the Mongolian, Malay or other race, were eligible to the presidency, while children of our citizens, born abroad, were not” (US Supreme Court, *United States v. Wong Kim Ark*, No. 132, 1898).

After this, although it appeared that citizenship discrimination against people of Asian descent had been abolished in the United States, it still continued. Regardless of being American citizens or not, almost 110,000 Americans of Japanese descent were denied their citizenship rights and sent to relocation camps during World War II. Even though Italy and Germany were fighting against the United States as much as the Japanese, only scattered selected Italian and German nationals were sent to internment camps. Almost all US-born American citizens of Italian or German ancestry were not subject to relocation. In other words, in the case of Italian and German descendants, if they were American-born they were recognized as Americans—unlike Japanese Americans who were not recognized as citizens, or had their citizenship denied. Almost 6,000 Japanese Americans were irretrievably stripped their citizenship after they refused

to fill out a loyalty questionnaire from the US government – at the very time they were confined in internment camps (Collin 1985, 4; Kim 2019, 38).

Throughout much of American history, Asian nationals, have been often denied entry to the United States: Chinese immigrants were excluded from immigration by the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882; immigration from the Asian-Pacific zone was prohibited by the Immigration Act of 1917 as well as 1908 Gentlemen’s Agreement (the latter targeting only Japanese); and immigration from Asia was completely eliminated by Immigration Act of 1924. Until the Immigration and Nationality Act was signed in 1965, there were no new-comers coming into the United States from Asia, though hundreds of thousands from Western Europeans continued coming in yearly. As a result, today 60% of population of the Asian diaspora in the United States is foreign-born (Lee and Fernandez 1998, 324). However, the total number of Asians descendants is still relatively small, being less than 21 million (Factfinder.census.gov. Archived), or about 6.5% of the 2015 American population of 323 million (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. World Population Prospects of 2015.). Almost eight and a half million American Asian diasporians were born in the United States compared to 12.6 million born outside the United States. According to Budiman, Cilluffo, and Ruiz (2019), among those immigrants, 58% have become U.S. citizens. Thus, only about six million people are permanent residents or Green Card holders. Regardless of having citizenship, or being native English native speakers, all of these American Asian diasporians are seen as foreigners, being called Japanese, Koreans, Chinese, or Indians instead of Americans or Japanese Americans, Korean Americans, Chinese Americans, or Indian Americans. On the other hands, most European Americans—such as those of German, French, and British descent—are called just *Americans*: never Germans, French, or British; and rarely German Americans, French Americans, or British Americans.

Most non-Asian Americans, and even some Asian Americans themselves, often consider personal harassment to be a minor social issue. However, daily harassments can cause many Asian Americans to have mental health problems:

Among all those who believe anti-Asian discrimination exists in America today, a two-thirds majority (68%) say that discrimination based on the prejudice of individual people is the bigger problem, while only 14% say discrimination based in laws and government policies is the bigger problem. Another 16% say both are equally problematic. (Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health/Robert Wood Johnson Foundation NPR Survey 2017: 2).

Instead of advocating for racial or ethnic equality, Asians and Asian Americans often try to assimilate into mainstream society, or try to remain as invisible as possible. One example of this is seen in Asian American intercultural marriage rates. The rates of Asian American and white interracial/ethnic marriages are very high: the Chinese American rate of intermarriages with white Americans is 53.7%; for Japanese Americans it is 64.9%; for Korean Americans, 67.9%; for Indian Americans, 69.3%; and Filipino Americans 61% (Lee and Fernandez 1998, 330). Furthermore, Chinese transnational migrants often change their Chinese names to local names (Lo and Reyes 2004, 116) and their children mostly choose to speak English over their parent's language (Wei 2016a, 6). Historian Ibram Kendi (2019) claims that minorities often subject themselves to racist behaviors, ironically falling into the manners and discourse of the hegemony. He says that in his own personal experience he thought that as a black youth he believed he could never achieve anything in society. Greater society imprinted his racial inferiority in his mind. As a result, he did not make any effort in his childhood to achieve his dreams. Asians and Asian Americans can also fall prey to a similar mind set. They can develop inferior self-images, and dismiss their ancestors' culture and language. They might try to separate themselves from their Asian diaspora community, but at the same time they are seen as perpetual foreigners by the mainstream. This is recipe for alienation and emotional and cultural homelessness.

Diversities in a Racially-Categorized Group

Once I believed Asian Americans did not tend to unite as a single group, like it is said—correctly or incorrectly—that African Americans and Latinx Americans sometimes do. So I asked my students why Asian Americans do not unite themselves? Their answer was that probably because they do not all have shared commonalities, like a diaspora language or a religion. For instance, linguistically, African Americans have Ebonics or so-called “Black English,” and people of Latin heritage have Spanglish. However the ancestors of today's Asian Americans brought with them many different languages—including Cantonese, Hokkien, Tagalog, Korean, Vietnamese, Japanese, Hindi, and Urdu—so they could not form a diaspora language in their community to foster a common identity. Instead of forming a diaspora language, with a common

language ideology, Asian Americans communicate with each other in English, the language of the mainstream (Adachi 2021).

The religious beliefs of Asian Americans are also diverse. Table 4 shows that roughly 79% of African Americans self-identify as Christians. Among these, 53%, are associated with historically black Protestant churches, 14% with evangelical Protestantism, 5% with Catholicism, and 4% mainline Protestantism. Latinx also showed a definite predilection for Christianity (almost 78% self-identifying as such). However, almost half of them identify themselves as Catholics, with 19% as evangelical Protestants, and 5% as mainline Protestants.

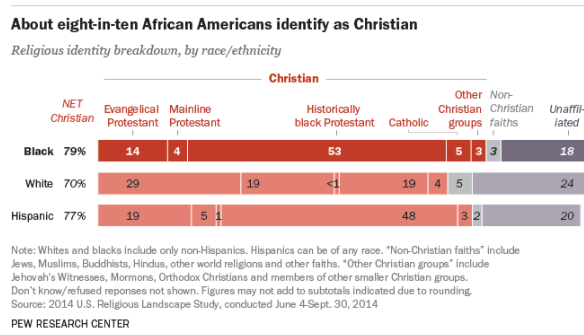


Table 4: Religious beliefs of African Americans and Latinx (Religious Landscape Study, 2014, the Pew Research Center)

On the other hand (Table 5), less than half of all Asian Americans identified themselves as Christians (42%), and among them 22% are Protestant, 13% is Evangelical and 9% are mainline Catholic. And about a quarter identified themselves as non-Christians, i.e., 14% identifies themselves as Buddhists and 10% as Hindu. Asian Americans, then, do not connect themselves with one important aspect of their ancestors' cultural legacy—religion—but connect themselves through their American citizenship.

Religious Affiliation of U.S. Asians

	U.S. Asians	General public
	%	%
Christian	42	75
Protestant	22	50
Evangelical	13	18 [^]
Mainline	9	17 [^]
Catholic	19	23
Other Christian	1	2
Buddhist	14	1.0-1.3[^]
Hindu	10	0.5-0.8[^]
Muslim	4	0.8[^]
Sikh	1	n/a
Jain	*	n/a
Other religion	2	4
Unaffiliated	26	19
Atheist/Agnostic	8	5
Nothing in particular	17	13
Don't know/Refused	1	1
	100	100

2012 Asian-American Survey, Q30. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding. General public figures are based on aggregated data from surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press in 2011, except where noted.

[^] General public figures for evangelicals and mainline Protestants are for white (non-Hispanic) evangelical and white (non-Hispanic) mainline Protestants. Figures for U.S. Buddhists and U.S. Hindus are Pew Forum estimates. Figures for U.S. Muslims are Pew Research estimates.

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Table 5: Religious Beliefs of Asian-Americans (Religious Landscape Study, 2012, Pew Research Center)

However, Kendi (2019) does not suggest that “African American” is one monolithic community, completely united. For example, he cites a quote made by Christopher Duncan, a light-skinned African American actor: “I have a nice car, ... I hate it when I get pulled over and I’m treated like I am one of them niggers” (p. 136). He argues that African Americans see themselves as “Black people,” but some separate themselves from other “nigger¹” African Americans. Kendi argues that words like “I have a nice car,” and “I hate ...” and “I’m treated like I am one of them” signify that some economically successful African Americans look down on less successful African Americans or “niggers” (drug addicts or thugs or the less ambitious), and feel they belong to a different social category. Unfortunately, they feel, most non-African Americans can’t tell the difference, branding all African Americans as one category, sometimes under the N-word label.

Latinxs are also a very diverse group, whose ancestors just happened to be from Latin American nations. Many Americans learned this through the presidential election of 2020. Many of non-Latinx Americans believed all Latinxs would vote against Trump, who made many humiliating statements regarding Mexicans, such as:

When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best. They’re not sending you.

¹ I have debated about using this terribly offensive word, and have even thought of using a euphemism like “ni**er.” However, because Kendi uses it intentionally himself to draw attention to an alleged stigmatized subgroup within an already stigmatized subgroup—and how that itself is a product of a hegemonic racialized image—I have (reluctantly) decided to leave this word with its full spelling, as Kendi did.

They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people. (Speech given on 16 June 2015 at Presidential announcement)

I can never apologize for the truth. I don't mind apologizing for things. But I can't apologize for the truth. I said tremendous crime is coming across. Everybody knows that's true. And it's happening all the time. So, why, when I mention, all of a sudden, I'm a racist. I'm not a racist. I don't have a racist bone in my body. (Interview on Fox News's "Media Buzz," 5 July 2015)

However, it turned out that many Latins supported Trump (cf. Krogstad and Lopez 2020).

Among the numerous issues on the table—such as conservative views on gender, education, and taxes—one of the reasons for their support was, ironically, his tough stand on immigration.

These voters were legal Americans who do not wish to be seen as illegal immigrants themselves, or supporters of illegal immigration.

There are many people of Mexican descent in the American Southwest. Among those are descendants of people who became Americans due to the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, ending the Mexican American War (1846–1848). The United States' annexing of Texas in 1845 started the conflict, and its end saw the United States expand its territory to eventually include California, Colorado, Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico (Morales 2002). When the area became US territories and states, not only was the land, but also the inhabitants, became subject to American laws. The local inhabitants "became the victims of racism and cultural genocide and ... [today] are [still] relegated to a submerged status" (Acuña 2016, 61). Regardless of their being proud of their Mexican heritage, they have suffered by Anglo (white) stereotyping, who mock Mexican descendants as rural and uneducated, and say everything Mexican is cheap or of poor quality (Hill 1993). Accomplished or assimilated Mexican Americans do not wish to be stigmatized, put in the same category as Trump's illegal immigrants, rapists, and drug dealers. As a result, many of them support Trump's policies like building border walls and deporting illegal immigrant.

Furthermore, there are many Americans of Cuban descent who supported Trump, allowing him to win Florida in the 2020 election. Their ancestors left Cuba after 1959 when Castro took political power in Cuba. Believing Trump's words—that Democrats are socialists—this voting block took the side of Republicans. These Cuban Americans have been continuously taught at home, and in the greater diaspora community, how bad socialism is.

Also, Latinx-Americans from different countries are different groups of people. A descendant of Quichua-speaking farmers from Peru may have little in common with middle class banking family originally from Buenos Aires. Yet “mainstream” Americans often believe Latinx-Americans or Hispanics say a collective cultural and political identity.

African Americans and Latinx Americans are diverse diaspora communities, just like Asian Americans, and they do not necessary stand in solidarity and help each other. The differences, then, between African Americans and Latinx Americans, versus Asian Americans, is not that Asian Americans are more diverse—so that they cannot, or would not, unite themselves to protest for their human rights—but that Asian Americans are always stigmatized as foreigners. As I have mentioned when I looked at history of Asian Americans, one of the reasons could be that historically they were susceptible to being treated as foreigners, regardless of them being American citizens. As a result they have tried not to be outstanding and have tried to assimilate into the majority society. But does such an attitude exist still now? Is the notion of perpetual foreigners still applicable to today’s Asian Americans? Aren’t they protected now by the Civil Rights Act of 1964? The Civil Rights Act guarantees to all citizens equal protection of under the law, via the Fourteenth Amendment which prohibits state and local governments from depriving persons of life, liberty, or property without a due process. But in spite of these protections, racism still exists in society today. This means one of the issues we need to consider is how our society comes to stigmatize minorities. Focusing on this issue I will now look at how racial stigma is promoted in society. I will particularly focus on the current scapegoating by the government. Asian Americans have often been victims of scapegoating when mainstream society experiences social, economic, and political crisis. In the following section I consider how the stereotype of perpetual foreigner-ness is promoted in society, and how the notion of Yellow Peril has been reformed in today’s social climate.

Asian Americans Are Again the Nation’s Scapegoat

The stereotypes of Asian Americans as “foreigners” has been used throughout the history of the United States. Since this is embedded into the American mindset, people easily forget that Asian Americans are *real* Americans. As a result, as they are always labeled and categorized by their ancestor’s homeland (*Chinese* instead of *Chinese American* or just *American*). According to Sue (2010), the first thing non-Asian Americans ask Asian Americans is “Where are you from?” If

their answer is something like “I am from California,” the other person would keep asking “Where are you *really* from?” or “Where are you originally from?” This goes on until the non-Asian American speaker is satisfied by categorizing the Asian American by his or her ancestor’s homeland. These exchanges happen ritually, and it seems a proper social relationship cannot be established otherwise.

I often wonder if Japanese do a similar thing regarding social status. Itoh (2007) reported that Japanese often ask about the social status of their addressees when they first meet. Until they find out the social status of each other, people cannot start to have a conversational exchange. This is because depending on their social status, their speech styles and discourse manners can be different. In case of non-Asian Americans talking to Asian Americans, it might be a similar mindset. Since non-Asian Americans see Asian Americans as “foreigners,” non-Asian Americans think that Asian Americans do not share the same “American” culture as they do (assuming there is such a thing as “American culture,” and that speaker is thinking in such abstractions). Thus, the non-Asian American needs to find out which nation the Asian American is “from” so they can have a conversation accordingly. This is at the level of Microinsults that their comments and action might not be intentional, however such questions are often seen unintentional comments and actions which are deeply embedded people’s mind and they cannot even establish their relationships without such microinsult behaviors.

Such queries as this reflect a pattern of thinking—one so prevalent and obvious to Asian Americans that they go to great lengths not to be labeled as foreigners, even to the extent of abandoning their heritage language, or not forming a diaspora language in the United States. Speaking English, after all, is to be seen as American. Therefore people often believe it is an ethnic characteristic of Asians that they submissively learn the languages of their new nations. But as I have argued previously (e.g., Adachi 2017, 2021)—using the diaspora language of Japanese Brazilians as a case study—becoming monolingual English speakers is not an ethnic characteristic of Asians. In other nations, Asian diaspora communities have formed their own diaspora languages. One of the reasons why Asian Americans in the United States did not do so is that if they communicate in a diaspora language—although this would foster solidarity among small diaspora groups—they would emphasize the stereotype Americans have about them: that is, they as non-Americans or foreigners in their own country.

Once a social or political or economic crisis occurs, such “foreign” minorities easily become targets of scapegoating. This has happened many times in American history. For example, Japanese Americans became political scapegoats and were sent to internment camps during World War II. In 2004, in his interview to *the San Francisco Chronicle*, Fred Korematsu (1919- 2005), who had a long battle in the US Supreme Court regarding Japanese American internment, stated that Japanese Americans were victims of a political strategy that promoted fear toward the enemy, and encouraged real Americans to fight against the Japanese:

Fears and prejudices directed against minority communities are too easy to evoke and exaggerate, often to serve the political agendas of those who promote those fears. I know what it is like to be at the other end of such scapegoating and how difficult it is to clear one's name after unjustified suspicions are endorsed as fact by the government. If someone is a spy or terrorist they should be prosecuted for their actions. But no one should ever be locked away simply because they share the same race, ethnicity, or religion as a spy or terrorist. If that principle was not learned from the internment of Japanese Americans, then these are very dangerous times for our democracy. (Hong. January 30, 2017)

The internment camps were not an isolated scapegoating incident towards Asian in the United States. A more recent scapegoating incident in 2008 concerned a Chinese American-owned family bank, Abacus Federal Saving Bank. The bank was accused of a scheme to falsify loan applications. Abacus Federal Saving Bank was run by the Sung family, founded by Thomas Sung, who arrived in the United State from Taiwan at age ten. He ran the bank with his American-born daughters, Vera Sung and Jill Sung, in New York's Chinatown. The bank was indicted on charges of a scheme to falsify loan applications to Fannie Mae in 2012 by Manhattan district attorney, Cyrus Vance Jr. After a four-month trial the Sung family won their case. However, because of the legal bills this court battle entailed, it drained the bank of more than \$10 million and hamstrung the bank's business for three years (the period of the prosecution). Abacus remains the only U.S. bank to ever have been prosecuted in connection to the 2008 financial crisis. The Sung family said in a documentary film on the prosecution, Americans tend to see Asians and Asian Americans as people who do not fight for justice in public, so they easily become targets of scapegoats (Abacus 2016).

In April 2018, about a year and half prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, President Trump announced a list of Chinese products would suffer an import surcharge equivalent to \$50 billion.

In return, China imposed import tariffs on a list of American products, including the imposition of a 25% tariff on soybeans from the USA. As a result, not only did American agricultural industries lose revenue, but so far the tariffs are not been paid by China but have been entirely paid by U.S. importers (Carvalho, Azevedo and Massuquetti 2019). This was the start of a trade-war between the United States and China which still continues. Then Covid-19 pandemic occurred. By early 2019 some negative opinion of this trade war with China started to surface, and some farmers became vocal about their economic problems. Yet soon after the pandemic started, the media shifted their focuses entirely to the corona virus. President Trump did not waist this chance, and started blaming China directly and indirectly for the virus.

Although it is not known how or exactly where the pandemic really started, some people say it came from Europe (such as Spain or Italy where the corona virus hit hard, early in the pandemic period). Many others say it came from China, another early victim of the pandemic. President Trump has constantly blamed China for the pandemic. He accused China as not only of a negligent response, he also said he suspected the virus came from Wuhan Institute of Virology, unleashed on purpose (Mangan 2020). While he was making these accusations (of which there is no proof), President Trump never failed to use the words *communist* or *socialism*, whenever he mentions China in his speeches. According to studies of Pew Research Center (October 7, 2019; Harting 2019) even prior to the pandemic, 55% of Americans had a negative impression of “socialism,” and about one-in-five (19%) say that socialism undercuts people’s initiative and work ethic, making people too reliant on the government for support. As a result Republicans have been claiming that any national health care program, including Obamacare, is the product of socialism, and say supporting it will eventually cause Americans lose their “freedom” to healthcare access. Manipulating such American folk beliefs, the Trump administration has conflated *China*, *communism*, and *evil* together in the mind of the populous, saying an activist government will monitor individual behavior, killing freedom and democracy. This scenario was successfully used to blame China for the social fear of the corona virus as well as negative trade deficit of the United States. The government switched from an economic issue—resulting from the unpopular trade-war with China—to a fight against China: China will not only invade American economy, but it will also take away American individuality and freedom.

The racial tension did not stop with only the Chinese government, but also with Chinese and Chinese American persons as well (including other Asians and Asian Americans). A newly

elected California republican congress woman, Michelle Steel said in her interview with Tucker Carlson on Fox News on Nov. 18, 2020, she was born in Korea and raised in Japan—so she speaks Korean and Japanese natively. But she has nothing to do with China and speaks no Chinese language. Yet people in the United States see her as if she were Chinese, especially these days during the pandemic. The current racial tension involves not only Asians but also Asian Americans; people in the United States often do not make a distinction.

Today, in the 21st century, the Trump administration targets China as a political scapegoat—a new kind of Yellow Peril threat from the East. In the early 1900s, the old Yellow Peril—the concept of Asians being an existential danger to American society—was derived from a fear of Asians taking jobs from American people. However, today the fear toward Asians and people of Asian descent has been, rather, a focus on the national economy, threatened by the expanding economic power of Asian nations. This change in mindset began in the 1980s when Japanese automakers successfully and competitively entered the US automobile market, and American automakers declining sales and profits. In 1982, with fear of losing their jobs, frustrated autoworkers sometimes resorted to violence. A “Japanese” looking person, Vincent Chin, a Chinese American, was killed in such an act. After an argument with two Chrysler plant workers, Chin was beaten to death by them with a baseball bat. Regardless of taking a life, the accused men were found guilty of lesser charges and were fined only \$3,000 and given three years probation with no jail time. The reason of this light sentence was that the juries were very sympathetic for the Chrysler plant workers who were worried about losing their jobs to the Japanese auto industry. The fact that the two white men did not know the difference between Chinese or Japanese was irrelevant; it seems in the language of the court record that this distinction was not especially germane, for either side.

By the end of 1900s then the direct danger of the hordes of the Yellow Peril taking over the manual labor market had passed (which was now taken up by Hispanic Americans). But the whole American economy is being threatened by Asia and Asians. The Yellow Peril never really disappeared from American society, but has been omnipresent, rising up in times of war, or political, economic, or cultural crises. Each time it resurfaces after being updated accordingly to the new social conditions.

Conclusion

In this paper I stated that increasing incidents of xenophobia and racial hatred demonstrated against people of Asian descent in the United States is related to a perpetual-foreigner stereotype not unique to the present crisis, but is something that is deeply embedded into American consciousness. Such “unintentional” discriminations became however easily beyond microaggression and became the current 21st century macroracism in the United States. Among other things, I looked at the language used by President Trump. He repeatedly uses racially loaded terms like “the Chinese virus” and “Kanfu virus” together with “Communist China.” Although he is using those words joking manners (i.e. microassault) behaviors, people who believe there is no more racism exist (i.e. microinvalidations) causally use such jokes and ritually repeat microinsults ethno-cultural borders behavior are indisputably associated with the old Yellow Peril notion, which becomes repacked at various and various guised, and recreated the current 21st century the Novo Yellow Peril notion in the United States. I argued that such words In 2020, for instance, the government successfully deflected people’s attentions away from its infective political policy and poor response to a health crisis, to foster fear in the hearts and minds of American citizens regarding people from Asia and Asian Americans. This scapegoating continues to stoke fear during the Covid-19 pandemic, and because of this, people are even believe false news stories of the most preposterous kind such as the coronavirus was intentionally developed in a Chinese laboratory and the Communist Chinese are stealing American vaccine secrets.

The words the government repeatedly used—like the “Wuhan Flu,” “China Virus” and “Communist”—rekindled fear and anger toward Asians and Asian Americans once again. The fear before World War II was that Asians would bring in cheap labor and bust labor unions and their hard-fought victories. But today the fear is connected to the raising economic power of Asian nations, and the fear that Americans will have their businesses taken away from them, and even that they will lose their “freedom,” the most precious of all of America’s symbolic values. This time American folk-economics beliefs regarding capitalism versus socialism has been used to promote division. Many citizens blindly take the word of political demagogues without any due diligence. Some leaders say a socialist government would do no end of nefarious deeds, like intentionally creating a corona virus in a Wuhan lab.

Such preposterous false news, filled with the buzz words, has caused racial tension to flair against not only Chinese but all people of Asian descent in the United States. This ethnic

blurring is unfortunately always found in a society—just like all Latin-Americans are not distinguished from illegal Mexicans. President Trump’s injudicious language might be targeting certain Mexicans; however, his words have affected all people of Hispanic descent in the United States. He has successfully rekindled racial tensions: illegal Mexicans are talking over Americans jobs and Asians are talking away American values, freedom, and democracy. Under such a tense social and cultural climate, more racial incidents are likely to occur and escalate. Today’s tensions between the Black Lives Matter movement and the police are only the more obvious evidence of underlying systemic problems. These are not isolated racial issues. No one’s incident of racial discrimination is “not bad enough.” Once is enough.

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