

Asian Hate in COVID-19: Problems and Solutions

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Abstract:

Hate incidents against Asians in the United States continue to skyrocket during the COVID-19 pandemic. Especially those targeting Asian Americans have raised concerns about their risk of victimization. Prejudice towards the Asian community and accusations of spreading the coronavirus likely led to a short-term increase in anti-Asian American hate crimes. With the spread of news in modern society, racial contradictions have received more attention, and significant events likely trigger the blaming labels on a certain group of people in society due to different identities. This paper employs four oppressions and finds that these variants of oppressions have gradually eroded the fundamental rights of Asian Americans as citizens, imperiled their daily existence, kept them in a state of panic and anxiety, and significantly compromised their welfare. The landscape of a global community predicated on the collective destiny of humankind still has a long way to go.

Keywords:

Asian Hate, COVID-19, Anti-Asian American, Four I's Oppression

1. Introduction

During the COVID-19 period, mainly from March to December 2020, there was significant discrimination towards Asian people, anti-Asian incidents took a dramatic upswing. This prejudice began when the U.S. declared its confirmation of COVID-19 and attributed Asian people as an excuse for the origin of the virus. Department stores, restaurants, and public transportation services alike have all been found guilty of discriminating against individuals of Asian descent. When prejudice towards the Asian community was combined with accusations of spreading the coronavirus, differences were magnified, which likely led to a short-term increase in anti-Asian American hate crimes.

According to the latest data from the Stop AAPI Hate group, 6,603 hate incidents against Asians and Pacific Islanders were reported to the organization between mid-March 2020, when the pandemic began, and March 31, 2021. Victims reported nearly 1,900 hate crimes against Asian Americans, and approximately 69% of cases were related to verbal harassment, including being called the "Chinese Coronavirus." Additionally, a poll about COVID-19 revealed that over 30% of respondents had

witnessed someone blaming the Asian population for the spread of the COVID-19 virus (Ipsos, 2020) [1].

Hate incidents against Asians in the United States are continuing to skyrocket during the COVID-19 pandemic. They were oppressed not only by institutions and society but also by direct interpersonal discrimination and internalized stigma. The novel coronavirus is an “Asian” or “Chinese” virus have been linked to anti-Asian American hate, potentially leaving members of this group not only fearful of being victimized but also at risk for victimization. There was a report that two Asian women, ages 63 and 84, were attacked and stabbed in broad daylight Tuesday on a busy street in San Francisco. This Asian Hate during COVID-19 harms Asian Americans' citizenship as well as their daily life and culture. Such discriminatory practices extend to the infringement upon their civil liberties. Furthermore, this racial exclusion causes resonance from national institutions and other countries all over the world.

2. Literature Review

Four oppression is the theory that considers oppression a systematic structure according to John Bell. He points out that the four oppressions are ideological, institutional, interpersonal, and internalized oppression. Also, “each is completely mixed up with the others” (Bell, N.D.) [2].

The Four I's Oppression is an integrated concept. When applied by scholars, many scholars choose to divide it into more narrow aspects. Thus, the whole theory is rare to be seen, but each component of this has many related works.

Ideological oppression is applied by many scholars to study social practice and its implying meaning. Haslanger has studied how the words or social norms that people take for granted oppress people. As he said, the interpretation of some words created for women, for example, sexual harassment, is the deprivation of their civic rights and a wrong implication (Haslanger, 2019, p.14) [3]. If women then accept the ideas that are oppression, they lost their social justice rights and internalized what they should be, then it will be turned into internalized oppression. He also pointed out that the solution is always to criticize the aptness of what we learned as concepts (Haslanger, 2019, p.22) [3].

Ciurria(2023, p. 36) [4] argued that the social contract can easily be linked with interpersonal oppression, for the policies are designed by people who have power. When people interact with each other, the way they perceived as right is oppressive. Interpersonal oppression can be intentional as well, with people's prejudice and stereotypes.

For interpersonal oppression and institutional oppression, these two oppressions can happen quite simultaneously when people face oppressive interactions with the staff of an institution. A study on the oppression of service users pointed out that the company staff's attitude is consistent with the institution itself (Ramsundarsingh & Shier, 2023, p.13) [5]. Interpersonal oppression has its root in institutional instruction when staff are exercised, and their wrong attitude is tolerated. What's more, institutional oppression happens in society, varying from government, school, and society. Braithwaite (2021) has researched the oppression from official organizations to child protection workers, which causes ineffective protection(p. 68) [6]. Another research has investigated how racial groups face oppressive treatment when asking for help from advisors in university (Pérez & Carney, 2018) [7].

Research about internalized oppression focuses more on the psychological field. This oppression tends to be thought of as inevitable (Banks & Stephens, 2018) [8]. The influence on people is to measure to what extent minority people internalized the stigma. More studies have researched the harms that internalized oppression brings to minority groups, for example, it can cause degraded esteem and low agency of themselves as Liebow said (2016, p.714) [9]. She also pointed out that empowerment from the community is a strategic method to resist internalized oppression.

As for the problem of oppression, the research has found that each part of Four I's oppression is being applied individually, while in this context of Asian hate during Covid-19, this paper is going to apply four aspects and problematize the social issue.

Firstly, the Four I's Oppression will be applied to analyze the different level of oppression towards Asian Americans in the United States. Still, the impacts on Asian Americans are detailed in different parts from individual to international. As citizens, Asian Americans' citizenship has been weakened under this discrimination, so the concept of citizenship is also used to examine the damaged part of these citizens' civil rights, membership, and participation. Finally, to stretch out social justice and reconfirm humanity, individual, community and nation-level action will be demonstrated.

3. Methodology

This paper aims to problematize discrimination by Four I's Oppression. The researcher will first use this methodology to analyze the content and text in the online report to discover the four types of oppression. Then, the reactive feedback and possible resolution will be given in discussion.

Four I's Oppression is a suitable methodology when facing the oppression problem. It provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the different forms of oppression that Asian Americans may face. By examining institutional, interpersonal, internalized, and ideological oppression, researchers can gain a better understanding of how anti-Asian sentiments are perpetuated and reinforced. Also, by focusing on institutional and ideological oppression, the Four I's framework can help researchers to highlight systemic issues that contribute to anti-Asian racism. This can help policymakers and advocates to identify areas where changes need to be made, such as in-laws, policies, or social norms. What's more, it acknowledges internalized oppression, which is a particularly insidious form of oppression that can be difficult to detect. By using the Four I's framework, researchers can explore how Asian Americans may internalize negative messages about their identity, which can have long-lasting effects on their mental and physical health. Still, it can inform interventions. After understanding the different forms of oppression that contribute to anti-Asian sentiment, researchers can develop more effective interventions to address the problem.

However, there are also some shortcomings of this methodology. The Four I's framework may not capture all aspects of anti-Asian sentiment. Overemphasis on victimization is another problem, which may leave little room for examining positive experiences and resilience within the Asian American community. Overall, the Four I's of Oppression can be a powerful tool for researchers seeking to understand the causes and effects of anti-Asian racism in the United States. By providing a holistic framework for examining oppression, it can help to identify areas where change is needed and promote greater social justice and equity.

4. Discussion

4.1. Four Sites of Oppression

Ideological oppression mains the idea formed in society. From the ideological oppression, the core of the discrimination is the thought that Asian people are to be blamed for COVID-19. According to research that collects keywords associated with COVID-19 and anti-Asian sentiment, they find that “tweets containing one of the ten keywords topped 80,000 for the day (March 18, 2020)” (Costello et al, 2021, p.111) [10]. This reflects that many people associate COVID-19 with Asian people, the trend is that the ideology is formed based on people’s justification of their discrimination. COVID-19 give them a chance to spread their fear with xenophobia and racial hierarchy, and the exclusion then happened in the whole society.

The ideological oppression was first started with the president’s words. As *NBC news* reported, the photo clearly shows the speech notes of Donald Trump with the words “corona” in “coronavirus” being replaced with “Chinese” (Smith, 2020) [11]. The ideology of politicians was reinforced through many speeches given by the president and his staff. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo used the term “Wuhan virus” following the president, according to *The New Your Times* report (Roger, 2020) [12]. This use of terminology is ideological oppression, especially when it is spoken by the dominant political power within a country. After that, some media coverage media outlets have perpetuated this ideology by emphasizing the race or ethnicity of individuals involved in COVID-19 cases, or by sensationalizing stories with sensational headlines that play into stereotypes about Asians or Asian Americans. For example, the headline from *The New York Post*, “Yellow Peril Goes Viral” was published on February 5, 2020, about the outbreak of COVID-19(Yam, 2020) [13]. However, this headline was widely criticized for its use of racist language and stereotypes and was later changed by the newspaper.

Institutional oppression focuses on the backup power like the legal system or political system. According to Kurtzman (2021) [14], “In the week after former President Donald J. Trump tweeted about ‘the Chinese virus,’ the number of coronavirus-related tweets with anti-Asian hashtags rose precipitously, a new study from UC San Francisco has found”. People who have a racist orientation get inspired by their presidents and feel even more justified in their discrimination. Moreover, Trump has promoted his policies of a trade war with China and anti-immigrant policies. These are all political practices that imply anti-Asian and racist ideology. This institutional background provides the hotbed for further racism attacks. Asian Americans have long been considered “foreigners,” and their communities have continued to experience being excluded and “othered” by the culture of racism and xenophobia.

The institutional oppression follows almost instantly after the president announced the word “Chinese virus”. Since the president is a symbol of national policy. After that, the immigration policy first shows the discrimination against Asian people, especially towards Chinese students. According to *The New York Times*, the Trump administration has canceled over 1,000 visas for Chinese students and researchers who are deemed to be national security risks (Wong & Barnes, 2020) [15]. The policy made in the Trump period of denying visas to Chinese students has long-term systematic discrimination towards Chinese students. What’s more, the local institution also oppresses Asian incidents during Covid-19. In Hawaii, as reported by *USA Today*,

Hawaii has implemented checkpoints to control the spread of Covid-19, with some advocates arguing that the checkpoints are disproportionately located in Native Hawaiian and Asian American neighborhoods (McAvoy, 2020) [16]. The article includes quotes from community members and civil rights organizations who criticize the policy as discriminatory and argue that it reinforces negative stereotypes about Asians.

Interpersonal oppression is the most tangible and apparent part. From the report of *Stop AAPI Hate*, they received 3,795 incidents from March 19, 2020, to February 28, 2021(2021, p.1) [17]. These attacks include verbal harassment, shunning, physical assault, civil rights violations, and online harassment. Victims suffered physical and mental oppression, and their citizenship is also undermined.

According to *Human Rights Watch*, crime towards Asians scored during the first two months when Covid-19 appeared in the U.S., including hate speech, discrimination, and physical attacks against Asians and Asian Americans (2020, August 16) [18]. The almost 1500 reports were collected by a coalition of Asian-American groups that had created a reporting center called STOP AAPI HATE as *Human Rights Watch* said. Moreover, specific incidents happened almost every day, article from *NBC News* highlights the increase in violence and hate crimes against Asians and Asian Americans during the pandemic. An elderly Thai man who was pushed to the ground and killed in San Francisco was mentioned in the article as a suspected racially motivated incident (Yam, 2020, May 12) [19]. Crime like this will be even more severe after the president's and the government's non-action. The media's report seemed to be too late. According to Connie Chung, "the media is miserably late covering anti-Asian violence" (as cited by Benveniste, 2021) [20] after the gunshots of six Asians in Atlanta.

The last proportion is internalized oppression. As the victims, some Asian Americans may not have the power to fight back without receiving more attacks. Then they tend to view themselves as negative. For example, some Asian people, especially Chinese, will try not to show their face and their identity as Asians to protect themselves. It is not fair for victims to "conceal their identity" because of unfair treatment, but some less powerful Asians, must digest the discrimination and try to avoid being attacked. These four explanations of different oppression together construct a problem---the Asian Hate in COVID-19 is supported by political practices based on the false assumption of Asians and COVID-19, gradually evolved by more attacking incidents and harm towards those Asian people.

4.2. The Impacts: How it Violates Asian People's Citizenship and Daily Life

According to Bellamy (2008), Citizenship is defined as "a condition of civic equality" (p.17) [21], and it has three components as membership and belonging, the right to have rights, and participation. Under oppression, the internal exclusion in American society and the denial of Asian people's rights are the two things that undermine Asian people's citizenship. At the same time, this discrimination also harms the daily life of Asian people.

The exclusion from other people in the community is severer than membership cannot be guaranteed. This exclusion originates from the political leader of America, Donald Trump, together with his supporters. They use social media to assault the Chinese and use the term "Chinese virus" and "Kung flu". These words and attitudes can transfer to tangible actions with exclusion. Internal exclusion leads to the lowered

belonging of Asian people towards society. Their belonging in the neighborhood, in the supermarket, or even in their house is lowered. Because they are excluded from society, they feel unsafe and insecure about their environment and people. According to a report, Asian households are more likely to have a food shortage during COVID-19 because they are afraid to get out (Speakman, 2021) [22].

Speaking of civil rights, Asian people have been discriminated from many aspects of their daily life and culture. The impacts happen in the workplace, in a restaurant where Asians are rejected having service, and in the public street where they are hurt by others. They cannot gain respect when taking public transportation because other people will avoid them and even eject them, this will cause high difficulties in their life and undermine their social rights. According to Bellamy (2008), “such rights include the standard of civic rights against such acts being assaulted or tortured, or being detained or punished without a due process”(p.80) [21]. Specifically, human rights are born to be respected, and citizens should not be assaulted by others. With the number of crime incidents rising in 2020 Asian people, their need to be respected as a citizen is totally destroyed by those haters.

4.3. The Impacts and Feedback: From National and International Level

From a national and international standpoint, it evokes both discrimination events and resistance on a global scale.

With 10370 incidents in the U.S. towards Asian Americans in 2020 and 2021 (Stop AAPI Hate, 2021) [23], the national crime is severe, however, there is positive resistance in the nation. The national institution has offered protections. For example, schools have difficulties with normal operation in the school system, especially those universities with many students abroad. To prepare students with safer study places, many schools have created Zoom classes, especially for Asian students. According to Sawchuk and Gewertz, “Oregon’s Beaverton school district hosted Zoom discussions for Asian and Asian-American staff and students the week of the Atlanta shootings” (2021) [24]. Schools are striving to protect Asian students and organize their faculties to call for less discrimination in society.

From an international perspective, some Western countries follow the current of blaming Asians as an excuse for their failed actions during the COVID-19 period. According to *Human Rights Watch* (2020) [18], many Western countries like UK, Spain, and Italy all have reports of Asian attack events. This feedback even adds fire to worldwide discrimination while it leads to a less civilized world. However, positive feedback also happens. The Asian people in France have held a campaign on Twitter using the tag “I’m not a virus” to show their resistance. This together constructs a coherence in the Asian community and shows Asian people’s resolve to fight against this unequal oppression.

4.4. The resolution: from individual, community, and nation

To help Asian people address this situation of insecurity and less convenience, not only the oppressed group themselves but also the non-Asian community and national institutions can aid.

From the individual level, just like the “I’m not a virus” campaign in France, people can show their attitude toward the world with the help of the media. This action is small but powerful. Here comes the power of media. According to Stevenson (2003), the public sphere is highly connected to the media, “the media of mass

communication commonly exhibit a form of cultural power that symbolically constructs popular horizons and investments” (p.124) [25]. Nowadays, through communication in the public sphere, people can have a great influence on society. Media can be a place to pour out hate and anger, like when Trump uses Twitter to assault “Kung flu”, but also a place to empower ordinary people the chance to speak out.

Community and societal organizations are other forces that back up Asian Americans' great support. Many NGO groups have offered help to Asian people. For example, Asia Society is an organization focusing on helping Asian people and U.S. people to foster mutual understanding, it launched a movement of #StopAsianHate and recast the music video of “Stop All Hate, Share Love” on YouTube (Asia Society, 2021) [26]. This video with love and support soon got global attention. Using the power of art, Asia Society contributes its own support to Asian people.

Still, from the national level, the political policies of some institutes have helped to protect their Asian citizens. “Following overwhelming support from both chambers of Congress, President Biden signed legislation Thursday that addresses hate crimes throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, with particular emphasis on the increase in violence against Asian Americans” (Sprunt, 2021) [27]. The political practice has been promoted a lot, and with the backup of national laws, the frequency of crime will be reduced. As citizens, people need to obey the national institutes, while the authority changed their attitudes from the “Chinese virus” to the new legislation, it can help the whole nation to change their minds and form a more civic society.

In conclusion, through the period of the pandemic, it is understandable that people will get nervous, while the countries also feel hopeless to control the messy situation. However, it is not an excuse to transfer this negative feeling to innocent Asian Americans and oppress them. This oppression, which is from institutional, ideological, interpersonal, and internalized levels, together exert a great impact on Asian people's daily life and their citizenship. Their belonging and rights in society are damaged. What's more, from the international level, this discrimination can both trigger resistance from Asian people and continuous oppression in more countries.

Though Asian people have experienced this sorrow during this COVID-19 period, there are supporters for them. Social justice is gained through the hard work of individuals in the media, by organizations volunteers, and the national law. Now it is the time to call for more actions so that the Asian-Hate issue can be calmed down more completely. With more people knowing the importance of citizenship and how these Asian people suffered, they will know that the oppression towards Asian people is unreasonable. Only with more mutual understanding, can this society be more civic.

5. Conclusions

In terms of ideological oppression, the belief that Asians are to blame for COVID-19 is at the heart of the discrimination. Institutional oppression centers on the legal or political systems. The utilization of derogatory labels such as “Kung flu” or “Chinese Virus” by certain political figures in the media has resulted in a notable increase in discrimination against Asian individuals. Interpersonal oppression exerts a direct and profound influence on the issue at hand, particularly in specific social communities, schools, and institutions where discrimination or even bullying may transpire. Internalized oppression of individuals represents a concession that exposes a vulnerability in the face of the actual milieu, and the "silent majority" may assume the

role of the perpetrator who inflicts harm upon Asians. These variants of oppression have gradually eroded the fundamental rights of Asian Americans as citizens, imperiled their daily existence, kept them in a state of panic and anxiety, and significantly compromised their welfare.

Notwithstanding this paper, it is important to note that the significant spike in anti-Asian American hate crimes was not sustained over time. Many Asian and non-Asian Americans are defending their rights on social media, and Asians in some areas have united to demonstrate. Additionally, some NGOs have come to assist Asians. Furthermore, policy legislation can help citizens change their perceptions, such as Biden's signing of the anti-discrimination bill against Asian Americans, which can protect the rights and freedoms of Asian citizens to a certain extent.

“The way that the media is covering and the way that people are understanding anti-Asian hate at this moment, in some ways, draws attention to these long-standing anti-Asian biases in U.S. society,” Janelle Wong, a professor of American Studies at the University of Maryland said. In human history, racial discrimination has existed for a long time, and with the spread of news in modern society, racial contradictions have received more attention, and significant events likely trigger the blaming labels on a certain group of people in society due to different identities. At the just-concluded Conference on Dialogue of Asian Civilizations, President Xi Jinping, on behalf of China and Asia, pointed out that “Civilizations only vary from each other, just as human beings are different only in terms of skin color and the language used. No civilization is superior to others.”

This momentous occurrence represents a seminal juncture that signals the metamorphosis of contemporary society from a dichotomous and adversarial framework to a global community predicated on the collective destiny of humankind, encompassing both the individual and the collective. This transition is characterized by a departure from a confrontational ideology that espouses exclusivity and intolerance to a culture that espouses inclusivity, reciprocity, and cultural parity.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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