

The Intersection of Racism and Xenophobia on the Rise Amid COVID-19 Pandemic: A Qualitative Study Investigating Experiences of Asian Chinese International Students in America

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Abstract

Racism and Xenophobia as entrenched social oppressions have been negatively impacting marginalized people in the United States. Due to the unforeseen COVID-19 interruptions since the very end of the year 2019, Asians and people with Asian descent have become paramount targets in the United States by facing greater intersectional racism, anti-Chinese sentiment, Xenophobia, and Sinophobia. By employing intersectionality as a theoretical framework and methodological approach, this article explores Asian Chinese International (ACI) students' lived and educational experiences as they relate to the intersection of race and nationality during the COVID-19 pandemic era from an intersectional lens. Suggestions and practices are presented in this qualitative study including depoliticizing race and nationality, employing the intersection of race and nationality as they relate to awareness, competence, and emancipation, and increasing the visibility of people with multiple marginalized identities. The study encourages national, state and local policymakers, and university administrators and educators to implement these practices for the purpose of eliminating intersectional inequalities for ACI students. Finally, a discussion on limitation of this study calls for a further exploration on experiences of people with multiple marginalized identities in both the current and post COVID-19 pandemic era.

Keywords: COVID-19, intersectionality, racism, xenophobia, Sinophobia

Introduction

During the very end of the year 2019, an unpredictable and undefined disease outbreak began in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China (Jernigan, 2020). This disease was named as 2019 novel coronavirus and abbreviated as COVID-19. Soon thereafter, COVID-19 had spread not only throughout China but also to thirty-one other countries and territories globally during the spring of 2020 (Jernigan, 2020; Gover, et al., 2020). As of September 2020, the total number of COVID-19 cases and deaths in the United States reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) by state and/or territory were approximately 6.8 million and 200,000 respectively (CDC, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has changed people's lifestyles globally, as they have become

accustomed to regulatory interventions such as social distancing, face covering requirements, quarantine, and stay-at-home orders. As people with lower socioeconomic status, refugees, immigrants, and indigenous populations, have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, discrimination targeted towards Asians or people with Asian descent increased dramatically (Jacobson, 2020; Roberto, et al., 2020).

One of the prominent global trends is the increase of discrimination and harassment, both verbally and physically, targeted against Asians or people with Asian descent. For instance, as reported in *Sky News*, Chinese students in Cardiff, United Kingdom experienced increased discrimination on the basis of race and nationality during the COVID-19 pandemic (Whitehead, 2020). Robin Zhang, who is a Chinese international postgraduate student in Cardiff, reported that four males overtly shouted at her and her friend—"Hey

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Coronavirus”—while walking to their lectures (Whitehead, 2020). This negative and hostile circumstance that discriminated against Chinese also spread to the Asian-British population as well. Specifically, during the pandemic, a young Chinese-British girl was targeted by a group of teenagers even though she was born in the United Kingdom (Whitehead, 2020). In addition to academic life on campus, Chinese International students as well as Asian-British students reported changing their work hours for the purpose of avoiding commuting during peak hours, so they could minimize encounters of hatred and discrimination. From these two instances, both Chinese International students and Asian-British students negatively experienced the intersection of race-, nationality- and coronavirus-related discrimination, abuse, harassment, and threats due to their visible Asian physical appearances and their Asianness. This type of anti-Chinese sentiment and discriminatory behavior has also been reported in other European countries, such as, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Russia, Ukraine, and Croatia (Roberto, 2020).

Similarly, in the continent of Australia, anti-Chinese racism and Xenophobia increased dramatically during the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to school banishment (Lewis, 2020), businesses marginalization (Rolfe, 2020), verbal harassments (Giles, 2020), and even physical attacks (Giles, 2020; Baker, 2020). In particular, Chinese International students, Chinese- Australians and Asian-Australians in general encountered race-based discriminatory slurs such as “yellow dogs”, as well as nationality-based vilification and antagonistic remarks such as, “Shame on China” (Giles, 2020). Even worse, these words—“Shame on China, go home yellow dogs” were painted visibly on the hoarding of a construction site in Melbourne (Giles, 2020). These aforementioned hatreds discriminating against Chinese also circulated in schools as well. For instance, at least one Chinese parent received a racist email during the COVID-19 outbreak, which said, “Our Kiwi kids don’t want to be in the same class with your disgusting virus spreaders” (Lewis, 2020).

As the COVID-19 pandemic spreads across the globe, it is also spreading anti-Chinese sentiments, anti-Chinese racism, anti-Asian racism, Xenophobia, and Sinophobia in the African continent. Although these outright hatreds are not new and have been perceived periodically across the continent, they have been strongly reinforced recently during the pandemic. In Kenya for instance, a man in the crowd insulted an Asian

couple by shouting at them “You are corona” and attempted to physically attack them (Solomon, 2020). Other aggressive behaviors on the basis of race and nationality have been seen in Ethiopia, Nigeria, and Cameroon as well (Roberto et al., 2020). All of these instances and complaints refer to a wide scope of discriminatory behaviors ranging from online bullying (Jalloh, 2020) to physical assaults in public (Solomon, 2020), affecting social life (Kyodo, 2020) and educational life, and impacting individuals both physically and psychologically (Solomon, 2020).

The Sinophobia in Asian countries, in comparison to Xenophobia across the globe, posed a greater threat to Chinese citizens or Asians of Chinese descent during the pandemic outbreak. Specifically, Walton (2020) indicated that racism and Xenophobia against Chinese targets in Indonesia largely remained the same, but took on a new form, because of the new Wuhan coronavirus. Some Indonesians conspiratorially spread anti-Chinese sentiments, anti-Chinese racism, Sinophobia, and Xenophobia along with the COVID-19 disease. In addition, Chinese citizens and Asians of Chinese heritage have been subject to intersectional harassment on the basis of race and nationality on social media, such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram in South Korea, Japan, and Indonesia (Fottrell, 2020; Walton, 2020, & Kasulis, 2020). Specifically, photos of “No Chinese allowed” signs on the window of restaurants and stores were posted and shared on Twitter in South Korea and Japan (Fottrell, 2020). Comments regarding avoiding locations where Chinese and Chinese Indonesians work and live were posted on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram in Indonesia. Ironically, these discriminations on the basis of race and nationality occurred not only across but also within races.

Although racism and Xenophobia are perceived periodically over the globe, unpredicted interruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak exacerbated social inequalities against Chinese and Chinese descent populations worldwide. After surveying the literature on Asian Chinese International (ACI) students’ experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic in the U.S., the outcome was apparent that relative studies were limited by the inadequate amount of research. Recent scholarly works present general and basic reports on how either racism or Xenophobia was manifested during the pandemic. The data of lived and educational experiences of ACI students during the pandemic has been overlooked due to the insufficient amount of research. With this said, it is

urgent to explore their experiences from an intersectional lens for the purpose of allowing additional scholarly work to make a contribution to the growing body of the existing literature. The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the intersection of race and nationality as they relate to ACI college students lived and educational experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States. Understanding their experiences is the first step of the study. The second step is what Chang and Culp (2002) identified as the “so what” step. As Chang and Culp (2002) delineated:

The first is to remember the ‘so what’ question. It’s one thing to say that race, gender, sexuality, class and nation operate symbiotically, cosynthetically, multidimensionally, or interconnectedly...the next step is to be able to prescribe or imagine points of intervention. (p. 490)

The purpose of the study is to raise the awareness of higher education administrators and educators to better understand complex issues involved with intersectionality and provide intersectional interventions to meet the particularity of the perspectives and needs of ACI college students, especially during the unpredicted COVID-19 interruptions and to consider how to create a more sustainable, democratic, and intersectional inclusionary educational environment in the post-COVID-19 pandemic era.

Operational Concepts

The following definition of concepts is to assist audiences to understand commonly used terms and concepts in the field of the research and avoiding any possibilities of being misunderstood due to their numerous and different interpretations in different fields and disciplines.

Racism

The United States society has an invisible but powerful pyramidal hierarchy, which situates people of color at the bottom, while empowers and privileges White/European Americans at the top. This pyramidal hierarchy on the basis of race, as a pervasive social force in the United States, is also socially named racism. What exactly is racism? Racism, similar to other social forces such as sexism and heterosexism, is a social form of oppression, which is discussed variously by many scholars. For instance, Grosfoguel (2016) defined it as a global hierarchy of superiority and inferiority, which politically, culturally and economically (re)produced inequalities by the patriarchal Western-centric colonial system. These racial based

inequalities ubiquitously exist at individual, cultural, and institutional levels (Hope et al., 2019; Neblett, 2019, Smith, 2016).

Specifically, the individual racism includes bullying, verbal and physical harassment, and discrimination. Racial minorities experience overt verbal and physical discrimination at worst and microaggressions at best. In addition to individual racism, racial minorities such as, Asians, Asian Americans, African Americans, Latino/x Americans, and Mexican Americans, were the target of the institutional racism as well. Institutional racism in the form of policies, consciously and subconsciously, intentionally and unintentionally, and covertly and overtly, affects racial minorities. For instance, with regard to education, second generation Asian immigrants were historically prohibited to attend San Francisco public schools during late 19th century according to a San Francisco Board of Education policy (Bu, 2020; Wollenberg & Nishida, 1994). Furthermore, during the same period, Asians, for example Chinese, became targets of educational and political exclusions (i.e., Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882) due to their racial identities (Lee et al., 2016). Even after one century, this institutionalized racism was still universal and ubiquitous. Some prestigious universities, including, Harvard University, Stanford University, University of California-Berkeley, and Princeton University were accused of racism due to their differential acceptance of Asian and Asian heritage students (Alvarez, 2009). Parallel to individual and institutional racism, Asians, for instance, experienced cultural racism implicitly and explicitly. One type of cultural racism is how society defines normalcy, values whiteness, and devalues others. Cultural racism can be found in how peers, parents, and teachers perceive “good” and “bad” students in American schools. For instance, Lee et al. (2017) and Lee (2005) indicated that traditional and Americanized Hmong youth distanced themselves with each other. Traditional Hmong students were warned to stay away from “bad” Hmong kids who were too Americanized, while the Americanized Hmong youths see Hmong students maintaining traditions as problematic in the United States. This within-group conflict was caused by two cultures. One was the home country culture of Hmong students, which was defined as a problematic culture in America; the other was the American culture, which was valued as cultural norms and promoted the dominance of whiteness over other races. These aforementioned dominant beliefs and values enhanced the white dominance and (re)produce and fuel racism. In turn, the racism reinforced the dominant beliefs and values, which

empowered whiteness but disempowered other races.

Xenophobia

In addition to racism, Xenophobia is another social force to be addressed. As Lee (2021) indicated that the ideology of Xenophobia was closely associated with terms *strangers*, *foreigners*, *fear*, and *hatred*. Oksana (2009) depicted Xenophobia as "...distrust, unreasonable fear, or hatred of strangers, foreigners, or anything perceived as foreign" (p. 116). In particular, during late 19th century, Chinese immigrants were recruited as cheap laborers in plantations of Hawaii, the canneries of Alaska, and the mines of California (Alvarez, 2009). Although Chinese immigrants were recruited to the United States by American plantations, they were constantly reviewed as "protentional threats to national security" because they were seen as yellow peril who would want to take jobs away from Americans (Lee, 2005, p. 5; Lowe, 1996). In addition, the steadily increasing population of Chinese during the 1870s in San Francisco was regarded as racial, political, economic, and cultural threats to America and Western cultures (Le, 2020; Lee, 2020). This perception of a threat and fear led to the xenophobic discrimination towards Chinese and other Asians. As a result of the xenophobia, Asians and people with Asian heritage experienced employment discrimination (Король, 2019), the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act (Le, 2020), and school banishment. Even in contemporary society, not only Chinese but also people with Asian heritage have fallen victim to this entrenched xenophobia. For instance, in Yeo et al.'s (2019) recent study, one Asian American student had to make the following claim in his classes because he was unfairly grouped with other international students who were taken for occupying white students' jobs on campus:

Being of South Asian descent, people, especially in the college [name], assume I am an international student here to take jobs away from the United States. Every time, in almost all my classes that require group work, I need to let them know that in fact I am an American and I live here in the United States. (p. 51)

Apparently, this "take jobs away" anti-Chinese sentiment still ubiquitously exists in educational institutions to (re)produce inequalities of all kinds.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality, as a "buzzword", is open to be interpreted in numerous ways across diverse political projects and interdisciplinary fields. In this

research, Collins and Bilge's (2018) latest definition on intersectionality is depicted as follows:

Intersectionality is a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences. The events and conditions of social and political life and the self can seldom be understood as shaped by one factor. They are generally shaped by many factors in diverse and mutually influencing ways. When it comes to social inequality, people's lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race, or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other. Intersectionality as an analytical tool gives people better access to the complexity of the world and of themselves. (p.2)

According to this definition, intersectionality can be utilized as the most appropriate theoretical framework to shed light on the complexity of educational and lived experiences of ACI college students enduring at the intersection of race and nationality. Intersectionality has been extensively employed to articulate the intersecting oppression, complex relationships of power and oppression, and social locations which are formed by analytical identity categories such as race, gender, and the like (Battle & Ashley, 2008). It has been widely employed as a way to understand and analyse "the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experience" (Collins & Bilge, 2018, p. 25). There are three reasons for this extensive employment of intersectionality. First, it is because of the nature and attributes of analytical identity categories which intersect with one another. The second reason relates to social systems and power, which "interest, constitute, and reconstitute each other" (Battle & Ashley, 2008, p. 2). Third is the shared nature of the intersection of interlocking systems and intersecting analytical identity categories.

McCall's (2005) Three Categorical Complexity

McCall (2005) introduced three methodological approaches to explore the complexity of intersectionality in social life by utilizing analytical categories such as race and gender. These are *anti-categorical complexity*, *intra-categorical complexity*, and *inter-categorical complexity*.

The *anti-categorical complexity* criticizes the usage of analytical categories such as race, ethnicity, gender, social class, religion, able- and disable-bodied, and the like. Many scholars who embrace and employ this approach aim to emancipate the individuals from socialized

categories, because normalized and socialized categories lead to oppressions, exclusions, and inequalities. McCall (2005) argued, such categorization “[led] to demarcation, and demarcation to exclusion, and exclusion to inequality” (p. 1777). For instance, the category of sexuality was initially understood as heterosexuality and homosexuality. However, there are people who are self-identified as bisexual, queer, transgender, and questioning that do not neatly fit into either heterosexuality or homosexuality. Therefore, categorizing individuals into either of these two categories based on sexuality excludes bisexual, queer, transgender, and questioning individuals to the margin or even out of either community. Another example regarding gender categories was given by Fausto-Sterling (2008), who criticized the two-sex system and expanded it from two sexes (i.e., male and female) to five (i.e., male, female, merm, ferm, and herm), and five to non-discrete-categories. McCall (2005) supported Fausto-Sterling’s critique, which could be used as a way of “effectively challenging the singularity, separateness, and wholeness of a wide range of social categories” (p. 1778). In addition to gender and sexuality, the analytical category such as race/ethnicity is of fluidity. Lee’s (2009) research contributed to the division of racial groups to some extent. Lee uncovered the subcategories from the Asian American groups who distinguished themselves into Asian Americans, Asians, Korean Americans, and Asian new wavers. In Lee’s (1994) ethnographic research, Korean Americans separated themselves from both the wholeness of racial category (e.g., Asian American) and other subcategories (e.g., Chinese American). Therefore, the analytical categories such as race/ethnicity is indefinable. In short, the anti-categorical complexity aims to delegitimize and refuse analytical categories due to its indefiniteness, fluidity, and complexity.

The second approach is inter-categorical complexity, which analyses “the relationships of inequality among already constituted social groups...and to explicate those relationships” (McCall, 2005, p. 1785). The focus lies more on the multiple social groups within and across analytical categories. This study attempts to explore the intersection of race and nationality; if this study were to employ inter-categorical complexity to explore ACI college students lived and educational experiences by being analysed across (i.e., race and nationality) and within analytical categories (i.e., Chinese international students, Korean international students, Japanese international students), the study would be unmanageable,

incomprehensible, and complicated.

To improve comprehension and manageability, this study employs the third approach—*intra-categorical complexity*. Instead of centering the multiple dimensions across and within analytical categories, which makes the study more complex, less comprehensible, and less manageable, *intra-categorical complexity* focuses on the single dimension of each category. Specifically, this study limits the scope from the wide range of dimensions of a wide range of categories to one dimension of each category. One category could be Asian from the racial category and Chinese from nationality category. This is how the complexity in this study is managed. In addition, a significant reason why the *intra-categorical complexity* approach stood out of the aforementioned three approaches was because this approach focuses on a single group located at the intersection of multiple categories.

Research Design

This qualitative study employed intersectionality as a theoretical framework and methodological approach through a multi-case study for the purpose of capturing the complexity of lives of ACI students during the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to capture detailed, holistic, and comprehensive descriptions of ACI students’ experiences regarding race and nationality, one-on-one in-depth interviews were designed as the primary method for data generation. Due to COVID-19, this study conducted virtual instead of in-person interviews via Webex and Wechat. Each interview ranged from sixty minutes to one hour and a half. In interviews, participants were asked open-ended interview questions through a semi-structured format to collect narrative data. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed carefully and precisely in order to ensure validity and reliability.

Research Participants

This study recruited ten ACI students through both researcher-to-participant and snowball sampling methods. The demographic information is listed in Table 1 below. The inclusion criteria of the recruitment included 1) all research participants had been living in the United States August 2019 to August 2020, which covers the periods of pre- and during-COVID-19 pandemic outbreak; 2) participants must be at least 18 years old; and 3) participants must be Asian Chinese International students in the United States. The rationale for this purposeful sampling was to accurately reflect the perceptions of ACI students about their lived and educational experiences on campus during the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States.

Table 1. Demographic details of research participants

Demographic Categories	Frequency	Valid Percentage
Gender		
Female	5	50
Male	5	50
Age		
18-24	8	80
25-34	2	20
35+	0	0
Ethnicity		
Asian	10	100
Other	0	0
Nationality		
Chinese	10	100
Other	0	0
Highest Level of Education		
High school degree or other	0	0
4-year college degree	8	80
Master's degree	2	20
Doctoral degree	0	0
Regions		
The Northeast	0	0
The Midwest	8	80
The South	0	0
The West	2	20

Trustworthiness

In order to interpret the data as accurately as possible and ensure the trustworthiness of analysis, triangulation needs to be carefully taken into consideration. This study employed Denzin and Lincoln's (2018) investigator triangulation, which employed different people to control or correct the subjective bias, in this study. For instance, member checking by asking participants from the research to review the themes, findings, and conclusions in order to verify the interpretations are accurate and unbiased. In addition to investigator triangulation, a second type of triangulation is introduced by Denzin and Lincoln (2018) called methodological triangulation. This requires reviewing the data several times, each time choosing a different methodological lens in order to analyze data. For instance, data was analyzed from both the intersectionality lens and the *intra-categorical approach* lens to ensure the findings were valid and reliable. Last but not least, data triangulation was implemented as well, as Denzin and Lincoln (2018) delineated "data triangulation refers to the combination of different data sources that are examined at different times, places, and persons" (p. 446). This study collected data at different times

with different individuals who are from different locations in the United States. During the data analysis process, several cases were examined independently as a way to employ data triangulation to ensure the trustworthiness of the study. Several themes were concluded based on the analysis, which are discussed in the following sections.

Intersectional Politicized Racism and Xenophobia

The manifestations of the intersection of racism and Xenophobia are less demographically based but more politicized. Across the United States, anti-Chinese racism and Sinophobia exist from entrenched racism and Xenophobia. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this worsened. ACI students became victims or scapegoats in this war of politicized racism and Xenophobia during the COVID-19 pandemic. One ACI third year doctoral student, named MeiMei¹, who studied at Good University narrated,

I was super mad when I saw the president Trump tweeted the "Chinese virus" on his tweeter. At the time, the virus has its official name like Coronavirus...he had the option to call it coronavirus instead of Chinese virus, but he chose not. He called it Chinese virus intentionally. And I realized that what he said in public was always having political purpose. I was like, he intensified the contradictions between the U.S. and China, didn't he? I felt like he did not handle well on this COVID-19 outbreak, so he was purposefully diverting Americans' attention, he just passed this domestic contradiction. I found that many Tweeter followers of Trump did actually advocate their president's racism and xenophobia behaviors. Later, I found out that there was such a phenomenon. If you diss China or scold China or something about China, this politician will get the goodwill of Americans. Anyway, he transferred domestic conflicts to China for the purpose of adding pressure on China, he is like that. I think it was like this... He said Chinese virus is because this thing can achieve political goals for him, so he said so. During the pandemic, he used this kind of things to inspire everyone. The Americans who was inspired had that kind of characteristic, that is, American heroism, sometimes especially radical American heroism.

Another ACI doctoral student—Lily—from Dream University shared her understanding regarding how the intersection of racism and Xenophobia were politicized.

I thought it was Trump's strategy to transfer domestic anxiety. I thought it was a politician's method. Well, I think...it might be my personal opinion... I think he himself did not care about where this actually virus came from. Maybe, maybe, I think Trump is a person with performance personality. What he said at the time was definitely to divert domestic anxiety, because the United States was too anxious at the time about the COVID-19 pandemic, so he must transfer this anxiety. Then I, I, I personally think that in fact, from the performance of Trump, I personally think that it is still a performance personality, that is, all his things are performing. Yes, it's just a rhetoric of politicians. It is hard to say whether he is a racist or not. I think Trump's racism and xenophobia are just a means of political performance.

The intersection of politicized racism and Xenophobia were widespread, negatively affecting ACI students in particular, making them psychologically exhausted. Participants from the study related that they were psychologically frightened due to the repeated "Chinese virus" and "Wuhan virus" announcements from President Trump and other politicians. This study suggests university administrators and policymakers, community leaders, and politicians replace the war lexicon such as "Chinese/China virus" with neutral words such as "Coronavirus" or "COVID-19". Because such expressions (e.g., Chinese/China virus, Wuhan virus), as a misleading, can (re)produce and reinforce negative social ideologies such as racism and Xenophobia, which can "create social distance among the groups" (Borrego & Johnson, 2011, pp. 9-10).

Participants in this study did not encounter overt physical attacks during the COVID-19 pandemic, however, the politicized anti-Chinese racism and Sinophobia could have a negative long term impact on the population of ACI students in particular and people with Asian descent in general via the wide usage of this politicized term—Chinese/China virus. Upon reviewing racism and Xenophobia in previous sections, the anti-Chinese movement, Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, and the "Chinese take jobs away" conspiracy of the nineteenth century still have entrenched and negative impacts on Asians and people with Asian heritage in the twenty-first century. Therefore, university administrators, policymakers, and educators need to be aware that race and nationality must be depoliticized, otherwise the sleeping racism and Xenophobia could be aroused in the future again.

The Intersectional Awareness, Competence, and Emancipation

As universities' demographics change constantly, university administrators, policymakers, and educators should practice intersectional awareness on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, and such. However, the argument exists that such cultural awareness is a superficial level of protecting an individual with multiple underrepresented identities from being multiply marginalized. The intersectional competence and emancipation of race, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, and the like should be highly utilized within educational institutions, communities, and society in order to ensure the elimination of intersectional exclusions. Specifically, since early 2020, wearing a mask in public is a nationwide regulation in China in response to the outbreak of COVID-19 for the purpose of protecting oneself and others. Whereas, wearing a mask in public has been banned by law since the 1950s in North Carolina as a way to regulate the Ku Klux Klan (Budryk, 2020). ACI students in North Carolina were exhausted psychologically by fighting for these cultural conflicts associated with their race and nationality between China and the United States. As Lily said,

Of course, I was worried. Every time I went out, I had an internal psychological fight on whether I should wear a mask or not. If I had to go out for grocery shopping, I wore a mask for the entire time. I don't care if they were it or not, like, I was like I stood firm for my cultural thing. At the very beginning, only our Chinese wore masks in public. Americans looked at us in strange, wired, unfriendly eyes. I was like, I just felt like I had a fearless of death for a just cause.

MeiMei also narrated,

At first, we wore face mask in public. We then realized that no one wore a mask except us. Later, we were acknowledged that wearing a mask in public in North Carolina was illegal. Like it was against the law. Then we dared not to wear a mask in public. We were joking like, among our Chinese international students, like if we got police because we wore a mask, then we just needed to pretend that we were sick or had health issues and pretended to cough. We were so passive. I was like saw us as weirdos. We learned very rich information regarding the disease from China and we knew how terrible it was. But Americans did not know cause they did not have this information from China. And we were like, we did not want to get sick here in the US cause we were foreigners. What if we got infection by this COVID-19 in the U.S.? my family

is not here; I cannot communicate with doctors in the hospital because of the language barriers. Even if I just got a cold, I felt like I would have a psychological meltdown.

These two research participants' narratives clearly demonstrate that it is important to practice cultural awareness. Cultural awareness on race and nationality should be intersectional instead of separable. However, practicing Asian racial awareness may ignore the different cultures among Asian groups associated with their country of origin. Similarly, merely highlighting the cultural awareness of sexual orientation may exclude LGBTQ people of color. Therefore, an intersectional cultural awareness on the basis of race, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, body ableness, language, religion, and the like should have high awareness in educational institutions, communities, and society in order to combat multiple inequalities.

Nevertheless, further actions such as intersectional cultural competence and intersectional cultural emancipation must be implemented to combat multiple inequalities. Specifically, giving equal racial competence to Asian with white, and nationality competence to Chinese with Americans can shorten distances between the privileged and the marginalized people. To this end, institutional policies should practice governing this social equity. For example, North Carolina voted to exempt citizens from the anti-mask law until August 1, 2020 after almost seventy years of anti-mask law enforcement. During that short time period of anti-mask law exemption, ACI students from the study reported that they felt much safer and less psychological exhaustion because of both protections—cultural awareness on Chinese mask wearing regulation in China and lawful exemption in North Carolina in the United States. Both protections brought the emancipation for ACI students because they could freely wear a mask in public without fear or psychological exhaustion. However, the anti-mask law exemption expired on August 1, 2020, which made mask-wearing illegal. This negatively affected marginalized people who were attempting to protect themselves, such as Asians and people of Asian heritage. Simply understanding different cultures does not guarantee social equalities. Incorporating both intersectional competence and emancipation on the basis of multiple marginalized identities through institutional, state, and national laws is an essential element to govern an intersectional inclusionary environment for our students with intersecting underserved identities.

Dynamic Relations of Privilege and Marginalization

Intersectional privileged identities (e.g., white, American, etc.) and intersectional marginalized identities (e.g., Asian, Chinese, etc.) are never stable but dynamic and situational. Leon, who is an ACI student studying at River University disclosed the experience of an American who immediately covered his mouth by using his shirt collar when he saw customers all wearing facial masks in a local grocery store, but he did not. This phenomenon was reversed before the mask-required regulation was enforced in local businesses at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Asians who were wearing facial masks were stigmatized, discriminated against, harassed, and bullied at the beginning of the pandemic outbreak. For instance, many discriminatory lexicons and rhetorical slurs have been employed against Asians and people with Asian descent. These biased phrases included "Kung-Flu" (Chan et al., 2020; Huang, 2020), "take your Kung-flu back to Wuhan" (Litam, 2020), and "the face of coronavirus" (Rafi, 2020). All aforementioned discriminatory lexicons were constructed and enhanced by America's entrenched White supremacy and American patriotism, which placed Asian Chinese at the bottom of the interlocking racial and nationality hierarchies.

The Xenophobic attitudes and racism against Asians in general and the Sinophobia and anti-Chinese sentiments in particular started to become less radical since the mask-required regulation has been enforced. Reversely, as Leon disclosed the experiences of one of her American friends who turned to blame Americans who did not wear facial masks in public as "radical patriotist", "white superiorist", and "selfish and arrogant Americans". This changing attitude illustrated that the increasing population of people who wear facial masks in public deconstructed oppressive hierarchies and restructured the power relations. In other words, increasing representations of minorities can deconstruct intersectional hierarchies that have been entrenched in the United States. With this being said, this study highly suggests universities, communities, and society increase representations of people with marginalized identities. Specifically, universities should increase the population of faculty and staff who are people with multiple marginalized identities such as Asian American women, African American LGBTQ, and so forth to expand the spectrum of diversity. Having proportional representations of people with multiple underserved identities in the university

employment system, students with intersecting identities will feel safer because they can more or less connect with these representations in one way or another.

Crowd Psychology and Culturelessness

“How do you understand anti-Chinese racism, Xenophobia, and Sinophobia?” I asked an ACI student Laurie who studied at Valley University. After a moment of silence, Laurie said to me,

I felt like it is kind of a crowd psychology. Like speaking to racism, sexism, or any type of -ism, people don't even know what it means actually. They are like, they do it because they see other people do. They are like they will be okay if they do what majority people do. But it would be problematic if they do what majority people don't do. Like I felt like regardless of the type of -ism, like racism, sexism, they need to be connected with the crowd psychology theory.

Answers like Laurie's, of which there were many participants, reported that many radical racists and patriots who performed the intersection of anti-Chinese sentiments, Xenophobia, and Sinophobia did not even understand their discriminatory behaviors but just presented a behavior of crowd psychology. This crowd psychology behavior and performance represented insidious forms of individual and societal sickness, which were due to the lack of individual responsibility and societal universality in this current social climate. This loss of individual responsibility and the entrenched universality had tremendous negative impact on people with Asian heritage in general and on Chinese students in particular. As Schild et al., (2020) showed, the usage of the discriminatory slur “Chink” increased substantially after Donald Trump publicly referred to COVID-19 as “Chinese/China virus” and “Wuhan virus”. The other manifestation of crowd psychology behavior and performance is perpetrators' culturelessness. For instance, many offenders regarded Chinese people wearing facial masks in public as abnormal and virus carriers because of the culturalessness of other cultures. As Wang, an ACI student who studied at Green University, said to me,

It's like, in China, we wear masks is mainly for the purpose of protecting self. Like, if the air quality is not good, or I am allergic to some odor, so we wear masks just for protecting ourselves. And wearing masks sometimes is kind of like for fashion, like many guys prefer to wear black facial masks just for being looking handsome and cool. But you know, in the U.S., if you wear a mask in public, it probably means that you are sick. Or like in many states in the U.S., wearing

masks is also linked with some racism, or things like that. But they don't care, they see you wear a mask, then you must be a virus carrier!

These two narratives may be helpful to promote an intersectional inclusionary environment for ACI students. One scenario is developed for better understanding. For instance, you may hear someone say, “Chinese/China virus”, “Wuhan virus”, or other COVID-19 related racial and Xenophobic/Sinophobic slurs in a conversation among friends, family members, or colleagues. It is extremely important, as a responsible citizen, to terminate the spread of denigration without following the crowd psychology behavior. Because this crowd psychology, to a large extent, will perpetuate, reinforce, and (re)produce racism and Xenophobia in general and anti-Chinese racism and Sinophobia in particular. In addition, people need to be open-minded and able to accept the difference. Universities, communities, and society need to encourage people to create a “*tabula rasa*” (Robinson, 2015) in their mind to be able to consciously learn about new cultures (e.g., racial culture, nationality culture, gender culture, etc.), to endorse different cultures in an intersectional way, and to constantly disrupt the crowd psychology behaviors that may perpetuate intersectional inequalities.

Conclusion and Implications

Asians and people with Asian heritage became paramount targets in the United States during the COVID-19 pandemic era and faced greater and intersectional racism, anti-Chinese sentiments, Xenophobia, and Sinophobia. ACI students have been tremendously impacted by these hatreds, which may have a longstanding negative influence on Asian populations in the United States and the world. This enduring COVID-19 related discrimination on the basis of race and nationality may (re)produce and reinforce racism, Xenophobia, and Sinophobia. Therefore, it is extremely important to provide suggestions and interventions for educational institutions, communities, and society in general to eliminate intersecting inequalities and eventually eradicate the interlocking oppressive systems. University administrators, national, state and local policymakers, and educators are highly encouraged to practice intersectional racial and nationality awareness, competence, and emancipation to authentically protect students with multiple marginalized identities. In addition, increasing the

visibility of minority of race, gender, sexuality, and the like can deconstruct power relations in the United States in order to create an intersectional inclusionary environment. Last but not least, local, state, and national leaders need to work together to stop the proliferation of intersectional exclusions by depoliticizing race, gender, sexuality, nationality, and so forth.

Limitations and Future Areas of Study

COVID-19, as an unforeseen interruption, has been changing the lifestyles of human beings globally and this impact is still ongoing. This study contextualized ACI students' experiences in the United States during the pandemic through an intersectionality lens by giving emphasis on race and nationality. Although this study presented suggestions to educational institutions, communities, and society in responding to COVID-19 impacts on ACI students in America, the suggestions are somewhat limited to students with other intersecting underserved identities such as gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, religion, able-bodiedness, and the like. Examples include Asian American female sexual minority students, African American LGBTQ students living in poverty, and women of color with disabilities. The unique needs of these aforementioned people who occupy multiple marginalized identities remain largely unknown. Therefore, further studies on the manifestation of intersectional inequalities related to the COVID-19 pandemic which may discriminate against people with multiple underrepresented identities need to be explored. Finally, a comparison study regarding the differences and similarities of intersectional inequalities between the United States and other countries is highly suggested, as it may help uncover issues and inequalities that exist in both the United States and the rest of the world but not explicitly discussed in the United States context.

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