

Analysis of the Causes of Discrimination against Chinese During the Pandemic in the United States

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ABSTRACT

During the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a sharp increase in discrimination against Chinese in the United States. Chinese were subjected to verbal or violent discrimination from the media, the public, policies and other aspects. In this study, the author mainly adopted interviews with 12 Chinese in the United States aged 20-35 to understand their discrimination experience in the United States during the pandemic and analyzed the reasons of the sharp increase in discrimination against Chinese during the pandemic. The interview results showed that more than half of the respondents had experienced varying degrees of discrimination during the pandemic. Only two respondents had not experienced discrimination at all, and some of them had changed their attitudes towards the United States. In terms of cause analysis, the misunderstanding and prejudice between Chinese and American groups peaked during the pandemic. The main reason is that the media and the governmental administration incited racial opposition by mastering public opinion and misled the masses to blame China for the pandemic. But the serious epidemic in the United States, public anger caused by high unemployment, tense Sino-US relations and weak anti-discrimination activities by Chinese cannot be ignored. The United States urgently needs to find the root causes of hate crimes against Asians, promote dialogue and understanding between the two minority groups, so as to avoid increasingly serious discrimination against Chinese.

Keywords: *The COVID-19 Pandemic; Discrimination; the United States; Ethnic Chinese; Anti-discrimination*

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the outbreak of COVID-19 in the United States in March 2020, racism and xenophobia in United States have been rising rapidly due to various factors, as multiple groups in the United States have joined in racial discrimination and xenophobia in diversified forms. As a result, Chinese Americans, and even Asians, are subjected to various degrees of racial discrimination, such as verbal attacks, violent attacks and travel bans, and other stigmatizing and unfair treatment.

Based on interviews with 12 Chinese Americans, this paper aims to understand the discrimination suffered by Chinese in the US during the COVID-19 pandemic, and to analyze the reasons for the sharp rise of discrimination against Chinese Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic, so as to reduce the recurrence of similar incidents.

2. THE MAIN FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION

2.1. Media discrimination

Media discrimination mainly refers to the fact that Western media associated the naming of the virus with specific countries or regions during the pandemic period, and discriminatory words such as "Chinese virus", "Wuhan virus" and "the Real Sick Man of Asia" in social media and even news. For example, on February 3, 2020, the Wall Street Journal published an article titled "China Is the Real Sick Man of Asia", a commentary by Wall Street Journal columnist Walter Mead on the impact during the COVID-19 pandemic. Famous media, such as New York Times and New York Post, have also linked the two by putting together the photos of Asian people wearing masks with the reports of COVID-19 [1]. According to the media reports, the author set relevant questions in the second question.

2.2. Discrimination in public

Public discrimination includes verbal harassment, violent incidents, excessive avoidance, etc., among which verbal harassment and personal abuse are the most common things encountered by Chinese Americans. According to the latest statistics released by Stop AAPI Hate, there were 6,603 hate crimes against Asian in the United States as of March 31, 2021. As many as 2808 such cases were reported in March 2021 alone, of which verbal harassment and personal attack accounted for 78% of reported incidents [2]. Excessive avoidance refers to that when approaching or seeing ethnic Chinese during the pandemic period, people deliberately keep a wide distance, or cast strange eyes and make defensive behavior, even isolate and give them cold treatment. This kind of discrimination is invisible, usually not reported by the media, so it is often ignored by people. But it is always relevant to the ethnic Chinese living in the local area. Furthermore, when the simple avoidance and verbal harassment are not timely attention soon turn into a bad nature of violence. The shooting in Atlanta, Georgia, has caused a stir in the global Chinese community. According to a report by American Overseas News, three massage parlors in the area were shot bloody on the night of March 16, 2021, and a total of eight people were killed, six of them Asian women. The shooting reflects the situation of the Asian community, which suffers prejudice and discrimination in the pandemic. It also exposes the vulnerability of Asian women in society. As Atlanta Mayor Burton said, "similar things are happening all over the country." The lead researcher, Russell Jeung, a professor of Asian American studies, said the data were "the tip of the iceberg" because only the worst cases are reported in the media. Therefore, the first question is about the type and place of discrimination in public places.

2.3. Discrimination in government policy

Policy discrimination entails different treatment and derogation from the rights of fixed ethnic groups, so that they are unable to obtain certain benefits or treatment [3]. The governmental administration issued a number of presidential orders with a strong political game during the outbreak, such as 2020.6.1 initiated by the White House website published "Proclamation on the Suspension of Entry as Nonimmigrants of Certain Students and Researchers from the People's Republic of China". The announcement said it would suspend and restrict the entry of foreign students, researchers and visiting scholars from China who hold Class F and Class J visas. These unfair policies against Chinese Americans further reveal the US government 's attitude towards China. The interview referred to the above unfair policies to design Question 3.

3. METHODOLOGY

In this research, qualitative research method was used because it can gather more specific information from sample of individuals. This paper interviewed 12 Chinese in the United States during the outbreak, all aged between 20 and 35, avoiding cross-discrimination against children and the elderly, ensuring the combination of school and social life to ensure the accuracy of the study. Six main questions were prepared for the respondents. According to the specific situation of the interviewees, seven respondents were also asked in-depth questions. Most interviewees answered all questions. Only two respondents said that there was no discrimination incident around them, so they only answered some questions. All the questions included in the interview are presented in table 1.

Table 1. The interview questions

Q1	Did you or anyone close to you experience discrimination in public during the pandemic?
Q2	Have anyone around you said or seen similar words like "Chinese virus" on social media?
Q3	Are there any policies that you feel are being treated unfairly?
Q4	How does this discrimination affect you?
Q5	What do you think causes the discrimination that Chinese people face in the United States?
Q6	Are there any demonstrations or rallies against Chinese discrimination?

4. INTERVIEW RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

4.1. The summary of the discrimination experienced by the interviewee

Among the 12 Chinese Americans interviewed, seven experienced serious discrimination events, with New York and Georgia accounting for more cases. A

24-year-old woman studying at the University of California, Los Angeles, said she was cold-eyed and discussed by several white people next to her in the local milk tea shop around April 2020. Even if she stared back angrily, they continued to look at her with disdain. In Buffalo, a 30-year-old male also revealed that on his way home in March 2021, while waiting for the green light, a car with a few high school students of blacks and whites, said aloud "look at the Chinese", and kept giving him the middle finger. Although he across

the road when the green light, the car continued to drive closely parallel to his car, and continued to insult him. And he attended many local Chinese conferences in Buffalo, where 80% of Chinese friends shared their injustice experienced during the pandemic. A 23-year-old student from Georgia was taking a taxi to Miami in February 2020. Upon arrival, a white driver recognized them as Chinese through a window gap and refused to pick them up. A man in LA said that because of the frequent reports of violence against Chinese Americans in New York and the warning emails sent by the school, he felt very scared and his parents were also worried about him. An Atlanta woman said her friend received dozens of anonymous text messages filled with abuse when she moved in early 2021.

Three respondents said during outbreaks have been working at home, so no similar incidents were encountered, but when shopping in large supermarkets like Walmart, where crowds are relatively crowded, many people kept away from them, and gave them strange looks. "Not because wearing masks", a Georgia student said, "clearly a lot of Americans in the supermarket are also wearing masks, but when they see us, they think we are sick people." However, she recounted that after communicating with some members of the school's association that wearing masks was only for the purpose of prevention, at least they were respected and recognized in the school.

Only two interviewees said that they did not find any discrimination around them. Their situation was similar. They were both students in remote towns. The number of migrant populations was small. Since the outbreak began in March, they have been in school for most of the time, and there were fewer cases of pandemic in the town. One interviewee said that there were many Christians in her place, often advocating friendly treatment and peace and love.

Of the 12 respondents, four said they were unfairly treated when looking for work or internships in the United States, with the exception of seven respondents with green cards who said they were not discriminated against at work. They think small and medium-sized companies in the United States preferred American citizens because of the impact of Trump's 'America First' policy. Another woman who worked in Silicon Valley did not suffer discrimination, but she said that local companies were more willing to recruit whites or Indians, so when Chinese people applied, they would be subject to more stringent inspection.

In addition, a male interviewee in LA said that due to the promulgation of the U. S. law prohibiting the entry of Chinese students and researchers, his brother had just received a U. S. visa until June 2021. For a whole year, he was unable to enter school and had to wait for policy changes while working at home, which greatly affected his study and life.

4.2. The impact of discrimination on Chinese in the U.S.

Four respondents said they had changed their plans for future development for reasons of discrimination, of which two women who had experienced serious discrimination events chose to return to China. One Chinese student said that they had changed their idea of staying in the United States because they felt unwelcome attitudes and cold eyes during the pandemic and the bad pandemic situation in the United States. Two respondents who did not experience discrimination said that although they did not experience discrimination events, their parents were very worried about the discrimination in the United States mentioned in the report, and because of the exclusion of Chinese students from the United States' visa policy, they finally chose to change the location of master's study in the United Kingdom and Hong Kong respectively.

The other eight interviewees all expressed their worries about the future, but their basic life was not greatly affected. The above indicates that discrimination in the United States will affect Chinese people's views and decisions on the United States to a certain extent, and has seriously affected the study and life of some Chinese people. The above indicates that discrimination in the United States will affect Chinese people's views on the United States and their decision whether to stay in the United States to a certain extent, and has seriously affected the study and life of some Chinese people.

4.3. Analysis of the causes of the more serious discrimination

According to the French "European Times" report, as of June 9, 2021, 23: 00 Paris time, 5178 new cases were diagnosed in the United States, 34248044 confirmed cases, 613299 deaths, ranking first in the world. The pandemic is disappointing for all as the world's strongest economic and technological power and leading healthcare country. Almost all respondents agreed that the reason for the severity of the outbreak was that the United States was too late to prevent the disease. A Georgia interviewee revealed that they did not begin to suspend classes and maintain social distance until March 2020 there had been cases in their own town. The serious pandemic led to high unemployment rate. According to the data released by the United States Department of Labor on May 28, 2020, the cumulative number of first applications for unemployment benefits in the United States reached 40.8 million from March 15 to May 23[4]. The sharp increase in the number of unemployed people has exacerbated the social tension caused by the new corona pneumonia pandemic. One interviewee in California mentioned that people around him panicked at the daily news of the rising death toll. The severe COVID-19

pandemic has left American citizens facing death threats and job losses. Such a "double tragedy" has turned the United States into an emotional kindling box. The growing anger of the public has turned the relatively disadvantaged Chinese people into a vent for negative emotions.

4.3.1. Incitement by mass media

In the era of omnimedia, in the face of the sudden rapid spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, the network has quickly become the most important place for people to obtain pandemic information, participate in pandemic discussions and even vent bad emotions. The biggest reason for the massive racial discrimination against Chinese is the misconception that China is spreading the virus. But this information is rendered by media reports to make everything more uncontrollable. American personality psychologist Albert thinks, "Rumor = (event) importance × (event) fuzziness." The serious consequences of COVID-19 have left everyone desperately trying to keep up to date with the outbreak through all kinds of online media [5]. The interviewees generally believed that the media had great guidance and influence during COVID-19. The news content of various false information, political tendencies and conspiracy theories spread rapidly through online channels. All kinds of false information, political tendencies and conspiracy theory news content spread rapidly through the network channel, which greatly amplify the public anxiety and mislead the masses. Two respondents said that even some people in the United States still believe that COVID-19 does not exist and is a fictional plot.

4.3.2. The governmental administration's attitude

What is more, it is the first time in American history that Trump, as President of the United States, personally presented conspiracy theory. On March 16, 2020, President Trump published a paper in Twitter calling COVID-19 "China virus". American Secretary of State Mike Pompeo even repeatedly claimed that the new corona pneumonia virus was from the laboratory in Wuhan, China [3]. In the opinion of the Chinese, the xenophobic views publicly expressed by politicians and public figures represented by the United States President and Secretary of State are inciting racial attacks, which not only cause secondary psychological harm to the Chinese, but also further lead to the tendency of discrimination against Chinese. More than 80 per cent of respondents said the massive racial discrimination was linked to the personal presence of the US president to guide public opinion and incite racial opposition. American psychologist William James thinks, "People in crisis are usually in a state of psychological or emotional imbalance, and the original coping

mechanisms and methods to solve problems cannot meet their needs [5]."

Also, during the COVID-19 pandemic, just at the time of the United States elections, in order to avoid being criticized by the Democrats and the public opinion for poor pandemic prevention, he re-elected Trump campaign spared no effort to find various excuses to blame China for the spread of the new corona pneumonia pandemic, bringing diversion to some right-wing extremists to divert people 's attention to Trump 's own problems. As an electoral tactic, Trump has also linked Democratic candidate Biden to China and attacked him for "being too weak in China" [6]. Moreover, as the importance of online political mobilization has gradually increased in the elections, the 2008 general elections have proved that 'online labels ' are more persuasive than lengthy arguments, and the 2016 general elections have proved that controversial voices are more likely to attract attention than rational voices. During the sensitive outbreak, the stigma and smear against China, is just the combination of label communication and controversial speech, which is more likely to become a hot spot in American social media [7].

4.3.3. China-US relations

The information war and trade war during the pandemic made Sino-U.S. relation increasingly tense. The U.S. Senate Foreign Affairs Committee passed the Strategic Competition Act of 2021 with high votes on April 21, 2021, and the Endless Frontier Act passed by the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation on May 12, both expressing an attitude of full competition with China. For example, anyone participating in the Chinese government's talent program is prohibited from applying for funding projects from the US government, and institutions that receive federal government funding are required to prohibit anyone participating in the Chinese government's talent program from using research funds.

According to the realistic group conflict theory, the root of prejudice and discrimination lies in the conflict of interest between groups, and the interest relationship between groups determines the attitudes and behaviors of group members [8]. According to a poll in the United States, since January 2020, the proportion of American respondents who believe that China is an "enemy" has increased by 11 % to nearly one third, while the proportion of American respondents who believe that China is an ally or friend is only 23 %, down by 9 % [6]. Obviously, when American media and government deliberately set up a competitive attitude towards China, most Americans will change their attitude towards China in the face of continuous information bombing and presidential statements.

4.3.4. Inactive anti-discrimination activities

In the interview, eight respondents said they were disappointed with anti-discrimination activities by Chinese people, and three said that anti-discrimination activities were not even organized locally at all. In contrast to the spectacular anti-black discriminatory activities following the George Floyd incident during the pandemic and the government's attention, according to the respondents, it was not until March 2021 Atlanta shooting that there were "large-scale" public figures condemning, local solidarity, candlelight gatherings and other anti-discrimination activities. Although there have been many relevant reports on discrimination against Chinese since 2020.

This is related to the character and consciousness of Chinese people. Chinese culture has been advocating the supremacy of collective interests and advocating harmony. Most Chinese people have inexplicable fear of guns and hope to rely on government forces to protect themselves. Compared with the famous black people's rights movement led by Martin Luther King in the 1950s and 1960s, the anti-discrimination movement of Chinese is always smaller and less. Despite this growing discrimination against Asians, The U.S. Senate passed a bipartisan COVID-19 hate crimes bill on May 20, 2021, responding to attacks on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. However, ethnic Chinese should understand that racial discrimination cannot be easily eliminated by only one bill, and they should be braver to fight for their rights and respect.

5. CONCLUSION

More than half of the respondents were subjected to varying degrees of discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic, which also led to physical and mental injuries and affected their attitudes towards the United States. However, from the experience of two interviewees who have not experienced discrimination, the promotion of friendly ideas and communication between the two sides have a positive effect on the elimination of discrimination. The respondents generally agreed that the incitement and misleading of the media and the government in public opinion were the main reasons. Some respondents were disappointed and dissatisfied with the pandemic prevention policy in the United States and the weak anti-discrimination activities of the Chinese. Therefore, the sharp increase in discrimination against China during the pandemic period is not only related to the United States itself, but the personality weakness of the Chinese themselves is a catalyst for the intensified discrimination. This paper only discusses the causes of intensified Chinese discrimination during the pandemic, but Chinese discrimination has existed in the United States for a long time. In the future, it can be further explored according to the causes of Chinese

discrimination in the United States for nearly half a century.

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