

## **Year of the Bull? Global Bullying of the Asian Diaspora as Repercussions to the Covid-19 Pandemic**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The Covid-19 global has exposed another pandemic, that of racism. As a result, Chinese citizens throughout the global community have faced bullying and malice. Bullying is a global problem; in this case the international community has concentrated its collective anxiety about Covid-19, which originated in Wuhan, China, to discriminate against those of Chinese descent. Therefore, this short essay reflects on some historical and psychological underpinnings, which inform the cruelty and blame ascribed to many Chinese people during this unprecedented public health emergency.*

**Keywords:** bullying, Covid-19, racism, xenophobia

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The Chinese culture has a rich tradition that includes 12 zodiac symbols designating each year with the luck of that animal totem (Shu-xian, 2014). For example, those from the year of the horse are straightforward, active, and energetic. In another illustration, people from the year of the rabbit are considered gentle, quiet, and patient. Within the contemporary context of

Covid-19, I respectfully borrow the spirit of the Chinese zodiac to designate 2020 the year of the Bull. Those bullies motivated by their fear and privilege disseminate racism, xenophobia, and impatience into a society already traumatized by the worst health crisis in over a century. With the pandemic, 2020 has been an unlucky year for the planet with soaring death rates to over 500,000 deaths at the time of this writing and subsequent economic fragility complicating the recovery.

## **COVID-19 AND XENOPHOBIA**

Those of the Chinese diaspora have already faced historical and discriminatory animus in the United States. With the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo that ended the Mexican-American War, the United States annexed much of Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Nevada, Utah, and California (Takaki, 1993). The American rush to the west also yielded the Chinese mass migration to their east when American developers recruited cheap Chinese labor to build the intercontinental railroad.

In their quest to escape the violence of the Delta lands and other peasant rebellions, over 325,000 Chinese immigrated to California. The Chinese who served as miners and railroad workers were major contributors to the burgeoning American infrastructure in the west. Yet when the railroad was complete, the Chinese remained in the states and were relegated to low paying work such as cigar making, farming, and laundry service (Takaki, 1993).

With the traditional struggle for labor that occurred in the east with Blacks in sharecropping, industry, and continuing racist disharmony, the Chinese in the west were also viewed as a threat to whites who did not want to compete with the cheaper wages accepted by Chinese laborers. Similar to other minority groups competing with whites for a living wage, the Chinese were vilified with a host of racist slurs and stereotypes that focused on their physical differences in their eyes, lips, and skin color (Takaki, 1993).

The aforementioned behaviors align with Allport's (1954) discussion on prejudice. Humans tend to gravitate toward those they find more familiar, within family parameters, regional parameters, language parameters, and racial parameters. Fear of those who are different, hence xenophobia (West, 1993), drives humans to engage denunciation behaviors such as antilocution, avoidance, discrimination, physical attack, and extermination (Allport, 1954, p. 49).

Similar to other minority groups in the United States who are plagued with such discriminatory historical and psychological underpinnings that

inform contemporary society, the Chinese as well must cope with demeaning treatment rooted in a century and a half of prejudice. With the global pandemic, which originated in Wuhan, China, the Chinese, along with Japanese and Koreans (who are often incorrectly lumped in with the Chinese) have encountered amplified bias, discrimination, and bullying.

For example, CBS News correspondent, Weijia Jiang noted on March 17, 2020, that the White House staff had referred to the Covid-19 virus as the “Kung-flu.” When Kelley Ann Conway, White House counselor was questioned about the racial slur, she shifted blame, stating that the use of the slur was hypothetical and a falsehood (Worthington, 2020). Nonetheless, in May 2020, Diaz (2020) reported that President Trump abruptly insulted Weijia Jiang who asked Trump to speak about Americans losing their lives daily to the pandemic. Trump’s hostile response on live television was “Don’t ask me, ask China.” He further declared that Jiang’s question was ‘nasty,’ then abruptly exited the press conference (Diaz, 2020).

While it might be easy to highlight the White House personnel for unrelenting utterances insulting minorities and women, Washington, D.C. has not cornered the market on heinous behavior. Some Americans have developed a petition, which surfaced on change.org to officially rename Covid-19 as the ‘Kung-flu.’ As bullying is a global issue (Hollis, 2017), the Human Rights Watch has reported that various groups in Italy, Spain, Greece, France, and the United Kingdom have also propagated xenophobia and white supremacist rhetoric deprecating the Chinese. Further, tormenting and bullying of the Chinese also have been reported in Africa, Brazil, and Australia. Additionally, the Chinese have faced increased discrimination in Japan, Indonesia, and South Korea. To track the racist pandemic that reestablished itself along with the Covid-19 pandemic, the Chinese for Affirmative Action Group reported that its Stop AAPI Hate Campaign had garnered comments from over 1700 Asian Americans from 45 states and Washington, D.C. who were subjected to Covid-19 discriminatory events (Choi, 2020).

## CONCLUSIONS

The year of the Bull should remind global citizens that interconnectivity between cultures and economies serves an international coalition of citizens who contribute to the health, prosperity, or demise of humanity. Covid-19 and its devastating wave of illness have further highlighted human foibles to either rally together or succumb to ancillary bigotry. Despite that Covid-19 will leave a global devastation in its wake, even after a vaccine stifles the

virus, the global community must still address the indelible xenophobia, racism, and bullying which infiltrates all cultures. With or without global and executive leadership, the task remains to inoculate the populace against another year of the Bull.

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## Bio

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