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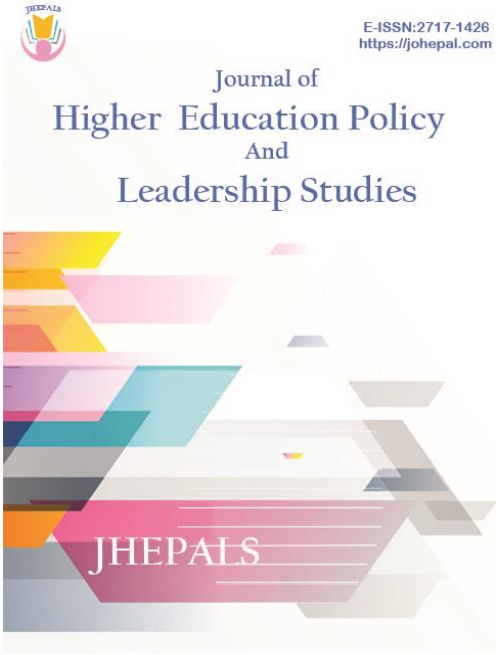


# Applying an AsianCrit Lens on Chinese International Students: History, Intersections, and Asianization During COVID-19

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# Applying an AsianCrit Lens on Chinese International Students: History, Intersections, and Asianization During COVID-19

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## Abstract

This theoretical paper explores how Chinese international students (CISs) in the US are situated through an AsianCrit lens during the COVID-19 pandemic. Stemming from Critical Race Theory, AsianCrit addresses the varying historical underpinnings of racism against Asian American communities, which the authors would like to expand into Chinese sojourner populations. Anti-Chinese sentiment is evident in US history through the prohibition of Chinese immigration and violation of civil rights dating back to well over a century. The framework seeks to challenge normative research on CISs that is largely understood through experiences in international education or mental health services. Key areas of AsianCrit: Asianization, intersectionality, transnationalism, storytelling, and social justice are addressed with both contributions and challenges of negotiating AsianCrit for CISs. Reflective recommendations in student support, organizing, and institutional policies are provided to empower student voices and take action towards those continuing to perpetuate racist practices. This paper is written in the hope of contributing to the dissemination of current CIS racialized experiences rooted in historical context.

**Keywords:** AsianCrit; Chinese International Students; COVID; Critical Race Theory; Intersectionality; Racism; Student Support

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## Introduction

Beginning with the genocide of indigenous peoples, slavery, followed by mass lynching, segregation of Blacks, exclusion & massacres of Chinese, and incarceration of Japanese Americans, these dark periods highlight the continued suffering and discrimination of minoritized groups in the US since its inception (Churchill, 1997; Pfaelzer, 2007; Saito, 2020). Current prohibition of discussions on the topic of historical racism in K-16 settings across a half dozen state government systems in the US (with over a dozen states in progress of banning critical race theory at the time of this writing), attests to the cyclical role of oppression prevalent in society (O'Kane, 2021). People choosing to attach COVID-19 to racist labels demonstrate the repeated history of epidemic-nation blame that has infected the nation (An, 2021; Mason, 2015). US-China relations can be partially blamed for the rise of anti-Chinese, anti-Asian sentiment in 2020-2022, however it is deeply connected to a longstanding history of colonial and oppressive mentality that has been normalized in today's society.

An AsianCrit lens can assist in critically understanding intersectionality and racialization of Chinese international students (CISs) in the United States. While the work is largely complex, the framework seeks to challenge normative research on CISs that is largely understood through experiences in international education or mental health services (Zhu et al., 2019). Further, research on CISs through a critical lens is scarce. As China represents the largest sending country of international students in the world, and the US being the largest receiving country of CISs, institutions and larger society need to understand, face, and expunge the legacy of racism and xenophobia (Open Doors, 2020).

The purpose of this conceptual paper is to provide: 1) a historical background of policies and anti-Chinese sentiment in the US, including Chinese international students, 2) the impact of COVID-19 on the Chinese international student population, 3) a description of the AsianCrit framework, 4) application of AsianCrit on Chinese international students during COVID, and 5) practical considerations in higher education contexts.

## Literature Review

### Historical Policies of Anti-Chinese Sentiment in the United States

Early mass immigration from East Asia into the US began from the Guangdong Province in China during the 1840's, at the brink of California's Gold Rush (Cassel, 2002; Paik et al., 2014; Takaki, 1998). The flood of Chinese miners in the mid 1800s was immediately noticed by the governor of California, who, in 1852 tried to place a restriction against their entry in the US. This was the beginning of several attempts to control and limit the Chinese population. Anti-Chinese sentiments soared during the 1850s as California residents felt threatened by the presence of Chinese miners. Chinese immigrants faced both policy and discriminatory acts against them, which often led to violence. The peak of violence against the Chinese miners occurred in the mid to late 1850s where mobs of angry White miners attacked hundreds of Chinese residing in mining camps (Pfaelzer, 2007). The court ruling of People vs. Hall in 1854 and the amended law in 1863 included the prevention of "Mongolian" including Chinese witnesses in court, intended to serve as a direct government policy issued against Chinese from responding to such attacks (Chin, 2013). Chinese immigrants continued to face several cases of violence which included a massacre in Los Angeles, killing 22 Chinese in 1871 as well

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as 28 killings of Chinese in Rock Springs, Wyoming in 1885 (Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, 2008). By 1882, the Chinese Exclusion Act was established which barred the entrance to all Chinese and extended an additional 10 years through the Geary Act and an indefinite extension in 1902. Although the Chinese immigrants lived in ethnic enclaves, they were largely a bachelor society which contained further growth of the population (Paik et al., 2014; Zhou & Gatewood, 2007). While some of the Chinese immigrants returned home temporarily during this period, another act targeting these laborers passed in 1888 which prevented them from re-entering the US. By 1904, the Chinese Exclusion Act was made indefinite. It was not until 1943, when the Chinese Exclusion Act was overturned by the Magnuson Act which not only provided the current Chinese population eligibility for citizenship but also allowed immigration from China with a quota of 105 (Soennichsen, 2011).

Repealing the Chinese Exclusion Act led to other acts that positively impacted Chinese immigrants. Five acts followed prior to the Hart-Cellar Act of 1965: 1948 Displaced Persons Act, 1952 Walter-McCarran Act, 1953 Refugee Relief Act, 1957 Chinese Confession Program, and 1962 Presidential Directive. These acts indirectly supported and propelled East Asian immigration into the US, particularly for Chinese immigrants which opened the doors for family reunification, the professional job market, while students-turned-professionals were able to apply for permanent residence visas in the US under the provisions of the same act (Choy, 2009; Oh, 2005; Park & Park, 2005; Soennichsen, 2011). Around the same time, China's Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was taking place. It wasn't until after the death of Mao Zedong that the Chinese American population in the US continued to grow through the next four decades, from 384,000 in 1980 to over 2.5 million in 2018 (Echeverria-Estrada & Batalova, 2020; Zhou & Gatewood, 2007). Thus, becoming the second wave of Chinese immigration.

## Chinese International Students in the US

Yung Wing is the first known Chinese student to graduate from a US university (Yale) in 1854. His predecessor, Zeng Laishun entered the US four years earlier, but due to financial issues, was forced to return without completing his degree (Rhoads, 2005). Yung Wing and Zeng Laishun formed the Chinese Educational Mission, to develop a system for Chinese students educated in the US. It began with plans of sending 30 Chinese boys per year into the US educational system and came to a halt just four years after it started due to concerns of Americanization (Rhoads, 2005; Xi, 2015).

Both US and Chinese government policies impacted the influx of CISs. As the US abolished the national origins quota, giving headway to new immigrants, this also gave preference to highly skilled immigrants. In addition, the political climate and economic status in China further increased immigration (Jeong & You, 2008). Later legislation repealed anti-miscegenation laws and in education, headways such as the 1974 court case of Lau vs. Nichols– which allowed for language instruction support for Chinese students in San Francisco (Fong, 2008). Just over a decade later, President George Bush signed Executive Order 12711 which provided amnesty to Chinese nationals following the massacre at Tiananmen Square in 1989 to those residing in the US. For those eligible, the Chinese Student Protection Act in 1992 allowed Chinese students, visiting scholars, and other nationals to apply for permanent US resident status between 1993-1994 (Chinese Student

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Protection Act, 1992). These opportunities led to the continued increase of the CIS population in the US, alongside open-door policies in China.

### COVID-19's Impact on Chinese International Students in the US

Following the outbreak of COVID-19 in spring of 2020, social media outlets revealed the ways institutions normalized xenophobic behavior, causing anxiety with CISs (Chiu 2020). With initial avoidance of CISs and evolving into open hostility, CISs reported an increased level of fear of being harassed due to COVID-19 related attacks (Tavernise & Oppel, 2020). CISs experiencing anti-Chinese sentiment and estrangement are at an increased risk of triggering mental illness (Zhai & Du, 2020; McLeod, 2020; Xiong et al., 2020). CIS anxiety is partially due to the negative ways media and previous administration has shaped COVID-19 (Ma & Miller, 2021). The continuous exposure and repeated negative messages transmitted through media, along with cultural and linguistic restraints, are major sources for CIS anxiety and stress (Duan & Zhu, 2020; Song et al., 2021; Xiong et al., 2020). In the 2019-2020 academic year, the US received over 370,000 students from China marking it the number one country of origin for international students in the US (Open Doors, 2020). However, the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic impacted student mobility (Altbach & de Wits, 2020, as cited in Mok et al., 2020). An increasing number of students changed or canceled their study abroad plans due to the travel restrictions and campus closures world-wide (Mok et al., 2020). As a result, American colleges and universities witnessed a 15% decline in international student enrollment in fall of 2020 and a year later, a 4% increase in overall international student enrollment which included a 68% increase in newly enrolled, first-time international students. (Martel, 2021).

## Theoretical Construct

This paper applies an AsianCrit lens, stemming from tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT) which is rooted from a movement in the 1970s by legal scholars of color to combat racism in US society (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Iftikar & Museus, 2018). Asian critical theory began as an analysis of Asian American legal scholarship published during a period of rising anti-Asian sentiment in the 1990s (Chang, 1993). Years later, the development of an Asian critical theoretical framework was developed to understand the role of White supremacy in educational spaces (Iftikar & Museus, 2018). Understanding that racial groups experience racism in different ways, branches of CRT have widened to include, but are not limited to: AsianCrit, LatCrit, TribalCrit, QueerCrit (Han & Laughter, 2019). AsianCrit focuses on the experiences of Asian Americans that are rife with racism stemming from historically unjust systems of oppression. While AsianCrit is specific to Asian Americans, CISs currently do not neatly fit within this framework as they are entering without having the historical context that undergirds their racialization. That being said, the tenets to AsianCrit remain largely historical and include the following outlined definitions with adaptations applied to CISs:

- Asianization: racism within Asian American history is long standing with terms "yellow peril" "forever foreigner", "model minority", "bamboo ceiling", and more recently, terms associated with COVID-19, anti-Asian immigration, accusations of Chinese spies and the threat of China's economy (An, 2016; Han & Laughter, 2019;

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Pompeo, 2020). For CISs, it has led to stereotypes, microaggressions, and blatant racism on university campuses (Redden, 2019; Ruble & Zhang, 2013)

- Transnational/National Contexts: racism can be understood through national and transnational context of Asians in the US as well as historical underpinnings which include both perception and reception in the US (An, 2016; Han & Laughter, 2019). Migratory and sojourner populations' understanding of US history is not transferred in the same ways as settled or permanent populations. In the case of CISs, the current political and economic climate sets the tone for government policies and societal reception (Paik et al., 2014).

- Intersectionality: vulnerable populations inclusive of class, gender, ethnicity, national origin, and sexual orientation in addition to racism are endemic (Han & Laughter, 2019). For CISs, it stems beyond national origins and into self-identification and perceived identification by the host society (Saito, 2020). Further is their immigrant status as temporary & objectification.

- Storytelling: Asians in the US are underrepresented in multiple sectors of society and their voices are often unheard (An, 2016; Han & Laughter, 2019). CIS voices are limited, even within the scope of news reports of anti-Chinese attacks in higher education.

- Social Justice: AsianCrit serves to support social justice initiatives and Asian American voices to combat systems of oppression and racism (An, 2016; Han & Laughter, 2019). Challenges for CISs include spaces to voice concerns and navigating a new system in the US that automatically oppresses them.

Previous studies have applied critical race theory and the broader population of international students. However, a specific focus on AsianCrit with Asian international students is less explored. Applying this framework with Asian international populations in the US during an intense period of anti-Asian rhetoric may lead to different outcomes.

## Conceptual Research Design

One of the purposes of conceptual research design is to advance current theory through its application to construct new knowledge. Conceptual research methods differ from traditional research methods as the theoretical framework is the heart of the research process. Rather than collecting data, a conceptual paper can apply and analyze the components of the theoretical framework as a primary approach (Jaakola, 2020). One of the benefits of conceptual frameworks is explicitly connecting and applying a framework that is more tightly aligned in research for future application in empirical work (Jaakola, 2020; Leshem & Trafford, 2007).

## Researcher Positionality & Insights

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Author positionality and context in this space is essential to further understanding the lens being applied to the study. The concept of positionality entails reflexivity in which the inquirer engages in self-understanding about the biases, values, and lived experiences that he or she brings to a qualitative research study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, the following aspects of positionality should be delineated clearly and transparently.

The first to be considered is the researcher's previous experiences with the phenomenon being explored. Both authors are of Asian descent. One identifies as cisgender female, fourth generation Japanese American MotherScholar, who was raised in an upper, middle-class neighborhood and attended public schools in southern California throughout her elementary, middle, and high school experiences (Matias & Nishi, 2018). The author is a former credentialed K-12 classroom teacher and taught in California for 17 years. The last eight of those years, she served a large international middle school and high school student population from China. Relatedly, the author taught English to students in China intermittently over a period of four years. The author currently holds a full-time faculty position in teacher education, serves on the university's Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Council as a subcommittee chair, and has published works on Asian American history, identity, and education of disaggregate Asian populations. She also assumes leadership roles within educational research organizations and is actively involved in a non-profit focused on training educators for implementing K-12 Asian Pacific Islander Desi American (APIDA) curriculum in US schools.

As a parent of two multiracial children, I look towards their future and aim to support and uplift them, even during the darkest periods of these past few years during a pandemic that included political upheaval and racial turmoil. The first step as a parent was to rationalize with my children that we should not be fearful of going out in public. Their fear was not because of COVID-19 but the violent attacks targeting Asian females. They were acutely attune to the harsh reality of being witness to the worst side of human behavior. Less than a year prior to COVID, I was robbed in a grocery store parking lot. No one helped. No one stopped. When I filed a police report, I was told that Asian women are often targeted. Reflecting on this, I know that attacks on Asian women and experiences similar to mine are not unique. Our visibility and victimization has been completely dismissed and normalized.

The second author is a current international Ph.D. candidate in education at a university in southern California. He works as a research assistant in the education department and received an internal research grant to provide faculty with Racism, Diversity, and Inclusion training within higher education. He was born and received his primary, secondary, and bachelor's degree in China. He has been studying abroad for five years and has taken international trips to India and the United Arab Emirates. By immersing himself in a foreign environment, he has substantially benefited from being exposed to diverse cultures. Furthermore, growing up in a community where there are a variety of ethnic minorities makes him passionate about education. He particularly wishes to initiate academic and social advancement for people pursuing higher education by guiding them towards available educational resources and learning opportunities with the help of technology. By being exposed to diverse cultures, he has developed his abilities to respect and embrace different social as well as cultural norms. Such immersive experiences have also made him more culturally aware and sensitive to the diverse needs of all students.

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### *Applying an AsianCrit Lens on Chinese International Students*

As a Chinese international student, I have personally encountered several different forms of discrimination including people shunned my mom and myself in the grocery store and verbal harassment publicly condemning that I was not supposed to be in this country and should get away from him/her. These discriminatory behaviors, whether it be implicit or explicit, one thing they have in common is that they were all solely based on my ethnicity and appearance. I felt heartbroken when my mom was undergoing these unpleasant experiences as she came to visit her son. When my mom asked me about what that individual was saying, I had to tell her a white lie so that she would not be worried about me when she returns to her home country.

Both authors are passionate about teaching and cultivating students to critically reflect and engage in the learning process. By fostering a healing space where educators and students can support each other's personal and relational growth, we are taking steps towards sustainable praxis (Pour-Khorshid, 2018). This paper serves as a milestone for both authors to critically examine potential effects Covid-19 has on CISs experiences with racism by integrating an AsianCrit lens. As a result, this paper was written in the hope that people would enhance their awareness and understandings of the historical rootings of anti-Asian racism in relation to Covid-19 related incidents, and most significantly, attempting to guide individuals to combat anti-Asian racism through available resources and institutional support within higher education.

## AsianCrit and Chinese International Student Findings

Grounded in AsianCrit, the following sections attempt to apply the adapted tenets through CIS experiences in the US during COVID. Each section will address a particular tenet: Asianization, transnational/national contexts, intersectionality, storytelling, and social justice in order to center the discussion of White supremacy in US society (Iftikar & Museus, 2018). Asians in the US are not monolithic and understanding the varied experiences endured by CISs can shed light on disrupting and transforming previous models of CIS acculturation processes.

### Asianization in the Era of COVID-19

Pandemic racism is built upon feelings of panic perpetuated by xenophobic biases and bigotry, dividing educational and communal spaces (An et al., 2021). The end result is scapegoating and othering that targets foreigners, immigrants, and marginalized groups. The act of blaming a racially marginalized group for introducing and spreading disease is not new in the US (An, 2021). Infectious diseases have been historically associated with specific ethnic groups. The US has a rich history of racializing epidemics and discriminating against underrepresented groups, with immigrants in particular. For instance, during the SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) outbreak in 2003, individuals became fearful and suspicious of all Asians without considering the actual risk of transmitting SARS (An, 2021; Person et al., 2004). Being labeled and accused of contracting or transmitting a disease such as SARS spawns fear and anxiety, resulting in Chinese individuals being stigmatized in society. A repeated but more severe reaction came with the direct linkage of COVID-19 and China. Following the spread of COVID-19, a similar but more intensified response occurred: individual acts of microaggression(s) in the workplace and schools, racial discrimination at

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places of service, and targeted acts of violence (Carnahan, 2020; Borja et al., 2020; McLeod, 2020). US leadership reinforcing the epidemic-nation blame in the media reinforced Sinophobic behavior (Litam, 2020). This resulted in an increase of reports of racial discrimination and violence against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs). More than 30% of Americans have witnessed someone blaming Asians for the COVID-19 pandemic, whereas 60% of Asian Americans said they have seen the same behavior (Ellerbeck, 2020). Chinese account for the majority of reported hate incidents between spring of 2020 to fall of 2021, with over 42% out of a total of 10,370 incidents of anti-Asian hate (Yellow Horse et al., 2021).

## Transnational Contexts & (Mis)perceptions of Asian America

Contributions to critical race theory from an Asian American lens addresses the anti-Asian sentiment that rose in the 1990s. "Violence stems from, and is causally related to, anti-Asian feelings that arise during times of economic hardship and the resurgence of nativism" (Chang, 1993). Despite subtle changes in the perception of Asian Americans in the US, particularly with the "model minority myth", discrimination and prejudice continues to persist in Asian American communities across the US (Fong, 2008). Similar accusations of Chinese as spies and committing treason during the Cold War bleeds into present government concerns of integrity and national security within the CIS population (United States Department of Justice, 2021; Fong, 2008; Yosso, 2005; Zhou & Gatewood, 2007).

Present day societal reception towards Chinese Americans and immigrants continues with prejudice. Historically, Chinese Americans faced a considerable amount of discrimination. Within the past four years, racist comments towards Chinese are found within social media through public comments and in larger corporations which add to pre-existing xenophobic ideation. Accusations and attacks made by universities and those at the government level about Chinese students studying in the US do not go unnoticed. The present generation is tech savvy and can not only voice their concerns, but publicly share the information to quickly gain support (Levin, 2018; Redden, 2019). Yet the economic and political issues impacting overseas relations continue to transfer into the US perception and reception of newly arrived immigrants in the US.

## Intersectionality: National Origin and Chinese Student Identity

Crenshaw (1991) described intersectional subordination being developed as "the consequence of the imposition of one burden that interacts with preexisting vulnerabilities to create yet another dimension of disempowerment" (p. 1249). For CISs, intersectional subordination is complex and involves: immigrant status, objectification, discrimination, and grappling with third space (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Witenstein & Saito, 2015).

International students are seen as temporary non-immigrants; they hold neither immigrant or citizenship status in the US. The onset of COVID revealed the Trump administration's perception of CISs with Proclamation 10043, which suspended and limited entry to Chinese students seeking graduate degrees. This move created a false narrative of Chinese students cast as potential spies and deeming them untrustworthy in the midst of the pandemic (Pompeo, 2020; Presidential Documents, 2020). At the same time this negatively heightened Chinese student visibility thus complicating the relationship between China and the US.

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With previous leadership and public health organizations instigating and perpetuating discriminatory behavior through associations between COVID-19 and Chinese in the US, the underlying racist beliefs of American people began to unfold (American Public Health Association, 2020; Dhanani & Franz, 2020; Ma & Zhan, 2020). Reception of CISs, along with all people of Asian descent in the US during the pandemic are fraught with heinous discriminatory acts of violence and racist verbal assaults against them, with many being unreported (Ma & Zhan, 2020). Prior to the pandemic, CISs also faced racist and discriminatory practices in higher education institutions linked to linguicism, xenophobia, Sinophobia, and stereotypes of cheating, being spies, and not assimilating quickly into American academics (Litam, 2020; Redden, 2019).

While in the US, CISs also face discrimination from their home country who do not want them to return and seeing CISs as a conduit for further spread of the disease. Some CISs encountered more than a double stigmatization of "virus carrier" from their home and host country (Feng, 2020; Wang, 2020). CISs were caught in a liminal space, referred to as third space-- of being neither fully accepted into home and host societies (Witenstein & Saito, 2015). News in China blamed CISs' actions of returning to their home country criticizing them, "祖国建设你不在，万里投毒你最快" (Zǔguó jiànshè nǐ bùzài, wànlǐ tóu dú nǐ zuì kuài) in Chinese, meaning you are not here (in China) for developing your home country yet the fastest to transmit COVID-19 (Feng, 2020; Wang, 2020). Such comments have furthered the contentious discussions of international students from overseas on social media platforms (Wang, 2020).

## Storytelling: Voices of Chinese International Students

A majority of CISs do not want to call attention to themselves and airing the negative experiences openly. Chinese culture can be an explanation for CISs' tendency to harbor their thoughts inwardly and digest the unpleasant feelings internally by communicating among themselves, without publicly challenging others' views (Ma & Zhan, 2020).

University professors have made national news for racialized comments on or about CISs. Examples include labeling COVID-19 as "Wuhan Flu" and "Chinese Communist Party Flu" in course syllabi and explicit race related comments connected to COVID-19 in online classes (Gajjar, 2020). Professors in these instances are temporarily removed or placed on academic leave. However, the impact it has on students and the climate of the institution is not reported. Tutarkov (2020) disregarded the racialized experiences of people of color in the United States, but he also demonstrated a lack of sufficient sense of ethical and societal responsibilities or the collaborative capabilities. Therefore, UCLA students collectively called for a removal of Eliezar Gafni by accusing him of openly demonstrating racism by utilizing the term "Wuhan virus" as an identifier for COVID-19 (Carnahan, 2020).

In 2020, countries world-wide have announced travel restrictions in studying abroad to alleviate the spread of COVID-19 (Zhai & Du, 2020). At the same time CISs are concerned with family members in China being susceptible and at risk of contracting the COVID-19 virus. Derogatory rhetoric in the media is used to perpetuate stereotypes and prejudices about Chinese people. As a result, CISs are at risk of hate crimes especially under the situation when they are perceived to be contagious. According to Ma and Miller (2021), the stressful situation faced by Chinese overseas students has been significantly prominent.

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Given the Covid-19 pandemic, coupled with US-China relationships being intensified, a Chinese student, Lily Zhao expressed that she occasionally finds herself hiding her Chinese identity to keep her feeling safe and secure. More specifically, Lily stated that sometimes she prioritizes her Asian identity before she acknowledges that she is from China because individuals might be Sinophobic and turn into a target of hate (Kanthor, 2021).

### Social Justice: Fighting Anti-Asian Sentiment on Campus and Virtually

One of the challenges facing CISs prior to the pandemic is the cultural adjustment needed when entering US schools. Part of the adjustment is making connections and being part of the college community. This can be challenging as access to campus resources for these adjustments is sparse. Instead, the use of social networks serves to build a virtual community for shared resources, support, and in more recent years, advocacy. To tackle discrimination and racism against the AAPI community, Asian Student Unions are actively appealing for all Asian students who live on campus and in Boston, to advocate for racial justice. According to Joshua Pei, president of an Asian Student Union, proposes that Asian students' voices and perspectives being heard are a top priority (Liu, 2021). In order to combat racism, it requires joint efforts and community solidarity. According to Liu (2021), a growing number of students have proposed their own initiatives proactively and engaged themselves in social campaigns to raise public awareness about anti-Asian violence. For instance, Boston University's Chinese Students Association (CSA) has posted a variety of educational resources on social media, such as Instagram, in an attempt to mitigate the surging anti-Asian sentiment (Liu, 2021).

The spread of Covid-19 has spurred a surge in anti-Asian hate throughout social media platforms and targeting Asian communities (He et al., 2021). With the Covid-19 pandemic having been referred to as "Chinese virus", racism and fears are bound to take place– even in virtual communities. As a result, social media plays a substantial role in combating such negativity on the internet. Utilization of social media platforms including TikTok, Weibo, and WeChat will serve as influential forces to combat anti-Asian racism fears (Global Data, 2020). For example, hashtags function as both symbols and organizing mechanisms (Chou & Gaysynsky, 2021). They are used not only to classify information into relevant categories and direct attention to trending topics or events but also to connect individuals and build communities. #ChineseVirus was used as a hashtag to promote anti-Asian rhetoric, hashtags including #IAmNotVirus also arose in the midst of the pandemic to combat anti-Asian racism and strengthen the shared humanity of Asian individuals (Chou & Gaysynsky, 2021; O'Malley, 2021). These online platforms serve as social capital and are linked to positive psychological well-being (Pang, 2018). In addition, there has been a growing utilization of '#StopAAPIHate'. The practice of using such hashtags demonstrates that social media platforms have the potential to be powerful tools denouncing and fighting against racial rhetoric, conveying solidarity with vulnerable populations, and providing support with those who have been victims of racial discrimination.

## Discussion

CISs face a complexity of issues as they navigate the US education system that stems beyond acculturation. This section outlines the recommendations for the areas addressed

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throughout the paper with an intentional focus on student-centered supports along with questions for consideration.

## Transparent and Accessible Support for International Students

Policies at the institutional level should be informed by identifying CISs' needs and creating a system that regularly supports student safety and well-being. This may mean recentering higher education resource spaces to reflect upon current accessibility and transparency to international students. CISs' perception of accessibility to resources can impact their overall learning experience, and if under supported, lead to negative outcomes (Rankin & Reason, 2005). This includes a wide range of areas such as what to do when encountering instances of racist or discriminatory behavior by students, faculty, or staff and understanding how to identify and file a grievance/complaint, or how to access an Ombudsperson. Separately are the procedures and considerations in referring students who have identified mental health needs and require support.

- How are policies and procedures for reporting hate crimes perceived and understood by CISs?
- What are the policies and procedures for reporting hate crimes? Are they accessible and transparent for CISs?
- What is the referral process for CISs identified with mental health needs? Is the support available in their home language?

## Outreach & Trauma-Informed Practices

Those involved in on-campus organizations and student services should examine the ways the CIS population is being served. This allows easier connections for CISs to convey their ideas in their first language, which is often the case in K-12 public schools and disappears in higher education. Programs to connect new CISs with other CISs already adjusted should be developed to build connections & relations between students and the university community. On campus clubs can take on this voluntary role to be strategic with their outreach and develop club missions for inclusivity.

Student support on campus is often underutilized, in part because students are not aware that it exists or understand how it can be leveraged to support them. Understanding preferred communication within the CIS community needs to be further explored. Social media may be a more useful tool in connecting students with each other and with services to alleviate any biases towards seeking mental health services.

Mentoring can be a source of student support that is often in graduate programs and less in undergraduate programs due to the ratio between students and teachers. However, mentoring can be done as a source of student support and achievement through out of class structures to build faculty-student relations.

CISs are experiencing trauma as a result of COVID racism and it needs to be addressed. Intentional conversations with trained professionals that provide brave spaces, healing circles, and other trauma-informed practices are needed on campus and available off-campus, where students may feel more comfortable. In seeking psychological help, CISs need professionals who speak their first language and understand the cultural nuances to support them. Students can be retraumatized when experiencing racism and being witness

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to it. Building resilience in students is important for all, but it needs to be better situated for populations being impacted.

- What are the specific student supports for CISs within your institution? Are they accessible to students in their home language?
- How is CIS access to on-campus support being evaluated?
- What types of mentorship opportunities are provided for CISs in both undergraduate and graduate programs?

## Social Justice & On-Campus Organizing

Studies centered on APIDA experiences with racism in the US during COVID-19 are voiced in educational advocacy spaces with CISs just beginning to emerge within the research, mainstream media, and places where people could empathize with their experiences. The pandemic may serve as a starting point to engage in critical dialogue surrounding their context and experiences with White supremacy in the US. Future research should explore how CISs perceive social justice and their role within this work as students in the US. There are complications with this as it may conflict with their voice in their home country. However, as students in the US, they should be afforded with rights to speak out when experiencing something unjust. Navigating this space is sensitive, but it is necessary to empower them.

While on-campus organizations may have opportunities for CISs to build community and student voice, they have some limitations. Community based organizations (CBOs) can serve as an alternative for students who are not seeing the results from student led clubs. CBOs can provide professional help for mental health services, legal aid, mentorship, and other services that may not be available on campus. Separately, CBOs cast a wider net between the ethnic community and the wider community when raising issues.

US media tends to focus on perpetrators of crimes against Asians and their backstories as a rationale for their criminal behavior rather than victim's stories. Evidence of this is in mainstream media, particularly in the case of university professors who explain why they made racist statements towards their students, rather than hearing how students received these messages and understood racism in the context of their educational experiences (McLeod, 2020; Redden, 2019). Where are CISs' stories within mainstream media? How are institutions responding to these experiences with victims? "Casual racism" has dire consequences. What is said in off-handed comments or written as a "joke" is not acceptable. This leads to the need of refining hiring practices that extend beyond the number of publications and degrees. Reviews of policies for hiring and firing adjuncts need to be reviewed alongside further consideration of consequences for tenure-track faculty engaging in racist behaviors.

Further studies should highlight CIS voice and experiences and ways they are receiving support during this time as well as what can be done. Placing responsibility back on CISs to address racism is not an equitable practice. It is a societal responsibility to ensure their safety as guests in the US. Some may contend that CISs contribute to the US economy, but there needs to be a more humanistic aspect in all of this work to improve relationships and cultural understanding.

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- How do on-campus student organizations support CISs?
- How are community-based organizations involved/partnered with higher education institutions in supporting CISs?
- In what ways are CISs supported when reporting incidents of discrimination?
- How are CISs informed of their rights and voice in higher education spaces?

### Creating Space: Affinity Groups

Presently, affinity groups have captured favor in educational settings for creating a secure space for members of a particular racial, ethnic, or shared social identity to engage in critical dialogue. The purpose of the space in building connectivity is more salient for those who have a stronger affiliation to their ethnic/racial identity and are open to discussing their experiences (Tauriac et al., 2013). Affinity groups, however, are not new. They have longstood as a resource of employee support and have adapted over time to serve as a cooperative method for student success, and more recently, as a source of critical support and healing in educational spaces for students and teachers of color (Van Aken et al., 1994; Gates et al., 1997; Pour-Khorshid, 2018). A CIS affinity group can offer the necessary space needed to build a greater sense of connection to each other and their institution, share their lived experiences, and offer peer-to-peer support in pushing forth conversations in a brave space. Considerations in supporting affinity groups include:

- Connections to intergroup support: How are CIS affinity groups connect to the larger intergroup of the institution?
- Student-led conditions: positive interdependence, in-person interaction, development of social and collective skills, and group processing to reflect and modify ways to improve group dynamics (Gates et al., 1997).

## Conclusion

The heightened climate of banning critical race theory in K-16+ education at the time of this writing is suggestive of a shift to authoritative systems rather than local and state education agency control (O'Kane, 2021). This is damaging as critical race theory provides opportunities for deepening understanding and openness to think critically about the role of race and racism, address the ways historically marginalized groups are treated in the US, and perspectives that examine social justice and intersectionality. By not allowing critical race theory is denying that racism is endemic. AsianCrit in particular highlights the historical wrongs impacting Asian American communities in order to understand the dynamic relations and reception in the present.

The future US-China relations and its impact on CISs in the US can be understood by its history. In the way the Chinese Exclusion Act is known as a racist act in US history, will the period of pandemic racism be regarded with the same discernment? How will higher education institutions look back on the ways they supported CISs during the pandemic? This leads to critically examining higher education systems and practices are equally needed to advance and be inclusive of international student support offerings. International student centers should offer culturally responsive support and be a resource to empower international students rather than taking a passive approach (Peralta, 2020).

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