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BEIJING INTERNATIONAL REVIEW OF EDUCATION

3 (2021) 187-211

Beijing  
International  
Review of  
Education

brill.com/bire

# Combating Anti-Asian Racism and Xenophobia in Canada: Toward Pandemic Anti-Racism Education in Post-COVID-19

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## Abstract

Canada is often held up internationally as a successful model of immigration. Yet, Canada's history, since its birth as a nation one hundred and fifty-four years ago, is one of contested racial and ethnic relations. Its racial and ethnic conflict and division resurfaces during COVID-19 when there has been a surge in racism and xenophobia across the country towards Asian Canadians, particularly those of Chinese descent. Drawing on critical race theory and critical discourse analysis, this article critically analyzes incidents that were reported in popular press during the pandemic pertaining to this topic. The analysis shows how deeply rooted racial discrimination is in Canada. It also reveals that the anti-Asian and anti-Chinese racism and xenophobia reflects and retains the historical process of discursive racialization by which Asian Canadians have been socially constructed as biologically inferior, culturally backward, and racially undesirable. To combat and eliminate racism, we propose a framework of pandemic anti-racism education for the purpose of achieving educational improvement in post-COVID-19.

## Keywords

COVID-19 – racism – xenophobia – anti-racism education – Canada

Since the World Health Organization declared the outbreak of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) a global pandemic on March 11, 2020, almost every country on the globe has been affected by the spread of the virus. Many countries have introduced quarantine measures to curb the spread of the virus, including closure of schools and universities, stay-at-home order, curfew, and lockdown. At the time of writing this article, a number of countries are still in lockdown and the death toll from the COVID-19 pandemic has surpassed 2 million in less than a year which continues to rise. With the rapid spread and spiking number of infections and deaths, we were caught off guard and unprepared in tackling a crisis of this magnitude and scale that we have never experienced in modern history. Without doubt the COVID-19 global pandemic has indeed posed unprecedented challenges to the globalized world. As a new global force it has affected society, reconfigured the world we live in, and disrupted our lives. It has also caused feelings of stress, isolation, uncertainty, anxiety, and depression. Reaching far beyond the medical sphere, clearly the impacts of the pandemic have extended the risk to the destruction of livelihoods with wide ramifications and social consequences (WHO, 2020).

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, the international community has responded swiftly in critically examining the impacts of the pandemic on the global society and seeking possible solutions in combating the virus (Alon, Farrell, & Li, 2020; McKibbin & Fernando, 2020). In education, the global pandemic sparked a collective and open dialogue which calls for transformation of the roles, responsibilities and values of scholarship in times of crises (Peters et al., 2020). While some focus on the role of education in changing people's behaviours in containing the virus (e.g., wearing mask, maintaining social distance) (Lopes & McKay, 2020), others explore the extent to which cultural differences may have made an impact on fighting the pandemic (Marginson, 2020). Another resounding theme emerged from the critical reflections is the importance of re-embracing humanity and humanities, as well as rethinking human vulnerabilities and aspirations in combating the virus (Oleksiyenko et al., 2020). Largely missing from this dialogue however has been discussions of the prevalence of racism and racial discrimination in the pandemic – a real virus that is contagious.

In the context of Canada, racism and ethnic discrimination resurfaces and proliferates during the global pandemic. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, there has been a surge in racism and xenophobia across the country towards Asian Canadians, particularly those of Chinese descent. They have been spat on, verbally abused, and physically attacked. They are shamed and blamed for the spread of the virus despite the fact that they have the lowest infection rates in Canada. They are shouted to “go home” although some of them are born in

Canada who have never visited their ancestral lands. Some of its members are stigmatized because of the virus and their properties are vandalized. As victims of racial discrimination, Asian Canadians have subsequently experienced high levels of anxiety, trauma, and desperation. These incidents illustrate how deeply rooted racial discrimination is in Canada. Using critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2005; Wodak, 1996), this article critically analyzes incidents that were reported in popular press during the pandemic pertaining to this topic. Xenophobia often refers to dislike and fear of foreigners, such as people from Asia, because of their different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Such hostilities often form the basis of racist attitudes and behaviours toward Asian Canadians who are often treated as foreigners rather than fully fledged citizens. The term overlaps with racism but at the same time is different and hence we are looking at both anti-Asian racism and xenophobia in this article.

The discussion that follows falls into five parts. It begins with a review of relevant literature pertaining to Canada's immigration history and racial and ethnic relations, followed by an examination of critical race theory (CRT) as a theoretical framework. Then, it discusses the research methodology which draws on critical discourse analysis. Next, it analyzes some of the critical incidents reported in media and ends with discussion and conclusion.

### Review of Literature

This article is critically informed by a collage of literature pertaining to Canada's immigration history, Chinese immigrants in Canada, and racial and ethnic relations. First, as an immigrant society Canada has a long and rich history of immigration. Canada's history, since its birth as a nation one hundred and fifty-four years ago, is one of immigration, nation-building, and contested racial and ethnic relations (Guo & Wong, 2018). The driving forces behind immigration are social, political, economic and demographic. From the Confederation of Canada in 1867 to the 1960s, Canada adopted blatant ethnocentric and racist immigration policies to keep out the "undesirable" and "unassimilable" citizens. As such, the selection of immigrants in Canada was based on racial background, with the British and Western Europeans being deemed the most desirable citizens, while Asians and Africans were considered unassimilable and, therefore undesirable. In deciding who are the most desirable and admissible, the state sets the parameters for the social, cultural and symbolic boundaries of the nation. It was not until after WWII that Canada's immigration policy slowly started to become non-racist, at least in terms of its language. By 1967, the Canadian government established a more

universalistic immigration policy through regulations that established three basic classes of immigrants that operate until the present day (i.e., economic class, family class, and refugees).

Often held up internationally as a successful model of immigration, Canada promotes itself as an immigration society and a land of opportunities with a vast territory and rich resources. Immigration is often promoted as a solution to help Canada ameliorate its labour shortages. Its multiculturalism policies present the country as a culturally tolerant nation, and its favourable integration policies guarantee a smooth settlement and transition for new immigrants (Guo & Wong, 2015). As the globalization of migration intensifies, Canada has speeded up its competition for the most talented, skillful, and resourceful workers. Since the mid-1990s, Canada has shifted to a knowledge-based economy and subsequently its immigrant selection practices have placed more weight on education and skills, favouring economic immigrants over family-class immigrants and refugees. As a result of growing immigration, Canada is becoming increasingly more ethno-culturally diverse. The latest census shows that 21.9% of Canada's total population were foreign born, and that 22.3% were identified as visible minorities (Statistics Canada, 2017). It is projected that by 2036, the proportion of Canada's foreign-born population could reach between 24.5% and 30%. As such, Canada qualifies as an immigration society characterized by: (i) employing a principled framework to regulate admission; (ii) generating programs to facilitate the integration and settlement of immigrants; (iii) entitling immigrants to all rights, including the right to permanent residency and citizenship; and (iv) seeing immigration and immigrants as society-building assets and central to national identity (Fleras, 2018).

The second body of literature that informs this discussion is about Chinese immigrants in Canada. The Chinese are one of the oldest immigrant groups in Canada, and the history of the Chinese in Canada reflects, and is shaped by, a long historic trajectory of Canadian immigration policies. The first arrived of Chinese arrived in Victoria on June 28, 1858, from California in search of gold and new development opportunities (Con et al., 1982). They came primarily as coolie workers or indentured labourers working in labour-intensive industries such as mines and railway construction and chain migrants who were from the same place or family moving to a particular destination. As the gold fields petered out, the Chinese found employment as domestic servants, coal miners, and seasonal workers in the salmon canning industry. Chinese workers were also used extensively during the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR). The proliferation of the Chinese on the West Coast was perceived as a threat to the mission of the government to build a white *British Columbia*. After all, the Chinese signified an ancient and medieval baggage

of distinctions between 'West' and 'East,' civilized and barbarian, master and slave, Christian and heathen, white and non-white (Anderson, 1995). With the completion of the CPR, the Chinese were no longer welcome. In 1885, the government of Canada imposed a \$50 head tax on all incoming Chinese to control their entry, which was increased to \$100 in 1900, and to \$500 in 1903. When it was found that it was not effective enough to keep the Chinese out of Canada, the Federal Government passed a restrictive Chinese Immigration Act in 1923, also known as the Chinese Exclusion Act, which virtually prohibited all Chinese immigration into Canada until its repeal in 1947. Besides the head tax and the 1923 Chinese Immigration Act, the Chinese also faced other kinds of discrimination (Yu, 2018). Since they were not allowed to vote, the Chinese were prohibited from entering certain professions such as law, medicine, or accounting. Further, they were denied the opportunity to acquire Crown land. Thus, since very early in Canada's history, immigration has served as a means of social, racial, and ideological control.

Recent arrivals of well-educated Chinese immigrants since the 1980s have come with tremendous human capital, constituting a substantially different calibre of Chinese from those of former years (Guo & DeVoretz, 2006). However, their racialized experiences indicate that they faced multi-faceted structural barriers in their efforts to integrate into Canadian society, including *a glass gate, glass door, and glass ceiling* (Guo, 2013). While *a glass gate* denies immigrants' entrance to guarded professional communities, *a glass door* blocks immigrants' access to professional employment at high-wage firms. Finally, *the glass ceiling* prevents immigrants from moving into management positions because of their ethnic and cultural differences. The *glass gate, glass door, and glass ceiling* may converge at different stages of their integration and transition processes to create *the triple glass effect* that causes employment and under-employment, poor economic performance, and downward social mobility.

The third perspective that informs this analysis is the literature on Canada's racial and ethnic relations. As alluded to earlier, the 1967 Points System established universalistic criteria which shifted the selection of immigrants to human capital in determining the potential eligibility of people wanting to immigrate to Canada. Despite its claimed non-racist immigration policies, racial and ethnic conflict and division have persisted over the past century and a half as manifested in racialized divisions between whiteness and non-whiteness, and between the foreign-born and the native-born (Guo & Wong, 2018). Besides the Chinese head tax and the Chinese Exclusion Act which are mentioned above, another example of racial and ethnic discrimination was the incident of the 1914 Komagata Maru which was denied entry to Canada through what was referred to as the continuous voyage regulation

(Panesar, Pottie-Sherman, & Wilkes, 2018). With 376 Punjabi passengers aboard, the ship sat in the Vancouver harbour for two months until it was forced to return to India resulting in the deaths of twenty people. A further example pertains to how the Japanese were treated during WWII. For approximately 22,000 Japanese living on the West Coast in B.C., the majority of whom were born in Canada, they were considered as “enemy aliens” within Canada. As such, there was the seizure of their property and physical relocation and internment during the last few years of the war. For these and some other past and significant government actions of racism, there have been apologies and/or redress provided after lobbying efforts by affected groups.

While the Canadian government excluded or attempted to exclude Asians from coming to Canada during its early period, those who were already in Canada were excluded from participation in Canadian society legislatively and socially (Guo & Wong, 2018). Asians and other racialized peoples within Canada experienced racism and ethnic discrimination socially in their everyday lives, in the educational system, in the labour force and legally as anti-Asian, anti-Black racism was systemic along with anti-Semitism. Microaggressions motivated by race, ethnicity, and religion are fairly prevalent in Canada. To illustrate, Fleras (2016) theorizes micro-aggressions as a distinctive perspective for understanding contemporary racism as a shifting discourse that consists of those words and interactions perceived as racist by racialized targets that rarely reflect vindictive intent yet inadvertently inflict insult or injury. There has also been a significant rise of reported hate crimes perpetrated against Muslims in Canada in the last two decades since 9–11. More recently, the increase of Asian immigrants and Asian international students to Canada has created an ongoing anti-Asian discourse regarding the perception that there are too many Asian students attending Canadian universities.

### Theoretical Framework

Critical race theory (CRT) provides an effective theoretical framework for combating racism and xenophobia in Canada. Originally developed as a critical response to the problem of the colour line in the US, CRT can be traced to legal scholarship countering the positivist and liberal legal discourses of civil rights in the mid-1970s (Crenshaw, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Tate, 1997). Widely recognized as a critical-emancipationist framework, CRT recognizes racism as an endemic, and deeply ingrained in every aspect of society. In particular, it is committed to advocating for social justice for racialized people who find themselves occupying positions on the margins. It seeks to understand how a

regime of white supremacy and its subordination of racialized minorities have been created and maintained in our society. In a sociological reflection about race and power, Luke (2009) argues that racism is an act of power and a form of symbolic and physical violence. He further points out that power is always contingent upon whether the structures and authorities of social fields set out the conditions where it can be recognized and used for gainful purposes. Racializing practices, he continues, are undertaken both by objects of power (e.g., immigrants) and by those who relationally exercise power (e.g., employers), though obviously not with equivalent institutional force. CRT seeks not only to name, but to be a tool for dismantling the unequal power relations, for eliminating racial oppression, and for achieving racial justice.

One of CRT's strengths is its interdisciplinary feature and as such CRT crosses disciplinary boundaries to offer a more complete analysis of 'raced' people (Crenshaw, 1991; Tate, 1997). In her analysis of Black women's employment and domestic violence, Crenshaw (1991) found that their experiences consisted of a combination of both racism and sexism which cannot be understood in independent terms of either being black or a woman. In light of this, Crenshaw proposed intersectionality as a strategy to capture how social identities of race, gender, and class as distinct social categories are mutually constituted to shape people's experience of social inequality. Crenshaw's contributions advanced critical race theory by effectively addressing multiple systems of subordination and oppression. With its origins in legal studies, CRT has increasingly permeated other fields, including sociology and education. More recently, CRT is moving beyond the Black-White paradigm and beyond vulgar racial essentialism to consider the racialized lives of other oppressed minorities (e.g., Chinese, Indians, Latinos) (Treviño, Harris, & Wallace, 2008). It has also expanded to cover other important and provocative issues, including immigration, language rights, sexism, sexual oppression, transnationality, and citizenship status. However, CRT remains faithful to its original mandate of treating the social construction of race as central to the way that people of colour are ordered and constrained.

In the context of education, CRT has been disproportionately influential in problematizing race and racism in education since the early 1990s. As largely an underresearched and undertheorized topic in education, race continues to be significant in explaining educational inequality across racial and ethnic lines, including high school dropout rates, suspension rates, and incarceration rates (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Hence, there is a need for greater analysis of race as an explanatory variable for disparate learning outcomes of racialized minority students. Other important issues related to education that have been discussed by CRT scholars include: the desegregation of public

education, language rights and bilingual education, affirmative action, access to and diversity in higher education, what counts as official knowledge in the academy, and analyses of the experiences of scholars of colour in the academy (Powers, 2007). Commenting on access to higher education, for example, Roithmayr (2000) analyzes how structural and institutional barriers such as standardized tests functioned as gatekeeper to discriminate against marginalized groups from entering higher education such as law, in which whites used their privileged monopoly power to lock in standards of competition that kept nonwhites out of law schools. CRT scholars in education also call for a deeper understanding of racism and its intersection with other forms of oppression, such as sexism, classism, and homophobia, in producing social and educational inequality. As its key tenets, CRT in education prioritizes the centrality of race and racism, storytelling as a strategy to challenge dominant narratives, and the commitment to a social justice agenda (Howard & Navarro, 2016). In agreement with Tate (1997), it seems clear that “the defining elements of CRT suggest that this theoretical perspective can provide novel and innovative ways of exploring educational policy, research, and practice” (p. 236).

### Research Methodology

To analyze anti-Asian racism and xenophobia during the global pandemic, we have employed critical discourse analysis (CDA) as a methodological lens as it approaches language as a form of social practice (Fairclough, 2005; Wodak, 1996). As a transdisciplinary approach CDA bridges linguistic and social analysis. Major theories underpinning CDA can be traced to the works of Foucault and neo-Marxists such as Gramsci, as well as Halliday’s systemic functional linguistics (Titscher et al., 2000). Given its different theoretical roots, CDA is neither a homogeneous nor necessarily a unified approach (Titscher et al., 2000).

In this article, we mainly draw on Fairclough’s work on CDA. Fairclough (1993, 1995) proposed an analytical framework that sees three dimensions to any discursive event, or any usage of language: text, discursive practice and social practice. At the textual level, analysis focuses on the content and form or texture of a text; it focuses on the grammar, vocabulary, semantics and other linguistic features of a text (Titscher et al., 2000). To analyze text as a discursive practice is to explore the link between text and context and social practice. It explain how a text is produced and interpreted in relation to the orders of discourse or “the semiotic aspect of a social order” and “a particular social ordering of relationship between different ways of making meaning”



(Fairclough, 2002, p. 126). One technique is to examine the intertextuality of a text, or how a text is constituted by diverse discourses and genres (Titscher et al., 2000). The analysis of text as a social practice involves addressing the issue of power, ideology and hegemony. The focus is on “the control over discursive practice as a struggle for predominance over the order of discourse” (Titscher et al., 2000, p. 151). The analytical framework employs three procedures: description, interpretation, and explanation. “Linguistic properties are described, the relationship between the productive and interpretative processes of discursive practice and the text is interpreted, and the relationship between discursive practice and social practice is explained” (Titscher et al., 2000, p. 153).

In this article, we also draw from van Dijk’s work on CDA, which focuses on discourse and racism. As a social practice and ideology, racism manifests itself discursively. Racist opinions and beliefs are produced and reproduced by means of discourse; through discourse, discriminatory exclusionary practices are prepared, promulgated, and legitimized (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, p. 1). To van Dijk, as a discourse analytical research CDA primarily studies the way social-power abuse and inequality are “enacted, reproduced, legitimated, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context” (2015, p. 466). For instance, manipulation is a form of social power abuse. Van Dijk (2006) discussed manipulation within the triangulated approach that explicitly link discourse, cognition and society. Discursively, he posits that manipulation generally involves “positive self-presentation” in favour of the speaker’s or writer’s own interests and “negative other-presentation” to blame negative situations and events on the ‘Other’ (p. 378). Cognitively, manipulation controls recipients’ minds into accepting certain ideologies. Socially, manipulation is illegitimate domination fostering social inequality. In other words, “manipulators make others believe or do things that are in the interest of the manipulator, and against the best interests of the manipulated” (p. 360). In this article, we examine how politicians and citizens use manipulation as a discursive strategy to exclude and demonize the ‘Other.’

We adopted critical incident as a specific research technique in analyzing anti-Asian racism and xenophobia during the pandemic. Critical incidents are brief descriptions of vivid events that people remember as being meaningful in their experience (Brookfield, 1995). Critical incident is a popular technique that has been used widely in nursing training (Kemppainen, 2000). In this article, we refer to critical incidents as events of interactions between people that result in avoidable and unfair inequalities across different racial, ethnic, cultural, or religious groups, including both racist remarks and behaviours (Paradies et al., 2009). Critical incidents were collected

through events reported by popular media and analyzed through a critical race theoretical lens.

Specifically, the data base of the study includes a great variety of online media genres, including social media, television news, and newspaper series, as well as statements and addresses of Canadian politicians and celebrities. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, there have been numerous popular press articles and news that have reported incidents of mistreatment and discrimination associated with the global pandemic, which provide the primary sources of our data. We conducted our news media search online through Google using key terms such as “COVID-19,” “anti-Asian racism,” “hate crimes,” “xenophobia,” “Canada,” which yielded overwhelmingly 4,450 results in 0.26 seconds. We then decided to narrow down the search by focusing on nine selected Canadian news outlets, including CBC News, CTV News, Global News, Globe and Mail, National Post, Toronto Star, Montreal Gazette, Calgary Herald, and Vancouver Sun, representing the geopolitical diversity of Canada. As Table 1 shows, this effort generated 310 results, which provided a rich data set for us to work with. Multiple sources of data enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of the study. For data analysis, we searched for key words and recurring patterns, and then grouped them into related categories which are presented below. We particularly paid attention to racist discourse including discriminatory metaphors or symbols, narratives, and argumentation; integrated analysis of such discourse into social, political and historical contexts; and examined who social actors were and how they exercised control over others (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001; van Dijk, 2006).

TABLE 1 Data Sources and Results

News Media	Search Results
CBC News	39
CTV News	31
Global News	30
Globe and Mail	40
National Post	40
Montreal Gazette	20
Toronto Star	46
Calgary Herald	13
Vancouver Sun	51
Total	310

## Findings and Analysis

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, anti-Asian sentiments have been on the rise in Canada and internationally (HRW, 2020; Kotyk, 2020). While international scientists are still searching for the origins of the virus, Asian Canadians, particularly those of Chinese descent, became the scapegoat who were wrongly blamed for spreading the virus just because it was first reported in China. Many of them have also become the target of hate crimes. In Vancouver, for example, hate crime incidents targeting Asian communities rose by 717% in 2020 compared to 2019, the highest per Asian capita in North America (Liu, 2021). As Figure 1 illustrates, other major Canadian cities experienced similar patterns since the outbreak of COVID-19 with the largest increase among Chinese, Korean, and Southeast Asian women. At the national level, the Chinese Canadian National Council reported over 1,068 incidents of such kind across Canada as of May 25, 2021 (CCNC, 2021).

COVID-19 related hate crimes based on race and ethnicity took many forms, including name calling, racial slurs, verbal abuse, physical attack, graffiti, and vandalism. Some of the attacks even aimed at children and the elderly. For example, a 92-year old elderly Asian man with dementia was physically attacked at a convenience store in Vancouver, who was thrown to the ground in an alleged racially motivated incident (Crawford & Ip, 2020). In the following section we will apply critical race theory in critically analyzing some of

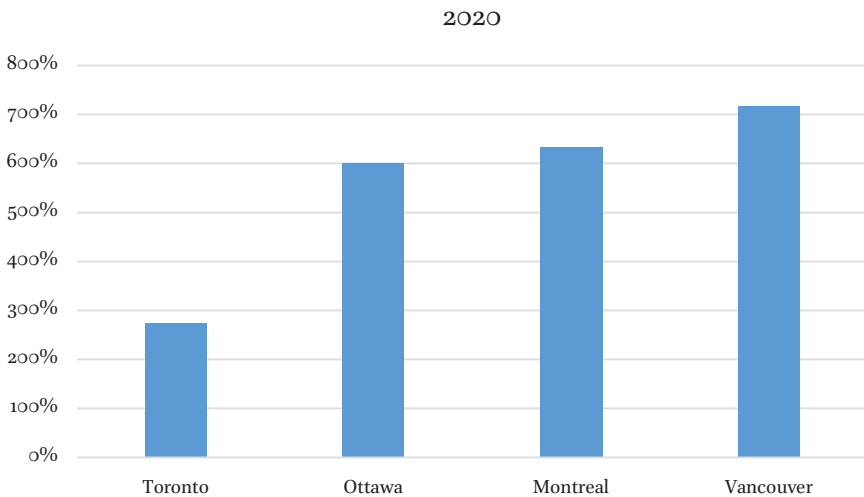


FIGURE 1 Increase of Anti-Asian Hate Crimes, 2020

SOURCE: GLOBAL NEWS SPECIAL, HIDDEN HATE: ANTI-ASIAN RACISM

the incidents that were reported in media in relation to COVID-19, racism and xenophobia towards Asian Canadians.

### *Face Mask, Stigmatization and Othering*

On May 20, 2020, Teresa Tam, Canada's chief public health officer, recommended wearing non-medical masks as a measure to curb the spread of the virus when social distancing is difficult or impossible (National Post, 2020). Such recommendation did not come into effect without controversy. First, Canadians were confused about the mixed messages from public health officials who initially told Canadians they did not need to wear mask if they were not sick. Second, provinces and municipalities were left on their own to decide if they want to mandate mask-wearing by public health order. While Quebec was the first province to enact province-wide mask regulations in July 2020, other provinces, such as Alberta, did not implement mandatory mask wearing in public indoor spaces until February 2021 (Woo, 2021). Third, the reinforcement of the mask regulations and bylaws vary from city to city. At the individual level, there has been widespread resistance to mask wearing. A number of protests against mandatory mask wearing have been reported in Canada. The most troubling aspect related to mask wearing pertains to the experiences of stigmatization, racism, and othering confronting Asian Canadians when they decided to wear face masks voluntarily to block potential transmission of the virus.

One such incident happened on March 5, 2020, when Jeongock Choe was shopping for grocery at a downtown Vancouver store and was told to "go back to China" by a stranger shopping next to her. Choe, a Korean Canadian, believed she was targeted because she was wearing a face mask. When she heard the racist comment, Choe started shivering and crying because she never thought that would happen to her in Vancouver having lived there for ten years. As Choe was pregnant, she was wearing a mask to protect herself and her unborn baby. "It's not about we are sick," said Choe, "people should know better and not being judgmental" (Brend, 2020).

Another racist incident took place on April 15, 2020, involving a white male suspect who allegedly assaulted a female bystander who defended two female Asian bus passengers from his racist comments. The suspect first verbally berated two Asian women who were wearing protective masks and shouted "Go back to your own country; that's where it all started." When the woman sitting directly across from the man told him to leave the other two women alone, the man punched her, kicked her in the leg multiple times, and pull her hair so hard he removed a "significant" amount (Chiu, 2020).

You may ask why such horrific incidents occurred in a democratic society like Canada where immigrants are said to be welcome? In analyzing face mask

incidents in the US, Ren and Feagin (2020) examine certain intersectional dimensions and distinctive symbolism involved in attacks on Asians wearing face mask during the global pandemic. Their analysis reveals that racialized marking of masked Asian individuals as diseased framed them as the source of the pandemic, portrayed them as particularly weak or sickly individuals, and generally asserted Asian groups foreignness or inherent socio-racial inferiority. Echoing Ren and Feagin, it seems clear that singling out mask-wearing Asians in Canada was based on such framing of these individuals as carriers of the virus who were scapegoated for allegedly responsible for spreading the disease. Furthermore, the framing of Asian individuals as physically weak and sickly could have also provoked the verbal and physical attacks. These hate crime incidents also suggested significant cultural differences between Asian and Canadian societies. While mask wearing is seen as a sign of individual weakness in Canada, Asian countries view mask wearing as part of civic responsibility in protecting their community from potentially spreading the virus.

The anti-Asian sentiments and stigmatization have also affected the lives of other Canadians. As the COVID-19 pandemic drags on, there have also been an escalating series of attacks on people who look like Asian, including Indigenous peoples in Canada. On May 16, 2020, another anti-Asian racist attack happened again in Vancouver, with a victim being punched in the head after a man heard her sneezing. This time the victim was an Indigenous woman who was mistaken for Asian. Identified as an employee with the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs, Dakota Holmes was walking her dog when a nearby Caucasian man overheard her sneeze and started yelling “go back to Asia”. He thought Holmes was Asian and her sneezing was COVID-19. In fact she has allergies and a throat infection. She was then punched in her head and left on the ground with bruising on her temple and jaw. Eventually Holmes’ dog scared the attacker off. Holmes said in a statement, “I’m sharing my story to get the message out there that racism is a deadly and sobering threat and every single instance of racism must be addressed and called out by all of us, so that it stops” (Ip, 2020).

Similar racist incidents were also reported in Montreal where Inuit people got caught in anti-Asian hate crimes. Often mistaken for Asians, Inuit people living in the city are alleging harassment by strangers in the era of COVID-19. Richardson (2020) reported a woman from the northern Quebec community of Kuujuaq, Nunavik alleged that a stranger approached her at a downtown metro station, spat on the ground, and told her to leave the country after mistaking her as Chinese. “It’s all about scapegoating,” explained Fo Niemi, Executive Director of the Montreal-based Centre for Research Action on Race Relations, “People need a target to unload on to because of their insecurity, paranoia – and in some cases, just plain racism” (Richardson, 2020).

These incidents illustrate how deeply rooted racial discrimination is in Canada. They reveal how essentialized notions of race and ethnicity are being used to arbitrarily identify and blame those perceived to be potential carriers of the virus. Discrimination and stigmatization of individuals from different ethnicity, national origins, and cultural backgrounds highlights the concept of “otherness” attributed to Asian Canadians and other racialized minorities in Canada. It is rooted not only in socio-cultural differences but also in the racialized divisions between Indigenous peoples and settlers, between whiteness and non-whiteness that have existed and persisted in the forms of colonialism and Anglo-domination over the past century and a half since Canada’s confederation (Guo & Wong, 2018). It is important to note that these hate crime incidents are not only racialized but also gendered because most of the reported incidents targeted female. Hence, understanding the complexities of racism and xenophobia has to be combined with other social categories of identities such as gender and class with respect to how they may mutually intersect in shaping people’s experiences of social inequality.

#### *Name Calling, Blaming and Neo-Racism*

During COVID-19, Asian Canadians became the targets of derogatory language in media reports and social media platforms. It is appalling when politicians referred to the virus as ‘China virus’, ‘Chinese virus’, ‘Wuhan virus’, or ‘kung flu’, which fuels the use of hate speech and name calling related to COVID-19. Such discourse discursively links the disease with race. One critical incident that draws public attention was racist remarks over ‘bat eating’ about COVID-19. On May 11, 2020, Canadian famed singer and songwriter Bryan Adams was scheduled to perform at London’s Royal Albert Hall which was cancelled due to the pandemic. To air his grievances about the cancellation, Adams posted a string of derogatory comments on Twitter and Instagram which backlashed. On May 12 he wrote:

Tonight was supposed to be the beginning of a tenancy of gigs at the @royalalberthall, but thanks to some f—ing bat eating, wet market animal selling, virus making greedy bastards, the whole world is now on hold, not to mention the thousands that have suffered or died from this virus. My message to them other than ‘thanks a f—ing lot’ is go vegan.

Adams’ racist remarks received condemnation on social media which was also reported on national TV and newspapers. One Twitter user commented: “I didn’t have Bryan Adams going on an unnecessary xenophobic rant during a

global pandemic on my COVID-19 bingo card. Did you?" (Lorinc, 2020). Feeling the pressure, Adams apologized on Instagram:

No excuse, I just wanted to have a rant about the horrible animal cruelty in these wet-markets being the possible source of the virus, and promote veganism.

The controversy did not stop there. Because Adams is a vegan, some believe Adams is a long-time animal rights activist who is against animal exploitation and cruelty (Menon, 2020). Others disagreed. Scott-Reid (2020) reminded us that animal suffering and disease risk can also be found in Canada where "we cram chickens into battery cages, pigs into gestation crates, and cows into sheds, to live their lives in filth, while imagining that zoonotic diseases could somehow never emerge or spread here". "What Adams got wrong," she continues, "was pointing his white, Western finger elsewhere, othering the issue, and failing to see how it involves us all". Paradkar (2020) concurred:

his framing of the problem becomes racist because the term "bat-eating, wet-market animal selling" evokes Wuhan and China and blames the culture rather than the natural evolution of viruses for the disease. This kind of unscientific characterization has already led to overt racism against Chinese-Canadians, and, coming from someone this high-profile, only legitimizes it further.

Framing this incident from critical race theory, using negative other-presentation (e.g., bat eating) and positive self-presentation (e.g., an animal rights activist) manipulative discursive strategies (van Dijk, 2004), celebrities such as Adams put emphasis on the alleged problem with the Other, thus contributing to the normalization of racist attitudes. Lee (2020) makes sense of this by applying neo-racism, a concept rationalized on stereotypes about cultures or national origin rather than by race alone. One example is the mistreatment of Middle Eastern people after 9/11. The negative stereotyping of China, particularly the criminalization of China, is another example that Lee observes, including sweeping political rhetoric of Chinese researchers and graduate students as spies. According to Lee, calling COVID-19 the 'Chinese virus' or 'Wuhan virus' is the latest development in neo-racism that is politically framed as an existential danger coming from outside domestic borders, for which China is blamed. Politicians connect the disease with race to distract Canadians from actual problems and their responsibilities. Similarly, the misperception that Western culture is more superior to Asian cultures also explains the use of hate

speech and name calling and justifies the incompatibility of life-styles and traditions that lead to a belief of cultural inferiority. As such, neo-racism limits our freedom, rights, and ability to respond to COVID-19 effectively. In light of this, Lee posits that “neo-racist barriers must be called out and addressed” (p.v).

### *Chinatown under Attack: the Yellow Peril Revisited*

Soon after the outbreak of the virus, Chinatown across Canada was the first to be hit. Businesses in Chinatown have reported major decline due to people's fear about the new virus and its association with China (Derworiz, 2020). In particular, there have been serious concerns about drop in customers in its restaurant business, which has had a devastating effect on local communities. Furthermore, driven by ignorance, fear and misinformation, Chinatown has been constantly under attack during COVID-19, a concern not only for Canada but also internationally. For example, Oakland's Chinatown in California has been hit with a series of attacks and thefts that have left the community on edge (Lu, 2021). Similar incidents were also reported in Canada.

On March 3, 2020, two lion statues at Montreal's Chinatown were defaced with a sledgehammer at the Quan Am Temple which was investigated by the police as hate crimes (Luft, 2020). As a result, the lion's head was smashed at the gate which got attacked again. Three weeks later two other temples and the gate lions at the entrance to Montreal's Chinatown were also vandalized. Crosses were drawn on some of the lions. According to Montreal police, they were treated as hate crimes because these acts were committed against religious symbols. The vandalism caused anger, fear, and tension in the Chinese community.

Similar attacks happened to Vancouver's Chinatown, one of the oldest and largest in Canada. On April 2, 2020, Vancouver's Chinese Cultural Centre was repeatedly vandalized with hateful graffiti and racist remarks toward the Asian community (CBC, 2020). The Centre is an icon of Vancouver's Chinatown which was founded in 1973 to promote cross-cultural understanding and friendship between Chinese Canadians and Canadians at large with a museum, a Chinese language school, and a Chinese garden. A male suspect sprayed four large glass windows with hateful graffiti, with one saying “Kill all” and another “Drive them out of Canada” (Woodward, 2020). In commenting on the graffiti, Vancouver police described them as “disturbing, racist remarks toward the Asian community” which are “disheartening”. On May 1, 2020, the Vancouver's Chinese Cultural Centre was vandalized again with a broken window. Yet, it did not stop there and instead it has escalated. Another attack took place on May 19, 2020, when two lion sculptures at the Millennium Gate of Vancouver's



Chinatown were defaced with graffiti that expressed anti-Asian sentiments in connection with COVID-19. Solvent was used to remove the graffiti and extra security services were provided during the pandemic.

To understand how Chinatown became the symbol of disease and the targets of racist attacks, it is necessary to situate the discussion in the historical context of the Chinese in Canada, an important technique as suggested by CDA scholars (Fairclough, 2002; Reisigl & Wodak, 2001; van Dijk, 2006). It seems a parallel can be drawn to two anti-Chinese riots that took place in Vancouver's Chinatown in 1887 and 1907 (Anderson, 1995). In the first incident that took place in the area of Coal Harbour, the homes of some ninety Chinese residents were burnt or damaged. In the 1907 riot that lasted for two days, rioters threw beer bottles and rocks at windows and damaged many Chinese owned businesses and homes. The second day of the violence turned against the Japanese community. It appears the anti-Asian hostility had been driven by a racialized 'Yellow Peril' hysteria depicting peoples of the East as an existential danger to Western civilization (Park, 2020). While the term can be traced to its origins in Imperial Germany and Imperial Russia and their fears of Japanese military strength in the 1700s, the racist stereotypes gained popularity in its dogmatic forms in the late 19th century when Chinese labourers immigrated to Canada and the US. Since the Chinese arrived in Canada, the presence of Chinese people was compared to that of vice and plague associated with gambling, opium addiction, disease, and unsanitary conditions (Anderson, 1995). According to Anderson, the perception of the Chinese in Canada as a vice-ridden race is "a comparable cultural abstract that belongs to the beliefs and institutional practices of white European society" (p. 8). Described as the opposites of Whites, Anderson argues, the Chinese signifies non-White in European culture with the connotations of 'them' as opposed to 'us,' 'outsiders' rather than 'insiders.' The most important thing is that the presence of the Chinese contradicted the mandate of the Canadian government to build a white Canada. Whereas state practices institutionalized the concept of a Chinese race, Anderson continues, it was in space that the concept became materially cemented and naturalized in everyday life. Thus, 'Chinatown' was not a neutral term that referred somehow unproblematically to the physical presence of people from China in Vancouver. Rather, it was an evaluative term, ascribed by Europeans no matter how the residents of that territory might have defined themselves. Chinatown's representers constructed in their own minds a boundary between 'their' territory and 'our' territory. This explains why Chinatown was repeatedly under attack and how Chinese Canadians became the targets of racism and xenophobia during COVID-19.

## Conclusion

Drawing on critical race theory and critical discourse analysis, this article critically analyzes incidents that were reported in popular press during COVID-19 pertaining to racism and xenophobia encountered by Asian Canadians, particularly those of Chinese descent. Since the outbreak of the global pandemic, there has been a significant rise of reported hate crimes perpetrated against Asian Canadians resulting primarily from ignorance, fear and misinformation. In this process, Asian Canadians became the scapegoat who were wrongly blamed for spreading the virus although some have never visited their ancestral lands or who are not even of Chinese ancestry. Throughout the incidents, Asian Canadians have been depicted as weak, sickly, diseased, and foreign, and therefore 'undesirable' citizens. Framing it from critical discourse analysis, our examination shows how manipulation as a discursive strategy was used to exclude and demonize the 'Other.' Furthermore, the hate crime incidents were not only racialized but also gendered because most of the reported incidents targeted female. Hence, it is important to understand the complexities of racism and xenophobia in conjunction with other social categories of identities such as gender and class with respect to how they may mutually intersect in shaping people's experiences of social inequality.

Our analysis demonstrates how deeply rooted racial discrimination is in Canada. Despite Canada's claimed non-racist immigration policies and multiculturalism to protect minorities from possible prejudice and discrimination, Asians and other racialized peoples within Canada experienced racism and ethnic discrimination socially in their everyday lives. COVID-19 triggered an angry backlash that unleashed some of the historical sentiments against the Chinese and deeply entrenched racial ideologies within the Canadian cultural framework. The anti-Asian and anti-Chinese racism and xenophobia reflects and retains the historical process of discursive racialization by which Asian Canadians have been socially constructed as biologically inferior, culturally backward, and racially undesirable. In discussing social construction of the Chinese in Canada, Li (2009) argues that historically Canada has socially constructed the racial category of the Chinese in relation to its European cultural framework of nation building. The racial category of the Chinese represented an undesirable race that had brought immorality and filth to Canada. What remains central in the social construction of the Chinese is the idea that the Chinese belonged to an inferior race that could never mix properly with the Euro-Canadian race. Whenever incidents trigger a moral or health panic, the public seems to be quick to racialize the Chinese as a problem, illustrated by the outbreak of COVID-19 and SARS in 2003. In agreement with

Li, these incidents seem to suggest that there have been deep-seated racial feelings toward the Chinese in the cultural framework of Canada. It seems clear that the social construction of the Chinese in Canada was produced and reproduced by historically significant discourse, through which discriminatory exclusionary practices are prepared, promulgated, and legitimized (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001).

As contribution to the theme of the special issue, it is important to identify the systematic issues of racism and xenophobia through deep, evidence-based investigation so that the original roots can be located as a key approach in seeking new policies toward effecting positive changes in education (Xiu, Li, & Li). Having done so, we now move on to finding possible solutions. To condemn and combat anti-Asian and anti-Chinese racism and xenophobia related to COVID-19, we propose pandemic anti-racism education that aims to call out any form of racism and xenophobia that is directly related to the global pandemic and eliminate racial oppression for achieving racial justice in post-COVID Canada. For this discussion, we draw on Dei's (Dei, 1996; Dei, James-Wilson & Zine, 2001) anti-racism education model that views education as a racially, culturally and politically mediated experience. The model encompasses four learning objectives to integrate multiple centres of knowledge, recognize and respect for difference, affect social and educational change related to equity, access and social justice, and teach for community empowerment. First, it is important to add diverse sources of knowledge to the current emphasis on Eurocentric sources so that traditionally marginalized sources can be affirmed and validated. Rather than being an add-on, these centres of knowledge would be integrated into the curriculum at all levels, and would provide alternative centres of knowledge to add to and enrich the learning experiences of all students. For example, during COVID-19 the Chinese community in Toronto implemented virus containment measures informed by sources in Chinese media, as well as friends and family in China during the earliest days of the evolving pandemic. Months later many of these measures became official recommendations by the City of Toronto which helped with virus prevention (Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences, 2021). Such knowledge is also helpful in enriching students' learning experiences.

Second, anti-racism education recognizes the need to consider and value the complex identities of students, and ensure that teaching practices acknowledge and validate these identities. This can be done by designing learning strategies that accommodate diversity of groups as well as considering the diversity within groups as being salient in the learning environment. During the pandemic, essentialized notions of race and ethnicity are being used to arbitrarily identify and blame those perceived to be potential carriers of the virus. Hence, it is imperative to go beyond essentialism in recognizing

fluid, multiple and intersecting identities as part of Canada's multiversal hyperdiverse realities. Third, it requires that educators acknowledge the existing inequities in educational structures and environments, understand their role in these structures and actively advocate for change. With this objective, the role of teachers and instructors extends from the sphere of the classroom into the community, and requires engaging with social and political issues. Educators need to explicitly teach pandemic anti-racism and develop awareness of discursive racialization and xenophobic violence and discrimination in relation to COVID-19 and discuss action plans to eliminate them. The last dimension of the model focuses on building capacity for engagement by working towards increased individual and group self-esteem through the active involvement of all concerned groups in decision making related to the educational process. This requires collaboration among teachers, students, administrators and community activists to work for change at a broader level. This is exactly what is needed in combating racism as a contagious virus that requires collective efforts in making more fundamental and systematic changes. Such changes will contribute to the goal of achieving educational improvement in post-COVID-19 not only in educational systems but also in humanity.

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