

ARTICLE

"Yellow Perils," Revived: Exploring Racialized Asian/American Affect and Materiality Through Hate Discourse over the COVID-19 Pandemic

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The goal of this essay is to explore what kind of hate is produced against Asian bodies in reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic. By centering Asian/American affect and materiality – marginalized voices, narratives, and feelings of Asian/Americans as affective-performative texts, this essay attends to critique the historical continuum of racial discrimination against Asian/Americans (i.e., yellow peril) and advocate for social justice, equality, and inclusion in the U.S. Overall, I argue that Asian/American bodies are both physiologically and ideologically desensitized, dehumanized, and weaponized as the revival of yellow perils over the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, this essay highlights the possibility of adding affective and performative lenses in Critical Intercultural Communication research, exploring the politics of Asian/American bodies and the hate discourse as a case study for further academic conversations in Asian/American scholarship in Communication.

In February 2020, global media such as *CNN*, *Sky News*, and *The Mainichi* reported that several incidents involving anti-Asian sentiment and violence were linked to the emerging COVID-19 outbreak (Coronavirus, 2020; FOCUS, 2020; Guy, 2020). This outbreak has transformed into not only a physical but also an ideological pandemic, specifically in the forms of inter/trans-national racism, xenophobia, and macro-/micro-aggression against the Asian body. This includes but is not limited to ethnocentrism, homophobia, cisgender heterosexism, and ableism/healthism (Chu, 2020; Tessler et al., 2020). In response to this global pandemic, the U.S. community-based AAPI (Asian American Pacific Islander) civil rights organizations such as Asian Pacific Planning and Policy Council (A3PCON), Chinese for Affirmative Action (CAA), and the Asian American Studies Department at the San Francisco State University launched the *Stop AAPI Hate* reporting website and shared that they had received 9,081 reports of the discrimination against Asian/Americans as of June 30, 2021 since the launch of the website on March 19, 2020 (Yellow Horse et al., 2021). Importantly, those are the *only* reported cases of the discrimination against Asian/Americans.

In the contemporary U.S., former President Donald Trump continues to refer to coronavirus (COVID-19) as a *Chinese virus* online and in public speeches (Kurtzman, 2021). More recently, Trump referred to COVID-19 as *Kung Flu* at a presidential campaign rally in Tulsa, Oklahoma (Lee, 2020). These instances are arguably the most visible examples of how hate speech is normalized in public discourse, given the wide reach of President Trump's platform; not only does it demonstrate a hostility towards Asian/American individuals, but also suggests a national attack by Asian diaspora. Moreover, the immigration policy changes of the past and present continuously situate immigrants as the Other (e.g., the enemy who carries the virus) and the threat (e.g., reject immigrants for the national security, economy, and health) (Wingrove & Bloomberg, 2020). As the numbers of anti-Asian incidents are increasing (Yellow Horse et al., 2021), emerged framings of COVID-19 as *Chinese virus* and *Kung Flu* on public discourse lead to real-life consequences for Chinese and/or Asian/Americans.

There have been scholarly interventions regarding racism against Asian/Americans in areas such as law enforcement, immigration, citizenship, and historical representation in Western societies and history (Chen, 2000; Eguchi, 2013; Fong, 2002; Kawai, 2005; Lee, 2007; Lowe, 1996; Tuan, 1998). Thus, the discourse on anti-Asian/American identity is not a new subject of inquiry. However, the COVID-19 outbreak heightened the visibility of historically, socially, culturally, and politically constructed problematic representations and discursive practices of Asian/American identity that have always been existed, particularly in the U.S. Specifically, the hate discourse during the COVID-19 outbreak elucidates ideological and material pain from the Asian/American bodies.

The recent uptick in hate against Asian/Americans in the context of the COVID-19 provides rich resources to further interrogate the discourse of bodies: body politics and the circulation of affect. As the study of bodies had been a taken-for-granted subject and/or not thoroughly discussed until the 1980s (Butler, 2011; Calafell, 2020), continuous scholarly conversations of how bodies matter in our world are much needed. Specifically, this essay engages with Asian/American body politics and the COVID-19 outbreak as a case study to extend conversations on Asian/American bodies in the field of communication and cultural studies. Ahmed (2014) asserted that "We need to ... think more about what the materials are 'doing', how they work through emotions to generate effects" (p. 19). Here, critical and affective turns to body politics – in this case, the materiality of yellow peril – are imperative to further examine how Asian/Americans are living the everyday with the hate discourse in the present moment. Therefore, this essay focuses on what kind of hate is targeted toward and ascribed to Asian bodies; bodies which move between domains both private and public. Subsequently, I hope to bring exigent voices of Asian/American bodies to the fore as an essential act/work in Critical Intercultural Communication research.

The goal of this essay is to explore what kind of hate is produced against Asian bodies in reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, I study affective-performative practices of hate discourse over the pandemic by analyzing the reports compiled through the *Stop AAPI Hate* website. By affective-performative practices, I mean the online/social media platform as the performing space that "makes affect [of bodies] a visible and palpable materiality" through hateful reactions (del Río, 2008, p. 10). Given the coinciding timelines of the increase of the anti-Asian sentiment during the COVID-19 pandemic, anti-Asian reports – incidents and/or anecdotes reported by victims of hate on the website serve as discursive texts to evaluate the historical continuum and revivals of yellow perils and the discursive practices of imbalanced power relations in the U.S. racial formation. Overall, I argue that Asian/American bodies are physiologically and ideologically desensitized, dehumanized, and weaponized as the revival of yellow perils over the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to the Census Bureau, *Asian* is defined as "a person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam" (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2018). Here, I do not forget the complex and problematic definitions of *Asian* and *Asian American* as the U.S./Western-centric, simplistic, unified, and monolithic identity markers that are historically rooted in colonialism and imperialism (Eguchi, 2013; Nakayama, 2004; Sekimoto, 2014). These umbrella terms are often strategically deployed to liberal essentialism and multiculturalism which conceal meaningful cultural nuances and ethnic differences in the U.S. But simultaneously, pan-Asian constructions often gain minoritarian Asian ethnic (sub)groups' political agency within the social structures, where the geopolitical hegemony continuously perpetuates the dominant system of whiteness in and across the local/global context (Espiritu, 1992; Lowe, 1996).

Throughout the essay, I indicate both Asians and Asian Americans as *Asian/Americans* with the use of "/" (slash). Palumbo-Liu (1999) noted that a slash "instantiates a choice between two terms, their simultaneous and equal status, and an element of indecidability ... as it at once implies both exclusion and inclusion" (p. 1). This articulation of *indecidability* is important in studying Asian bodies because the racialization of Asian race does not distinguish Asians from Asian Americans or Asian Americans from Asians in everyday interactions in the U.S. (Kawai, 2005; Oh, 2020). Therefore, the use of slash symbolizes the inseparable relationships between Asians and Asian Americans and my inclusive approach to the categorization of Asians *and/or* Asian Americans in various geopolitical and sociocultural contexts (Palumbo-Liu, 1999).

In exploring the hate discourse in the U.S., I locate this essay in what Halualani and Nakayama (2010) defined as Critical Intercultural Communication studies which focuses on "issues of power, context, socio-economic relations and historical/structural forces as constituting and shaping culture and intercultural communication encounters" (p. 1). Simultaneously, I attend to what McIntosh and Eguchi (2020) underscored as the silence of the body in qualitative Intercultural Communication research. Through critiquing and problematizing the missing contexts of the body, they argued that a performative turn in Intercultural Communication research allowed us to centralize the body in scholarship. Thus, with a performative perspective in the Critical Intercultural framework, I stress the importance of considering "the body as a central site of meaning, making, and unmaking" (McIntosh & Eguchi, 2020, p. 398). In this vein, anti-Asian reports are the central body of knowledge to better understand the hate discourse in response to the pandemic. Consequently, this essay surfaces lived experiences of Asian/American people and their exigent voices, affect, and materiality into the critical scholarships of Communication.

In what follows, I briefly revisit the notion of yellow peril, the historical context of anti-Asian sentiment in the U.S. Subsequently, I conceptualize affect and its relationship with the theoretical frameworks of affective economy and performativity in this essay. Then, I introduce critical textual analysis as the method(ology) of this study, and my analysis follows. Lastly, I conclude this essay by discussing the implications on Asian/American affect and materiality in the context of U.S. hate discourse over the COVID-19 pandemic.

Yellow Peril: Historicizing Anti-Asian Sentiment in the U.S.

The idea of yellow peril has emerged and became popularized by Western societies in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Eguchi & Ding, 2017). As the term *yellow peril* explicitly indicates, it means the peril of the yellow race (Kawai, 2005). Specifically, yellow peril is a racial stereotype that generally refers to the West's fear of the yellow race. Because of the large population in East Asia, the potential economic power in China, and the rise of imperial power in Japan around the 1880s, the yellow race became a cultural, political, economic, and military threat to the White race in Western societies (Chen, 2000; Hsu, 2015; Kawai, 2005). In the U.S., increased Asian immigrants from the late 19th century sparked the fear of Asian invasion over the White race (Ono & Pham, 2009). For example, Asians are considered as *forever foreigners* (Tuan, 1998) or *inassimilable Others* who "would eventually overtake the nation and wreak social and economic havoc" (Fong, 2002, p. 189). The fear of being outnumbered and out powered invoked the threat to the stability of power and the dominance of Whites. As a material consequence, the early Asian immigrants were restricted to enter the U.S. through the legislature of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the Immigration Act of 1924 (Chen, 2000; Lee, 2007; Lowe, 1996).

Subsequently, the discourse of yellow peril was intensified by Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor which led the U.S. into World War II (WWII). During WWII, more than 110,000 Japanese Americans were incarcerated in concentration camps (Tuan, 1998). Even after WWII, the idea of yellow peril continued to frame Asians as the enemy with rapid economic growth and global competency. In addition to Asian immigrants, American citizens of Asian descent were targeted as the enemy and threat because, as aforementioned, the U.S. racialization does not recognize the distinction between Asians and Asian Americans. In contemporary U.S. society, the discourse of hate through yellow peril is still persistent. To name a few examples, in 1982, Vincent Chin who was a Chinese American was killed because he was misidentified as Japanese (Ono, 2004). This incident occurred in response to the rise of the Japanese automobile industry in the 1980s, economic pressure on American domestic automobile sales. In 1989, one Vietnamese and four Cambodian children were shot and killed at an elementary school because of the shooter's hatred towards Southeast Asians induced by the Vietnam War (Chen, 2000). These historical incidents exemplify the materiality of yellow peril, hate against Asian bodies in the U.S. racial formation.

Despite the continuous racism and hate crime against Asian/Americans in the U.S., exigent voices of Asian bodies have not been heard or discussed thoroughly in public discourses. On the note of hate crime against Asian bodies in the U.S., Chen (2000) asserted as follows:

there is widespread underreporting of hate crimes against Asian Americans ... Even when racially motivated incidents are reported to the police, law enforcement may still fail to classify the incident as a hate crime, sometimes deliberately to avoid further investigation and additional paperwork. (p. 75)

This assertion of the underreported hate crime situation illuminates how discursive practices of yellow peril are systematically institutionalized within the social structure. Furthermore, a Queens Congresswoman, Grace Meng expressed at the rally on April 3, 2021, responding to the anti-Asian hate crime in New York City, as follows:

So we [Asian/Americans] have been invisible for way too long. And now we come together to say that we are invisible no more. We are not going to take it anymore. We are gathered in solidarity within and with other communities, to say that we matter too. (Holtermann, 2021, para. 8)

As Meng spoke for the community at this rally, racism and hate crime against Asian/Americans (i.e., the materiality of yellow peril) have been invisible. Attending to the underreported situation and invisibility of hate against Asian/Americans, in this essay, I reiterate the importance of highlighting historical contexts of hate pertaining to Asian individuals in the U.S. Moreover, I connect the historical contexts of anti-Asian sentiment to the current discourse of hate against Asian individuals during the pandemic. Given the invisibility of yellow peril and historical continuum of violence, discrimination, and hate against Asian/American individuals in the U.S. (Chen, 2000; Hsu, 2015; Kawai, 2005; Lee, 2007; Lowe, 1996; Oh, 2020; Ono, 2004), I situate the ideological epidemic during the COVID-19 outbreak as the revival of yellow perils.

Affect, Affective Economy, and Performativity

I adopt the affective economy and performativity as theoretical and conceptual lenses to identify and critique discursive practices of hate that are produced, performed, and materialized through Asian individuals in public discourses. Importantly, I rely on Deleuze's (2004) explanation of the term *affectus* (literally translated as *affect* in Latin) to locate what I mean by affect in this essay. Deleuze (2004) defined *affectus* as "the continuous variation of someone's force of existing, insofar as this variation is determined by the ideas that s/he has" (p. 4). Therefore, *affect* in this essay, is about managing and navigating sensory intensities that increase or decrease our bodies' capacity and power to act in relation to other body politics and ideas.

Building on the idea of poststructuralism which understands that our bodies exist in the political world, scholars in affect studies have critiqued that there has not been enough discussion on the politics of bodies (Ahmed, 2014; Brennan, 2004). Simultaneously, contemporary scholarship has examined a political dimension to affect (i.e., the political power of affect), further complicating the conversations of affect (Clough, 2008; Glapka, 2019; Lara et al., 2017; Lechuga, 2017). For example, Glapka (2019) examined the complex relationships between affect, discourse, and power by analyzing the qualitative interview data, and showcased the discursive practices of affect and subjectivity that "the embodied becomes social and the social becomes embodied, what's personal turns out shared and what's collective is made one's own" (p. 616). Thus, Glapka (2019) not only explored *what* lived experiences were narrated but also *how* they were affected and embodied through the structures of power.

With emphasizing the political orientation to affect studies, I draw on Ahmed's (2014) theorization of hate as an affective economy. The concept of affective economy is a key lens that allows researchers to locate affect as the production of social and political circulation of objects, rather than habitually situated within subject/object relationships. Hate as an affective economy illuminates the circulation between objects and signs, as Ahmed (2014) elaborated as follows:

[E]motions do not positively inhabit *anybody* or *anything*, meaning that 'the subject' is simply one nodal point in the economy, rather than its origin and destination ... [An affective economy] suggests that the sideways and backwards movement of emotions such as hate is not contained within the contours of a subject ... affective economies are social and material, as well as psychic. (p. 46; emphasis in original)

This movement of affect elucidates how the circulation of hate materializes collective bodily senses of (un)belonging and othering of hated bodies (e.g., us and them; in here and out there). For example, as described through the love/hate relationality, hate is an intensive undesirable emotion to others as well as "unmak[ing] the world of the other" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 58). Simultaneously, hate creates the community of *we* who hate others while loving themselves. Thus, this relationship of love/hate demonstrates the political power of affect — circulation of affective economy. Here, I do not locate hate as an inherently subjective affect attached to particular individuals, rather, it considers how the circulation and movement of hate affects the individuals who are objected to hatred (Ahmed, 2014).

As Protevi (2009) illuminated, "affect is inherently political: bodies are part of an ecosocial matrix of other bodies, affecting them and being affected by them; affect is part of the basic constitution of bodies politic" (p. 50; see also, Lechuga, 2017). In this vein, making sense of how bodies move and think requires an extensive understanding of the political affect in-between an individual and group act. For example, Protevi (2009) analyzed how modern U.S. military training desensitizes the act of killing by desubjectivizing the individual self and dehumanizing the body of the enemy. Because the act of killing entails highly intensive emotions that may exceed the individual capacity to act, "individuals are entrained in an enraged or panicked collective agent without individuated self-consciousnesses or consideration of the social context" (Protevi, 2009, p. 47) to sustain the self (i.e., a desubjectified killer). Simultaneously, the act of killing requires dehumanized victims. Thus, in the context of hate discourse over COVID-19, the logic of political affect rationalizes the discursive practices of hate (i.e., intensive emotions) that are not only emerging out of rage but also out of entrainment which desensitizes the act of hate.

Drawing on Butler's (2011) theorization, I locate performativity as another theoretical and conceptual lens to discuss about affect and its performative practices. With stating that there is no such thing as the *pure* body and the body cannot be separated from the cultural and social interactions, structures, and systems (Butler, 2011), performativity must be understood as "the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names" (Butler, 2011, p. xii). This means performativity is about the power of discourse that materializes the cultural and social effects through signification and reiteration. Said differently, performativity produces and reinforces socially constructed and structured normative ideology by the repetition of norms.

Performativity showcases the subject's temporal ability to act within a specific cultural and societal context which allows me to unpack the materiality of political affect. As Butler (2011) noted, "repetition is not performed *by* a subject; this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject" (p. 60, emphasis in original). Therefore, I adopt performativity as a theoretical framework to guide my analysis of the temporal state of power in the text and to critique how this temporal power limits or controls capacities, abilities, and positions of specific bodies to (re)act. Here, it is crucial to underline that this repetition is not simply a reiteration of the same subject, object, or context. Rather, repetition is "a performative 'works' to the extent that *it draws on and covers over* the constitutive conventions by which it is mobilized" (Butler, 2011, p. 172, emphasis in original). Thus, I must not forget the historicity (i.e., accumulation and dissimulation) of the performative to make sense of the temporal bodily acts.

In this vein, Butler (2011) further suggested the possibility of performativity to create spaces for marginalized identities towards the future. More specifically, performativity "entails avenues for resistance and spaces of agency for marginalized groups struggling for identity/belonging" (Cisneros, 2012, p. 150). If performativity illuminates, produces, and reinforces the normativity, this framework can be applied in the non-normative contexts to challenge the marginalization of

non-normativities by claiming the normative venues for non-normative contexts. Therefore, performativity not only elucidates the power of discourse but also has the potential to destabilize the normativity. In this essay, performativity allows me to understand the *Stop AAPI Hate* website as a couterpublic space for Asian/Americans to resist and protest against the anti-Asian hate (Whiteley, 2018). Said differently, the *Stop AAPI Hate* website is a space for solidarity, a possibility for the Asian/American community to gain political agency by creating an avenue for voicing their experiences of hate.

Situating affective economy and performativity as theoretical and conceptual lenses, the materiality of affect can be examined through, for example, the language of hate discourse. Butler (2011) pointed out a crucial relationship between the materiality of the body and language that the use of language repeatedly fails to attempt to capture circumscription of the materiality of the body. Adding an affective turn to this point, the act of repetition lowers the intensity of emotions (i.e., desensitization and dehumanization) (Ahmed, 2014; Protevi, 2009). Therefore, affective-performative practices not only make discursive practices of affect visible but also guide me to explore what kind of hate is produced, performed, and materialized in a certain sociopolitical structure.

Critical Textual Analysis

With this critical engagement, I use critical textual analysis as a method(ology) to theorize affect and performativity in the context of COVID-19. As Fürsich (2009) explained, textual analysis is a useful analytic that guides researchers to read the studied objects "beyond the manifest content of media, focuses on the underlying ideological and cultural assumptions of the text" (p. 240). In addition, a critical perspective orients the analysis with specific focuses on imbalanced power relations and historical contexts within certain social structures (Halualani & Nakayama, 2010). Thus, critical textual analysis as a method(ology) allows me to closely read both affective and performative texts and bring today's lived experiences of racialized Asian/American individuals and their exigent voices, affect, and materiality into the critical scholarships of Communication.

Data is collected from the periodical reports uploaded to the *Stop AAPI Hate* website that are publicly available. Not only are the submitted reports transparent in terms of public accessibility, but the *Stop AAPI Hate* website includes both quantitative (e.g., the summative demographics of respondents such as race, ethnicity, gender, age, and language) and qualitative data in each report (e.g., the lived experiences and circumstances of the respondents). The qualitative data — the lived experiences of Asian/Americans — is examined from seven periodical reports that are uploaded between March 25, 2020 and March 16, 2021 (i.e., Week 1 Report, Week 2 Report, 1-Month Report, 3-Month Report, Anti-Chinese Rhetoric Tied to Racism Against Asian Americans, National Report, and 2020–2021 National Report). In total, there are 149 incidents featured as examples to demonstrate the types of discrimination that are notable at the time when each report was published.

A Close Reading of *Stop AAPI Hate* Reports

Through the analytical lenses described above, my close reading of the anti-Asian reports as affective-performative texts offers perspectives about what kind of hate is produced in reaction to this pandemic. Specifically, through the exploration of the anti-Asian tropes (i.e., yellow peril) in the COVID-19 discourse, affective-performative texts present how the temporal state of affect mirrors the historical continuum of the Asian/American stereotypes and materializes hate through the economy of circulation.

As a Critical Intercultural scholar originally from Japan, I am interested in the body politics of Asian/Americans in the U.S. In particular, my experience of *being Japanese* has shifted to *becoming Asian* once I entered the U.S. (Sekimoto, 2014). Because of this experience of *becoming Asian* in the U.S., I am driven to study the ways in which bodies are located within the flow of changes as cultures consistently shift. But simultaneously, I must be accountable for my own privilege and marginalization as a Japanese individual with a non-immigrant visa engaging with the U.S. cultural texts through this essay. My international and non-U.S. identity may fail to fully be reflexive in analyzing the U.S. contexts. Moreover, my Japanese identity already insinuates a historical, cultural, and political privilege and power in relation to the U.S. which I am inescapable from. Still, I believe my racialized positionality as Asian in the U.S. can be a location to critique the affective-performative texts of Asian/Americans and challenge the historical continuum of racism and racialization in the U.S.

To showcase my analysis, I present the following three themes: *Desensitized Ethnicities*, *Dehumanized Bodies*, and *Weaponized Bodies and Nations*. As affect circulates through performativity, it is important to note that these themes do not exist as completely separate entities. Rather, they exist in a circulation of affective-performative practices that often overlap with one another. Firstly, I present my reading of the theme, *Desensitized Ethnicities*.

Desensitized Ethnicities

Many of the anti-Asian reports illustrate the blame on China for the critical situations of the pandemic. In addition to the example of Trump's tweets about framing COVID-19 as a *Chinese virus* and *Kung Flu*, several reports signified China and Chinese people as the target of hate in the forms of racism, xenophobia, and microaggression. As an example, one report exemplifies the connection between Trump's political acts and material consequences against Asian bodies, as follows:

While I was trying to pick a bike at the dock station, the bike company employee who was changing the batteries on e-bikes yelled at me and said, "Spray that sh--" (meaning I needed to spray the bike with disinfectant after riding.) This employee went on and said, "The Chinese invented the virus and Donald Trump knows it." I'm Asian and was wearing a mask at the time of the incident. (Borja et al., 2020, p. 2)

This report demonstrates the hate discourse against Asian/American individuals that is attached to a specific location such as China. Moreover, Trump's political rhetoric of framing COVID-19 as *Chinese virus* has been engrained in our everyday life in the U.S. Importantly, while this respondent self-identified as *Asian*, the bike company employee referred to *the Chinese* in this conversation. Another report finds the political rhetoric of *Chinese virus* in the form of graffiti that, "While driving into my apartment complex, I noticed a sign in the entrance saying 'the China virus kills people' instead of the coronavirus" (STOP AAPI HATE, 2020a, p. 10). Graffiti is a specific form of embodied performance grounded in identities of the self and others, informed by cultural and sociohistorical contexts (Myllylä, 2018). Thus, this report informs the normalized discourse of framing COVID-19 as *Chinese virus* in the current cultural and sociohistorical context.

Additionally, many reports highlight that the Chinese culture of eating as a barbaric act. For example, "Owner, broker and real estate agent posted on Facebook a commentary associating coronavirus with Chinese. She included a photo showing dog meat in China and stated she was disgusted" (STOP AAPI HATE, 2020b, p. 11) and "Students from Colorado State University created a fake restaurant called 'Ching Chong House' featuring dishes like 'Mouse tail salad' and 'Crispy Burnt Pug- Delicious Deep-fried dog body' and many more racist and offensive comments. <https://www.instagram.com/chingchonghouse/?igshid=1rq4panrv058m>" (STOP AAPI HATE, 2020b, p. 11). As these examples characterize, the blaming of the nation, culture, and identity of China from the Western/U.S. gaze had framed them as "uncivilized, barbaric 'others' who bring with them dangerous, contagious diseases and an appetite for dogs, cats, and other animals outside the norms of Occidental diets" (Zhang, 2020, para. 2). In this vein, these reports illustrate the political rhetoric of China and Chinese people as culturally inferior Others to the West/U.S.

As demonstrated through the patterned reports of China-shaming, China is framed as dangerous, threatening, and barbaric Others to the U.S. — the target of hate. Another report adds more nuances to the relationality between the racialization of Asians and eating habits of the Chinese in the context of COVID-19, as follows:

Yesterday a teammate assumed I was Chinese even though I never said my race; all I said was 'that is racist, I'm American FYI' when the teammate called me Chinese. He got everyone else on his team to join in and harass me. I feel ashamed almost to be Asian in America. It hurts. I was being called a 'gook', being told 'China has the highest suicide rates, you should think about that)' or calling me 'ling ling' and saying I eat dogs and spread corona virus. (Jeung, 2020b, p. 3)

This report exemplifies the circulating trope of China and/or Chinese people as the barbaric Others across individual and societal levels. For example, a teammate assumed this respondent's racial/ethnic identity as Chinese and denied their American citizenship status. This is the materiality of hate that works to exclude certain bodies.

Looking further into the anti-Asian reports, a series of discriminatory experiences demonstrate that the material consequences of hate are not only directed towards Chinese individuals but also Asian bodies as a whole. For example, there were reports of verbal harassment: "I was harassed by [a] deaf white guy who can't stand me living in America. He asked me to pack up all clothes in suitcase and stated 'go back to China! Go! Go! F**k too many Asians in America'" (Jeung, 2020b, p. 2) and "three girls tapped my shoulder and made a face vomit motion and said 'Asian' and 'corona' to me. I decided to walk away and they shouted" (Jeung, 2020b, p. 2). Here, the former report referred to *China* but immediately after, *China* was mixed up with the term *Asians*. For the latter report, *corona* (coronavirus) was paired up with *Asian*. In these reported cases, the ethnicity of the hated subject becomes ambiguous. Another report narrated, as follows:

My Korean boyfriend was at a store when he passed by an employee who stated 'f—king Chinese people spreading the virus and wearing a mask.' My boyfriend confronts the employee and asks her to repeat what she just said and she repeats it. The manager steps in and my boyfriend tells manager what had happened. My boyfriend is angry, but not aggressive; manager asks him to leave or they'll call the cops. (Jeung & Nham, 2020, p. 9)

Similar to previous narratives above, this Korean man was blamed and harassed as Chinese. As this Korean man was asked to leave the store by the manager because he was seen as a Chinese man, it is apparent that the ethnic differences between Korean and Chinese are invisible, ambiguous, and desensitized. Similarly, another report demonstrates the problematic interchanging use between the terms such as *Chinese* and *Asian*, as follows:

My son (9-year old) was on a summer camp field trip to. [a pizza restaurant]. While there, a girl from his camp group told him that all Chinese people have the Coronavirus. She said that Asians brought the virus. Then, she proceeded to get the other kids to play a game called "corona touch" and said that he had the "corona touch." The constant insults ended up making him cry. The camp counselors stepped in at that point to stop her. (STOP AAPI HATE, 2020b, p. 9)

These narratives exemplify the problematic material condition of Asian identities and bodies that is situated within a simple and monolithic racialization of *Asian* through the Western/U.S.-centric categorization (Eguchi, 2013; Nakayama, 2004; Sekimoto, 2014). Asian ethnicities are desensitized in day-to-day interactions in the U.S.

Particularly these reports remind me of the aforementioned case of Vincent Chin in 1982. Chin who was a Chinese American man, was killed because he was mistakenly seen and identified as a Japanese man in Detroit, Michigan. The 1980s was the time when the American automotive industry gradually declined, and the Japanese automotive industry successfully prospered in the U.S. Because U.S. Americans feared that the Japanese will take over the U.S. economy, Chin was mistakenly killed in response to this anti-Japanese sentiment (Ono, 2004). Thus, this incident is also grounded in the desensitized Asian ethnicities within the U.S. racial discourse. Connecting with the historical context of the hate against Asian/Americans, the anti-Asian reports demonstrate that the materialized hate towards China and Chinese people at the macro-level (e.g., Trump's political rhetoric) have discursively translated to the hate towards Asians at the micro-level.

Dehumanized Bodies

With the rise of Twitter hashtags such as #ChinaVirus and #WuhanVirus (Vazquez, 2020) and Trump's continuous political statements about COVID-19 as *Chinese virus*, Chinese people and/or Asian/Americans have often been hyper-visible as a virus or a carrier of a virus since the COVID-19 outbreak. As a response to the dehumanization of Asian bodies in both physical and virtual spaces, Asians residing in France created the hashtag #JeNeSuisPasUnVirus (literally, I am not a virus) to combat hate discourse over the pandemic (Boyle, 2020).

This hashtag has been going viral not only in France, but also worldwide with a translation in English, #IamNotAVirus. In the U.S., the #IAMNOTAVIRUS campaign was established by Moses Farrow and Mike Keo with the hope to create a more inclusive and belonging space for the Asian/American community (Merchak, 2020). In this campaign, Asian/American individuals who have experienced anti-Asian racism during the COVID-19 pandemic express and share on their social media posts, starting with the statement "I am not a virus," followed by "I am X." For example, "I am not a virus. I am a student, a dog mom, and a future surgeon." –Soriya | USA | South Korea" (IamnotavirusI, 2020).

This #IAMNOTAVIRUS campaign elucidates the space for Asian/American individuals and communities to protest against the trope of yellow peril pertaining to the COVID-19 pandemic. Unsurprisingly, this trope of yellow peril – literally situating the Asian body as a virus or a carrier of a virus – is demonstrated through the anti-Asian reports as well. For instance, "I had worn a face mask on Bart to work. There are about five black African teenagers saying I have coronavirus and used their backpack to hit me" (Jeung, 2020b, p. 3). Like this report illustrates, the assumption of Asian bodies carrying a virus turned the discourse of hate into physical violence. Another respondent expressed, as follows:

We were having community circle in our grade 4 classroom. One of the students said "Kill the Chinese" in Spanish when it was his turn to speak. Many of the Spanish speaking children laughed. I asked to have what he said translated. I explained to the class that the statement was offensive and not part of our norms for community circle. (Jeung, 2020b, p. 2)

As the phrase *Kill the Chinese* was specifically spoken by one of the students, this report reveals how discursive practices of hate situate Chinese and/or Asian/Americans as the enemy who needs to be *killed* to prevent the spread of the virus. This narrative shows what Protevi (2009) denoted as the collective act of killing, desensitized subjectivity through a group of people laughing at the expression of killing. The act of killing (both verbal and physical) is a highly intensive emotion (Protevi, 2009). However, the phrase *Kill the Chinese* was verbally expressed as if it is the norm or accepted within the anti-Asian sentiment.

Another narrative illustrates the dehumanization of Asian bodies with racial and gender dynamics, as follows:

A white male customer in the derive [drive] through asked my ethnicity and assumed I had a Coronavirus. I asked if there was a problem, and he replied defensively "the virus came from China". As I got his drink from my partner, he shouted "don't touch top!" I assured him that we'd place a new lid on the cup and scanned his credit card. After I gave his card back, he wiped his hands and card in disgust as he had a disease. (Jeung, 2020b, p. 4)

This report explicitly articulates that a White male subject practicing the hate against an Asian/American individual, how whiteness plays a role in everyday life situations. As Nakayama and Krizek (1995) argued, whiteness "is constituted in everyday discourse and reinscribes its position on the social landscape" (p. 296). Because of this everydayness of whiteness, it strategically conceals and reinforces the historically constructed racial privileges and power of Whites such as colonialism, white supremacy, and colorblindness (Projansky & Ono, 1999). Unsurprisingly, many reports disclosed that respondents were discriminated against by White individuals.

To name a few examples, the following two narratives illustrate the dehumanization of Asian individuals by receiving racial slurs and being referred to as dirty and/or contagious:

A white man catcalled me, then aggressively followed me down the block, and got inches from my face and yelled "Ch*nk!" and "C*nt!" after realizing I was Asian. Lots of neighbors were standing outside their homes and no one intervened. (Jeung et al., 2021, p. 7)

Another narrative was:

I worked (I was laid off shortly after this incident) at a yoga studio and I was wearing a mask as a precautionary measure. I was washing my hands and these two white women kept staring at me and then proceeded to ask where their families should buy groceries because "us Chinese people have ruined Irvine" and how it was "ridiculous" that we still show up to yoga class and how we are "so dirty," etc. They were complaining about how Chinese people have infected Orange County and how their families have just moved here and it was a mistake to let us into their neighborhoods associating Asians with garbage. (Jeung, 2020b, p. 4)

Both cases showcase the entitlement of White individuals to evaluate and attack Asian/Americans. Here, the relationship between whiteness and hate discourse is also visible in Trump's political statements about the *Chinese virus* and *Kung Flu*. Budhwani and Sun (2020) argued that the rhetorical use of *Chinese virus* creates the COVID-19 related stigma that could incite "fear and increasing distrust of public health systems by Chinese and Asian Americans" (para. 13). Repetitively, I argue that it is crucial to underline the act of the former president of the U.S. literally referring to COVID-19 as *Chinese virus* and *Kung Flu* through his presidential comments perpetuates the stigma of fear and distrust against the Chinese and Asian/Americans (Budhwani & Sun, 2020).

Close readings of hateful actions as reported by *Stop AAPI Hate*, whiteness is persistent through dehumanizing Asian/American individuals. Martinot (2010) described whiteness as a social structure that "whiteness and white society can constitute themselves only by racializing, by dehumanizing and dominating other people they define as non-white for that purpose" (p. 66). In the context of the COVID-19 outbreak, the everydayness of strategic whiteness has been heightened in the form of hate discourse. This respondent expressed how they felt by literally articulating that they were *dehumanized*, as follows:

I was not seen by the employee at my local post office where I have been a regular customer for over 20 years. After patiently waiting as she pointed to others behind me for nearly 45 minutes, I approached the desk when she prompted me to take several steps backwards in a very hostile tone. She had not requested any of the prior customers that had gone ahead of me, and they were also all non-Asians. The sting of her racism and coldness towards me made me feel less than and frankly, dehumanized. (Jeung, 2020a, p. 5)

Thus far, all of the examples I have introduced above insinuate the work of whiteness which dehumanizes the Asian body as a virus or a carrier of the virus by racializing, dominating, and othering Asian/Americans in the historical continuation of the U.S. sociopolitical structure. But simultaneously, the growing use of hashtags such as *#JeNeSuisPasUnVirus* and *#IamNotAVirus* is an affective-performative act. I must acknowledge that this affective-performative act is a form of resistance against the heightened whiteness and the materiality of yellow peril, calling for a sense of Asian belonging in the world. Therefore, the hate discourse over the COVID-19 outbreak demonstrates the dehumanization of Asian bodies, but at the same time, (re)action to this hate discourse reveals the possibility for future positionality and belonging of Asian bodies in the U.S. and Western societies.

Weaponized Bodies and Nations

Elaborating on the explorations of desensitized and dehumanized Asian bodies, the last theme illuminates how bodies and nations have been politically weaponized in response to the COVID-19 outbreak at micro and macro levels. The theme, *Weaponized Bodies and Nations* indicates what Ahmed (2014) called "emotional intensities of love and hate" (p. 52). Love and

hate are intimately connected. Subsequently, I argue that this affective connection is what keeps the act of hate going to dehumanize and weaponize bodies in the contemporary U.S. Ahmed (2014) invoked that "hate sustains the object through its mode of attachment, in a way that has a similar dynamic to love, but with a different orientation" (p. 51). In this theorization, hate is an affective sign that detaches from certain bodies and circulates between subject and object. Then, the attachment of the affective sign of hate – which is not equivalent but similar to love – maintains the act. Thus, in this theme, I understand that the act of hate against Asian bodies is sustained and reinforced through the circulation of affective signs in public discourse. One respondent shared their narrative, as follows:

I got into the elevator (mask on) so I could get my mail from the lobby. The elevator opened on the 4th floor and this unmasked white woman yelled "OH HELL NO" when she saw me. The elevator door opened on the 1st floor and she gets out of the elevator and looks me up and down and goes, "You f**king Chinese people, you're not going to get away with this, we're going to get you." (STOP AAPI HATE, 2020b, p. 13)

As represented in this report, the use of *you* and *we* indicates the collective sense of people who are not Chinese (i.e., we) through the act of hate against Chinese/Asian people (i.e., you). Another report illustrates the maintenance of hate through the affective signs that, "Colleague of 4 years, who is the office bully yells at me, 'Hey, it's YOUR fault, it's YOUR people that brought this over here,' followed by demeaning laughter" (Jeung & Nham, 2020, p. 11). Word choices such as *YOUR people* and *over here* draw ideological and spatial borders of the collective sense of (un)belonging.

These exigent voices from the Asian/American individuals not only showcase the dehumanization of Asian bodies but also the weaponization of them. Said differently, Asian bodies are considered as not just the virus itself and/or a carrier of the virus, but also as a weapon that will kill people. For example, one report connects the relationship between the Asian/American body and its weaponization with COVID-19 that, "Young 'white' girl told her parents she was going to 'Die' (repeatedly) and her parents asked why? And she said of Coronavirus and pointed in my direction" (Jeung, 2020a, p. 6). In this situation, the respondent's Asian/American body itself is weaponized and directed as a threat to a non-Asian/American individual. Simultaneously, non-Asian/American individuals are also weaponized to justify their attacks towards Asian/American individuals through the act of hatred and violence. Another report further exemplifies that the weaponization is not only about an individual body but also a nation as a whole that, "One of my professors was talking about the public health response to COVID-19 and explicitly called it the 'China Virus' and that 'we've gotta be very careful about that country and what they'd do to us'" (Jeung et al., 2021, p. 10). In this vein, by framing COVID-19 as *China virus*, China as a nation became a weaponized enemy to the U.S. Thus, the theme of *Weaponized Bodies and Nations* elucidates a critical situation of bodies and nations through historical, cultural, political, ideological, and physiological tensions in everyday interactions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Reviewing desensitized and dehumanized experiences of Asian bodies in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, my analysis demonstrates how the current situation of hate against Asian/Americans is a historical continuum of racial discrimination: yellow peril. It is unfortunate, however, unsurprising to witness this revived yellow peril pandemic and how the hate is and has been naturalized through the circulation of affect. As I have mentioned at the beginning of this essay, anti-Asian/American discourse is not a new phenomenon in the U.S. racial history (Chen, 2000; Hsu, 2015; Kawai, 2005; Lowe, 1996). Racism and discrimination against Asian/Americans have always been existed, practiced, and embodied in our everyday life. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has made the correlation between the normalized discourse of hate and materiality of affect intensively visible through politically weaponizing and weaponized bodies.

In response to the public discourse of hate, many reports denote Asian bodies, particularly Chinese bodies as the *weapon* for/to/against the U.S. in forms of the act of killing, extinction, scapegoating, false accusation, and security – socially, culturally, and politically benefitting to maintain the structures of power and whiteness. One narrative exemplifies the intense stereotyping of China and Chinese people, as follows:

Roommate told me that the Chinese are filthy people who all deserve to die of COVID-19, and said it is no wonder all plagues spread from China. Said that the Chinese were selfish and horribly overpopulated, and they should have issued a 0-child policy so they could not proliferate. (Borja et al., 2020, p. 4)

This narrative indicates weaponized Chinese bodies as the threat, leading to characterize them as *filthy*, *selfish*, and *overpopulated* that spreads diseases, hence, need to be extinct. As closely reading the context of this verbal harassment report, the message quickly escalates from the Orientalist characterizations of Chinese people to the act of killing (e.g., the verbal attack of "[Chinese people] deserve to die"). For example, another respondent reported that, "I was walking my dog at night and a car swerved toward me on the sidewalk; two guys started shouting, 'Trump 2020, Die Chink Die'" (STOP AAPI HATE, 2020a, p. 10). Considering Trump's repetitive political messages about scapegoating Asian/Americans, China, and Chinese

people, this is the materiality of the normalized discourse of hate – the act of killing that is desensitized by dehumanizing and weaponizing Chinese people (Protevi, 2009).

Lastly, the report representing the discriminative experience on the online platform embodies the theme of *Weaponized Bodies and Nations* distinctly. For example, one of the narratives voiced that, "The person said: USA should blow out the China, by circulating his friend's post. He also commented: I feel like Trump should use nuclear to finish China" (Jeung, 2020b, p. 3). Specific word choices such as *blow out the China* and *use nuclear to finish China* in this report directly signify the weaponized nations of the U.S. and China. This narrative demonstrates the politically fueled anti-Chinese/China rhetoric and racism against Asian/Americans across the U.S. In this vein, China and Chinese people are politically weaponized for bolstering the U.S. nationalism through the hate discourse against China. More broadly, the Asian body and China as a nation are weaponized for the political benefits of the U.S. because the act of hatred against China circulates to desensitize and dehumanize the Asian body.

The theme of *Desensitized Ethnicities* insinuates how the political framing of COVID-19 as *Chinese virus* and *Kung Flu* turns to the violence against Asian/Americans. Simultaneously, a close reading of the anti-Asian reports reveals that the normalized hate discourse such as scapegoating and false accusations has specifically targeted towards China and Chinese people. As represented in *Dehumanized Bodies*, this normalized hate discourse marginalizes China, the Chinese, and/or Asian/American individuals as a virus or a carrier of a virus. Altogether, the anti-Asian reports excerpted as examples in the theme of *Weaponized Bodies and Nations* showcase that bodies and nations are politically weaponized to strengthen the national (in)security and perpetuate whiteness, working towards sterilizing *yellow perils* in the U.S.

Concluding Thoughts

My reading of the affective and performative text of Asian/American lived experiences and the U.S. hate discourse reinserts the historical continuum of racial discrimination against Asian/American bodies in the U.S. Specifically, Asian/American bodies are both physiologically and ideologically desensitized, dehumanized, and weaponized as the revival of yellow perils over the COVID-19 pandemic. With a critical approach to the discourse of hate, the exploration of affective-performative practices showcases the materiality of embodied Asian identities and bodies in jeopardy. By bringing today's lived experiences of Asian/American bodies and their exigent voices, affect, and materiality as the central production of knowledge, I decenter the dominant discourse and power of hatred that neutralize or normalize the discrimination against Asian bodies.

Despite the findings and contribution to Asian/American scholarship in Critical Intercultural Communication research, this essay has several limitations on its epistemological and methodological approaches. As a critical project, this essay lacks a careful and close consideration of the messy and complex systems, relationalities, and constructions of social institutions such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, and more. Moreover, the Asian body has not been the only target of the hate discourse during this pandemic. Rather, there are other racialized minority groups of people such as women, Black, indigenous, people of color, and LGBTQ who have been discriminated against inside and outside of the U.S. For example, there has been an increase in reported cases of discrimination against Black/African people in response to the pandemic in South Africa (Staunton et al., 2020). Most importantly, the COVID-19 pandemic is not over yet. This means this essay may leave out important shifts and transformations of the sociopolitical situations as they are rapidly and continuously changing.

Consequently, the possible direction in further exploring the hate discourse against Asian/Americans could be, for example, interviewing Asian/American individuals about how they negotiate their identities such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and class during the COVID-19 pandemic. Are there any differences between how Asian/Americans have experienced everyday racism, hatred, and violence before and after the beginning of the pandemic? How do Asian/Americans understand the idea of hate in the U.S.? How are they racialized as Asians in the U.S.? In-depth interviews focusing on the relationalities between the hate discourse and Asian/American identities would offer a rich qualitative context to better understand the current voices of Asian/Americans who have historically been marginalized, silenced, and strategically othered in the U.S.

I end this essay by reiterating the possibility of theorizing affect and performance in Critical Intercultural Communication research to advocate for a more inclusive and equal space for historically, culturally, and politically marginalized people (Ahmed, 2014; Calafell, 2020). In engaging with affect and performance, Critical Intercultural scholars must (re)centralize the body as a site of essential knowledge production and primal sensorial system of human interactions (Calafell, 2020; Cisneros, 2012; McIntosh & Eguchi, 2020). Therefore, I hope this essay contributes to affective and performative lenses in Critical Intercultural Communication research by exploring the politics of Asian/American bodies and the hate discourse during the pandemic as a case study for further academic conversations in Asian/American scholarship in Communication.

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Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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