

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Racism, the prejudices related to skin color, particularly with the broad division of mankind into white and non-white populations, is not something foreign in international relations.¹ At the heart of racism is the notion of white supremacy—the belief that white people are a superior race and hence, should rule over other races.² Racism has occurred since the 16th century and ever since, racism has created a schism in both the international and domestic system, manifested itself in slavery, immigration policies, and hate crimes. Although European colonialism and apartheid have officially ended and the 1964 Civil Rights Act has outlawed racial discrimination, the legacy of systemic racism toward people of color persists hitherto.³ Thus, making racism an important issue to be discussed in International Relations (IR).

The United States (hereinafter, the US) is ranked first as the most destined country for migrants.⁴ Officially, the US recognizes five major ethnic groups, which are White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian,

¹ Jayant Bandopadhyaya, “Racism and International Relations,” *Alternatives* 3, no. 1 (August 1977): 21, <https://doi.org/10.1177/030437547700300102>.

² Tilden J. Le Melle, “Race in International Relations,” *International Studies Perspectives* 10, no. 1 (2009): 77–83, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44218580>.

³ Jayant Bandopadhyaya, “Racism and International Relations,” *Alternatives* 3, no. 1 (August 1977): 21, <https://doi.org/10.1177/030437547700300102>.

⁴ “Top 25 Destinations of International Migrants,” *Migration Policy Institute*, July 22, 2021, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/top-25-destinations-international-migrants>. (accessed February 18, 2022).

and Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islanders. However, racial diversity is more often a curse than a blessing for American society. Although the 1776 US Declaration of Independence mentions that “...all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness...”,⁵ both the American government and citizens fail to realize this ideal, particularly to the minority groups. White Americans enjoy more privilege than other ethnic groups regarding employment, educational attainment, healthcare services, criminal procedures, etc.⁶ Minority groups used to experience brutal slavery in the past and to this date, they are still experiencing discrimination, racism, and hate crimes. In the present, race relations have evolved as a result of the Civil Rights Movement. However, the old pattern keeps repeating wherein as the pandemic or economic or political crisis emerges, the scapegoating of minority groups, racial violence, and xenophobia follow correspondingly⁷—like what is currently happening to the Asian American and Pacific Islanders (hereinafter, the AAPI) community.

The AAPI community is one of the fastest-growing ethnic groups in the US, which consists of immigrants migrating from the Far East and Pacific countries such as China, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, India, Hawaii,

⁵ “Declaration of Independence: A Transcription,” *National Archives and Records Administration*, n.d, <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>. (accessed February 18, 2022).

⁶ Nicholas Rohde and Ross Guest, “Multidimensional Racial Inequality in the United States,” *Social Indicators Research* 114, no. 2 (October 5, 2012): 591-605, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24720265>.

⁷ Jonathan A. Greenblatt, “Fighting Hate in the Era of Coronavirus.” *Horizons: Journal of International Relations and Sustainable Development*, no. 17 (2020): 208–21, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48590574>.

Guam, etc. In 2020, the AAPI community made up 7.2% of the US population (24 million people).⁸ Chinese Americans made up the majority of Asian Americans (24% or 5.4 million people), followed by Indian Americans (21% or 4.6 million people) and Filipinos (19% or 4.2 million people) in 2019.⁹ The huge wave of AAPI first migrated to the US between 1838–1917 in search of economic opportunities and political freedom. They worked as indentured laborers or coolies, and consequently, they were perceived as cheap laborers of inferior races who devalued wages and stole Americans' jobs—birthing anti-Asian sentiments.¹⁰ Despite their contribution to the American economy and society, the AAPI community is still struggling in order to be fully accepted as “Americans” and not “outsiders” even until this current pandemic—questioning their identity within American society.

The unprecedented outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in late 2019 in Wuhan, China, has put the world in a grave tribulation with the global health and economic crisis it entails. Nevertheless, the pandemic is also seen as a beacon of hope for countries to set aside their resentment towards each other and instead, cooperate multilaterally to tackle the pressing health and economic crisis.

⁸ Nicholas Jones, Rachel Marks, and Roberto Ramirez, “2020 Census Illuminates Racial and Ethnic Composition of the Country,” *United States Census Bureau*, August 12, 2021, <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2021/08/improved-race-ethnicity-measures-reveal-united-states-population-much-more-multiracial.html#:~:text=The%20White%20and%20Black%20or,people%2C%20a%20230%25%20change>. (accessed February 18, 2022).

⁹ Abby Budiman and Neil G. Ruiz, “Key Facts about Asian Americans, a Diverse and Growing Population,” *Pew Research Center*, February 16, 2022, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/04/29/key-facts-about-asian-americans/>. (accessed February 18, 2022).

¹⁰ Erika Lee, *The Making of Asian America: A History* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015), 41.

Unfortunately, this ideal did not seem to happen just yet as in the early outbreak of the pandemic, the US and China, the long-standing rivals in international relations, were playing the blame game as they accused each other of spreading the virus. Donald John Trump (hereinafter, Trump) blamed China for the pandemic by actively promoting the lab leak theory—a theory that the coronavirus is leaked from the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV).¹¹ Trump also criticized China for suppressing information and mishandling the early outbreak of the virus to the point that he urged world leaders to hold the Chinese government accountable.¹² Responding to Trump’s accusation, China retaliated by claiming that the US army brought the virus to China.¹³ Subsequently, Trump racialized the virus by calling the coronavirus “Chinese virus,” “Wuhan virus,” and “Kung flu” to win this blame game and emphasized that the virus came from China. At the societal level, the two contrasting narratives over the origin of the virus, as well as Trump’s racist remarks, have far-reaching consequences for the AAPI community.¹⁴

The pandemic witnessed a dramatic increase in Asian hate crime by 149% in the 16 largest US cities in 2020.¹⁵ The AAPI community became the victims of

¹¹ Jacques deLisle, “When Rivalry Goes Viral: Covid-19, U.S.-China Relations, and East Asia,” *Foreign Policy Research Institute* 65, no. 1 (November 2021): 46–74, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orbis.2020.11.003>.

¹² “President Trump on China: Putting America First,” *National Archives and Records Administration*, November 2, 2020, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/president-trump-china-putting-america-first/>. (accessed February 18, 2022).

¹³ Dali L. Yang, “The COVID-19 Pandemic and the Estrangement of US-China Relations,” *Asian Perspective* 45 (2020): 7-31. <https://doi.org/10.1353/apr.0.0001>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ “Anti-Asian Hate Crime Reported to Police in America’s Largest Cities: 2019 & 2020,” *Center for the Study of Hate & Extremism*, 2021, <https://www.csusb.edu/sites/default/files/FACT%20SHEET-%20Anti-Asian%20Hate%202020%20rev%203.21.21.pdf> (accessed February 18, 2022).

racist attacks as they were brutally harassed, both physically and verbally, threatened, got yelled at with racist slurs, and their property was also vandalized.¹⁶ Consequently, the AAPI community had to live under immense fear, trauma, anxiety, and pain due to the bias and prejudices against them. Such prejudices inevitably affected Asian businesses as well, wherein according to a survey conducted by the Asian/Pacific Islander American Chamber of Commerce and Entrepreneurship (ACE), 85% of Asian small business owners reported that the pandemic negatively impacted their businesses and 38% of their businesses' revenue also decreased by 25%-75%.¹⁷ As the Asian hate crime had critically impacted the psychological and economic well-being of the AAPI community, there is an even greater urgency to address racism and xenophobia more seriously in order to protect the human rights of people of color and maintain peaceful race relations within the US' multiracial society.

From an individual level of analysis, A leader's ideas of other countries determine his/ her administration's foreign policy toward the said country, which have profound consequences at international and societal levels. To put it another way, leaders are the central strategic actors in the two-level game that connects domestic politics and international bargaining.¹⁸ Trump is well known as a vocal

¹⁶ "Combating Hate Crimes Against Asian American and Pacific Islander Communities," *COPS Office*, April 2021, https://cops.usdoj.gov/html/dispatch/04-2021/asian_hate_crimes.html. (accessed August 1, 2022).

¹⁷ "AAPI Businesses and COVID-19," *Asian / Pacific Islander American Chamber of Commerce and Entrepreneurship*, 2020, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f03fd142e430f23993da413/t/601ddf6f7028a91d4f0e3756/612570485148/Nat+ACE+PDF+SURVEY.pdf> (accessed August 1, 2022).

¹⁸ Margaret G. Hermann and Joe D. Hagan, "International Decision Making: Leadership Matters," *Foreign Policy*, no. 110 (1998): 126-129, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1149281>.

critic of China as he perceives that China's foreign and domestic policy conduct is threatening America's economic and political way of life.¹⁹ The pandemic has evidently further deteriorated US-China already deteriorating relationship as Trump perceives that China caused the virus and thus, should be held accountable for the current health and economic turmoil. Trump's idea that China caused the virus, which translates into his racist remarks, is believed to be the fire that fueled the Asian hate crime as people now believe that Asians are carrying the virus. Hence, it can be argued that Trump's decision to label the virus with such derogatory terms is determined by his ideas of China, which are heavily shaped by the intensifying US-China competition and even conflict during his presidency. Therefore, this research is interested in **“Analyzing the Rising Asian Hate Crime during Donald Trump's Presidency.”**

1.2 Research Question

This thesis will focus on the US former president, Donald John Trump, particularly on his ideas of China and how his ideas of China that are manifested in his speeches, tweets, and policies fuel the Asian hate crime. Although Asian hate crime is still happening, this thesis will just focus on the phenomenon under Trump's administration (2021). Thus, I suggest the following research question to be answered comprehensively in the thesis:

How does Donald Trump's ideas of China fuel the Asian hate crime?

¹⁹ “President Trump on China: Putting America First,” *National Archives and Records Administration*, November 2, 2020, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/president-trump-china-putting-america-first/>. (accessed August 3, 2022).

1.3 Research Objective

Based on the aforementioned research question, the objective of this research is:

To explain the process of how a leader's ideas of other countries shape the intersubjective understanding of the people at the societal level and influence the people's actions.

1.4 Research Significance

This research will elucidate the correlation between Trump's ideas of China and the rising Asian hate crime, helping us to better understand how a leader's ideas of other countries affect people-to-people relations at the societal level. Understanding Trump's ideas of China is inseparable from the dynamics of US-China relations before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, this research will also help us to better understand the impacts of the pandemic on US-China bilateral relations.

Moreover, this research will explain the factors leading to the rising Asian hate crime, which hopefully may be a reference for policymakers to take the best measures to tackle the Asian hate crime. This research will also help people to understand the socio-political impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in detail. Ultimately, I expect that this research may raise awareness regarding the importance of tolerance to ensure racial harmony within a pluralistic society.

1.5 Structure of Writing

This research is divided into five chapters. The first chapter, Introduction, introduces the topic of this research as well as its urgency. The research question, objective, and significance are also determined to guide the discussion for the subsequent chapters.

The second chapter, Theoretical Framework, is composed of two major parts, namely Literature Review and Theory and Concept, that serve as the foundation for this research. The Literature Review is divided into three categories, which provide a rudimentary understanding of the topic: (1.) Understanding Donald Trump as a Decision Maker, (2) Pre-COVID US-China Relations under Trump's Administration, and (3) The History of Racism and Hate Crimes towards Asian Americans in the US. Furthermore, the second chapter also elaborates on one IR theory and five concepts that will help to analyse the findings of this research and ultimately, answer the research question.

The third chapter, Methodology, explains how this research will be conducted by describing the research approach, research method, data collection technique, and data gathering technique.

The fourth chapter, Analysis, is the most important part of this research as it systematically presents all the relevant data that has been gathered in order to answer the research question comprehensively in accordance with the theory and concepts.

The fifth and last chapter, Conclusion and Recommendation, concludes the findings of the research succinctly while asserting the main arguments from the

findings. Additionally, the fifth chapter provides recommendations for future research.

