

Revealing The Patterns of Xenophobia Driven by The COVID-19 Pandemic



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Group Number: S2025903047

Supervisor: Prem Poddar

Group Members

Abigail Teso Janketic - 65863

Gwenaëlle Marine Joubert- 65872

Hümeyra Gülsüm Çelik - 69581

Mert Yılmaz - 67527

Sena Akyıldız - 67564

Abstract

With COVID-19 becoming a pandemic plaguing the world, this project seeks to uncover the xenophobic behaviors it has brought forth among the Chinese and Westerners against each other. Since the origin of the virus was in China, it may have been assumed that xenophobic behaviors would have remained directed only towards the Chinese, however, in time it has appeared that the Chinese have developed a similar attitude towards Westerners. This paper has attempted to answer the following problem formulation “How do Chinese and western xenophobic rhetorics, triggered by COVID-19, differ from each other and what are they driven by?”. In order to conduct this project, news articles and a survey were at the center of the data collection in support of the problem formulation, and the analysis of said data was guided by the fitting theories. It is concluded that Westerners demonstrated severe xenophobic behaviours through verbal and physical assault due to their intense feelings of fear and threat of contagion. These were fueled by pre-existing bias and prejudice directed towards the Chinese and their cultural habits. With the decrease in the number of cases in China and the country's reinstatement, the Chinese developed xenophobic behaviors towards Westerners, though not in the form of physical attacks, but mainly verbal and through the restriction of Westerners free travel in public places. These actions were driven by the distrust that Chinese citizens felt towards Westerners in regard to respecting health restrictions and norms.

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Introduction

Many health-related outbreaks that have been encountered throughout history have caused serious consequences all around the world. Epidemics, which primarily affect a limited population in specific countries, may later develop into pandemics due to a greater spread, and threaten the well-being of millions of people. COVID-19, also known as Coronavirus, is an infectious respiratory disease that has been spreading all over the world since late 2019 and has gained *pandemic* status as recently as February 2020 (Malik, 2020). Coronaviruses - a group of RNA viruses - which have first been discovered in the 1960s, have different biological kinds such as SARS and MERS, that have as well affected the global population in the last century (Kahn et al., 2005). The most recent type, COVID-19, which first appeared in Wuhan China, has been causing a great number of deaths due to its high rates of infection. The spread of COVID-19 has also arguably negatively affected the psyche of many individuals as well as their interactions with others. Similarly, it has created a strain on many societies and in particular certain ethnicities.

Within the first few months of 2020, COVID-19 has reportedly caused an increase in xenophobic behavior and actions throughout the world, as the pandemic started spreading from a specific geographic location to others. Xenophobia is defined as the feeling of fear of what is foreign and unknown (Makgopa, 2013). As early as the 26th of January the French newspaper *Le Courrier Picard* featured an East Asian woman wearing a mask on its front page with the headline "Yellow Alert" (Boyle, 2020). COVID-19 has also been associated with names such as the Wuhan virus, the Chinese virus, and Yellow Peril, addressing its origin in China and at the same time ostracizing the Chinese population. Various news outlets have showcased several cases of people all over Europe shouting xenophobic remarks and in some cases even resorting to physical violence towards anyone who was 'assumed' to be Chinese. In many cases the victims of these xenophobic attacks were Filipino, Thai, or other East Asian descent, and most of them were legal citizens of the country they were being discriminated in. In the months between February and May 2020, discriminating behaviors due to xenophobia have started occurring more and in even more drastic ways in the USA, as the number of COVID-19 cases has been increasing rapidly. These types of xenophobic reactions towards a certain group of people are however nothing new in human history - 1892

typhus fever and cholera in New York City blamed on Jewish immigrants and since the 1980's HIV and AIDS blamed categorically on homosexuals (Gorman, 2012). One thing that seems to be different in the case of COVID-19, is the shift of the epicenter of the xenophobic fear of only East Asians towards other groups as well. Since the number of infections in China has started to drop in mid-April, people have slowly started to return to a slightly more normal life in the country. While throughout the rest of the world infection rates have been consistently increasing, xenophobia towards Westerners, and consequently foreigners in general, has started to appear in China. Even though there have not yet been any cases of physical violence, Westerners living in China have started to experience cases of people avoiding them in public and in more extreme cases being prohibited from entering various public places (Davis, 2020). On social media people have expressed the opinion that if there was to be a rise in cases of the virus, it would be because of foreigners in the country (Kuo & Davidson, 2020). According to *The Telegraph*, hotels, supermarkets, restaurants and other facilities have denied entrance to foreigners in China and others have had their visas canceled and re-entry into China barred (Yan, 2020). Moreover, strangers who were being shouted at by Chinese citizens in public places were sometimes scolded as "foreign trash" based on a report by *The Guardian* (Kuo & Davidson, 2020). Xenophobic behaviors have also been spreading through social media platforms. To give an example, stories of foreigners exhibiting inappropriate behavior started circulating on various Chinese internet platforms, which have arguably caused an increase in xenophobia (Linder, 2020). There have not been many examples in history of xenophobia - fueled by the same phenomenon - that has changed direction from the victimized to the victimizers.

This project will seek to understand how the xenophobia that arose due to COVID-19, which was primarily directed against Chinese and East Asians, has spread from one category of people towards another (Westerners and foreigners in China).

Problem formulation and Research Questions

How do Chinese and western xenophobic rhetorics, triggered by COVID-19, differ from each other and what are they driven by?

Sub Questions

- How does xenophobia appear in the past epidemics?
- How does fear of the COVID-19 affect both Chinese' and Westerners' attitudes?

Problem Area

For many years, xenophobia has been a phenomenon in many societies. The causes and the direction of it showed variations depending on the context. What has not changed as much has been the prevalence of unpleasant xenophobic and discriminatory attitudes towards those who are seen as the 'others' - foreigners, immigrants, refugees, minorities.

The center of this paper is the wave of xenophobic behaviors that have arisen due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The outbreak of the virus posed new challenges and more importantly new threats to societies. Because of the way the virus disseminates, individuals self-evidently became more cautious towards each other. However, the most noticeable observation is at the societal level, in which people started to show ambivalent fear (xenophobic attitudes) towards others.

The outbreak of COVID-19 differs from previous coronavirus related cases (SARS and MERS) and other global pandemics. It is not yet that clear why this particular case caused greater cases of xenophobia, whether due to the accelerating pace of spreading of the infection and/or quick globalization of the problem etc.. However, what is striking is the appearance and the development of xenophobic cases vis a vis the appearance and the development of the pandemic itself. When the virus was recognized to originate in China, discriminatory attitudes towards Chinese people and East Asians, in general, began to flare up in Europe.

As the virus started to affect the whole globe, with it so did prejudice and xenophobia towards those who were seen as the source of the pandemic. As the severity of the situation in China subsided and the number of cases declined, xenophobia began to embody any pre-existing discriminatory attitudes the Chinese had against Westerners. From there onwards, Chinese people became more xenophobic towards Westerners, all of this in fear that they could be the cause of a second wave of the pandemic in China.

It was not only the outbreak but also the change in the threat perception that showed a strong emergence and growth of xenophobia. What was once only xenophobia against East Asians by the Westerners spread into xenophobia against Westerners by the Chinese people.

Concepts

This section will present the concepts that are necessary for explaining our matter of inquiry, namely the COVID-19 pandemic and the xenophobia that has emerged from it. Self-evidently, the main concept will be xenophobia, along with prejudice and ethnocentrism, both notions that go hand in hand with the first one. Below, we will provide brief definitions of these concepts and further elaborate on their relevance to our topic.

Prejudice

The literature on the exact correlation between prejudice and xenophobia lacks research and evidence to put forth a causal relationship between the two. Prejudice has been researched at the individual and the group level in many aspects. The paper will examine how prejudice on a group/social level can be more meaningful within the framework of xenophobia related to COVID-19.

As a powerful concept, it enables people to act in a way that emphasizes an image of the 'other'. Individuals of a certain group prevent themselves from being associated with the image of the other group (outgroup), so that they can realize themselves with the images of their group (ingroup) (Sniderman et al, 2007). It can be inferred that societies instrumentalize prejudice as a way of differentiating themselves. However, this may not always be an innocent action. Prejudice can even lead to biased and discriminatory behaviours.

Most similarly prejudice within the framework of migration has been problematized by some. The explanation of intergroup prejudice will be discussed and elaborated through the Intergroup bias theory. It is stated, "threat perceptions refer to the anticipation of negative consequences related to the arrival and presence of immigrants in a country (Riek et al., 2006; Scheepers et al., 2002; Sears & Funk, 1990; Sniderman et al., 2004; Stephan & Renfro, 2002)". Taking the competition over scarce resources between groups in a country into account, it was claimed that perceptions of such competition denote material threat (Esses et al., 2001; Quillian, 1995; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Although the causal relationship is not available in the literature, humans treat health as a resource not only individuals but also societies try to protect. Therefore, as the threat perception, that the societies perceive against

their health, changes, so does the prejudice and the discriminating behaviour against others, who are perceived to be not healthy only because of their ethnicity or nationality.

What follows will be two more concepts to make more sense of the case, the section discusses another of the concepts present in the case, ethnocentrism and xenophobia.

Ethnocentrism

The term ethnocentrism was coined by William Graham and it means that one specific group is the center of everything. Ethnocentrism is a very common concept when talking about xenophobia since it puts a specific group of people in the center of attention, for bad reasons (Bennett, 2013). Ethnocentrism is closely associated with xenophobia, as our ancestors used xenophobia to push away possible stronger groups while maintaining the centrality of their own (ethnocentrism). This concept is also very useful in understanding how communication and relations function within a specific group.

The primary mechanism of ethnocentrism is perceptual (Bennett, 2013). If an individual is part of a specific group, this group will provide him some specific distinctions. In this kind of ethnocentrism, there are two implications. The first one is that a group may be seen and perceived by other groups or not at all. The second implication is that people may fail to attribute equal humanity to others (Bennett, 2013).

The second kind of ethnocentrism is as a defense. This comes to be when a member of a dominant and 'stronger' group is oppressing another group, to the point of imposing them another culture, which is not the one they had at the beginning.

The last kind of ethnocentrism is minimization. This subtlest form of ethnocentrism is when a cultural difference is minimized in favor of stressing human similarity and common experience (Bennett, 2013). This kind of minimization appears to be the solution to ethnocentrism since it removes many of the expressions of denial and defense.

Xenophobia

Xenophobia as a word is rooted in Greek through the combination of two words, *xenos*, meaning ‘foreigner’ or ‘stranger’, and *phobos*, meaning ‘fear’ (Makgopa, 2013). It often refers to the feeling of fear towards foreigners, but not any foreigner in the world. Instead, it is emphasized in the literature that xenophobia emerges with the presence of foreigners in a relevant context, namely their visibility is necessary. “[foreigners refer to] people significantly different from oneself, usually in the context of visibly differentiated minorities” (Akinola, 2018, p. 126). It can be inferred that the fear/feeling is not a permanent one directed against all foreigners, but to the ones who are contextually visible. Therefore, it can be claimed that xenophobia is not static, but a dynamic concept, which defines itself contextually.

Another aspect of the definition and understanding of xenophobia as a concept is how it can be used to define ingroups and outgroups, as in the case of the aforementioned concept of prejudice. Societies, engaging in xenophobic attitudes, do not basically (and only) intend to perpetuate hostility against others, but they are defining and, in a sense, actualizing their sense of self (Tajfel and Turner, 1986; Makgopa, 2013). This aspect has been discussed in studies regarding Intergroup bias theory, which focuses on the differences between ingroup and outgroup and the impacts they have on each other. By arguing that the “group attachment is always depicted by a commitment to social identity and social comparison” (Makgopa, 2013) it is possible to point out the connection between xenophobia, nationalism, ethnocentrism, and patriotism.

By defining xenophobia as “..a strong and unreasonable dislike or fear of people from other countries.”, Sinclair (2006), problematizes that it is an unreasonable feeling, which is directed towards a certain group only because that group is a stranger to the ingroup. This concept is mainly used by social scientists to explain the perceptions/feelings of societies towards immigrants, refugees, and other minorities (Oksana, 2009). Observably, this feeling is characterized as a negative attitude. Which groups are affected by this feeling varies from country to country (Warner et al, 2003).

The case of South Africa has been widely discussed in the literature as a salient example. Most of the cases, defined as xenophobic in the media, are committed against black immigrants and refugees from other African countries (Warner et al, 2003). It is claimed that this xenophobic attitude is caused by competition over scarce resources. As a ramification of that, the stereotype that immigrants deprive the South Africans of their jobs, still prevails (Warner et al, 2003).

The COVID-19 pandemic has as well brought forth xenophobic attitudes as reported by numerous news articles. It is an interesting phenomenon to observe and analyze the relevance/connection of xenophobia with this pandemic. The hostile/xenophobic actions of Westerners against people of East Asian descent and the following ones of Chinese national towards Westerners, as presented in this paper, are proven to be typical examples of xenophobia. However, what is more interesting to observe is that this xenophobia is already dynamic even within this specific case itself. In the beginning Chinese individuals (or even anyone who resembled them) were perceived to be a threat. Following the improvement of the situation in China, Westerners started being perceived as a threat. The change in the threat perception did not put an end to the xenophobic attitudes against Chinese and started a new one against Westerners, instead, the two cases became relevant simultaneously.

Background and Context

This section will be divided into three parts. The first will be a historical background of past pandemics/diseases and how xenophobia has manifested through those. The section will be structured chronologically from the oldest to the most recent pandemic/disease. What will follow will be a similar historical background of what Coronaviruses are and the different types that are best known by the public. This section will conclude with an outline of six of the most relevant news articles that regard the topic of COVID-19 related xenophobia, three from the western side, and three from the Chinese.

Historical Background - Xenophobia

The oldest pandemic on which it is possible to find substantial information is the Spanish flu. It was called this way because wartime censors minimized reports of the illness while the Spanish press did not (Brown, 2020). It is a disease that took place in 1918 and it was the deadliest pandemic in history. It is recorded that there have been about 500 million infected by this virus and it is estimated that the amount of deaths varies between twenty to fifty million people (Parmet & Rothstein, 2018). It is difficult to find any kind of testimony about xenophobia towards Spanish people during this pandemic. Nonetheless, the article “The 1918 Influenza Pandemic: lessons learned and not” it is stated that “giving a disease the name of a foreign or minority community is closely related to the desire to wall off those who are viewed as threats or contagion” (Parmet & Rothstein, 2018). It is interesting to see this quote which explains that giving a disease the name of people’s nationality can bring xenophobia and fear towards those people, as has been reported during the COVID-19 pandemic which by many is being called the Wuhan virus or the Chinese virus.

One of the most infamous global epidemics in history is the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) which can develop into the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). The disease first appeared in the 60s spread from Africa to Haiti and the Caribbean when Haitian professionals in the colonial Democratic Republic of Congo returned home (History.com Editors, 2017). The virus then moved from the Caribbean to New York City around 1970 and then to San Francisco later in the decade (History.com Editors, 2017). At first, the virus was

associated with homosexuals. In fact, because the disease appeared to affect mostly homosexual men, officials initially called it gay-related immune deficiency, or GRID (History.com Editors, 2017). The disease was not curable when the pandemic exploded; and to this day there is still no official final cure. It is possible to talk about xenophobia in this case because of the high stigma and belief in the population that homosexuals were mostly the ones who were carrying it which led to a great rise in homophobia and xenophobia towards this group of people. This was highly reinforced by the disinformation circulating on how the virus could be transmitted. People went to the extreme of believing it could be transmitted by a simple touch, thus ostracizing an entire category of people.

The last disease which will be mentioned in this historical background is the more recent Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). This virus was identified in 2003 and has hit twenty-eight different countries in the world and infected more than 8000 people. During the pandemic, the East Asian community was being accused of bringing the virus, due to its origin in being traced back to China. This led to xenophobic behaviors towards this population, in a very similar manner to what is going on nowadays with COVID-19. In the article “Chinese Canadians denounce rising xenophobia tied to coronavirus” written by Jillian Kestler-D’amours, it is stated that “they ranged from people harassing other commuters on the bus or subway, crossing the street when someone of a particular ethnic group was walking by, or leaving hateful messages at places serving the Chinese community”.

Historical Background - Coronavirus

Coronavirus [*Coronaviridae*]

Coronaviruses are a group of viruses that have significant health impacts on human and animal well-being. These viruses are known to cause enteric or respiratory diseases and are considered to be severely dangerous for human life. If they are spread from animals to humans, the viruses have reported causing severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) in humans, which are types of coronavirus diseases (Wilde et al. 2017). In addition to SARS and MERS, the latest coronavirus that has emerged is also known as the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2

(SARS-CoV-2), which came up in late 2019 in Wuhan, China and is more commonly known as COVID-19.

In the 1960s, coronaviruses were identified as human pathogens for the first time. Vertebrates and humans are known to be potential carriers of coronaviruses. The main symptoms are usually known to consist of respiratory or gastrointestinal infections, while further symptoms may also show similarities to the common cold, with the possibility of also causing more serious lower respiratory infections such as pneumonia (Caringly yours, 2020).

Severe acute respiratory syndrome [*SARS*]

Severe acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) is an infectious respiratory disease that has first appeared in the early 2000s, causing severe acute respiratory malfunctions. It first appeared in southern China in November 2002, while leading to the death of over 750 people in twenty-eight countries in less than two years. 2004 was reportedly the end of the SARS outbreak, and the virus has never appeared afterward. By the end of 2017, Chinese scientists tracked the SARS virus from civets to cave-dwelling horseshoe bats in the Yunnan province in China, with the hopes of uncovering the trail of the spread (McKie, 2017).

The Middle East Respiratory Syndrome [*MERS*]

The Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS) is another coronavirus disease that impacts the respiratory systems of humans. Even though MERS causes respiratory disease, symptoms may range from mild to moderate, not always leading to death.

The first case of MERS was reported in 2012 in the Middle East, while later on spreading within the region, more specifically in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Yemen, as they have contained the majority of the cases at the time. Even though the spread has mainly affected Middle Eastern countries, MERS cases have also been found in some of the major European cities, due to people traveling from the Middle East. MERS did not spread to the Northern American region to a significant extent, as there have only been a few cases identified in the United States. In total 2519 cases have been reported and 866 of these cases were fatal. Furthermore, the virus has also been found in camels (John Hopkins Medicine, 2020).

Coronavirus disease 2019 [*COVID-19*]

COVID-19 is an illness caused by viruses members of the Coronaviridae family. It is reported as the source of the pandemic of disease that spread from Wuhan, China in late 2019. In March 2020 the COVID-19 epidemic was officially declared as a pandemic by the World Health Organization (Mayo Clinic, 2020). COVID-19 has symptoms such as fever, cough, shortness of breath, or difficulty breathing, and the appearance of these may take between two fourteen days after being infected. Even though this is the initial statement by WHO research on the virus is showing various exceptions and research is constantly being updated in 2020. The city of Wuhan, China, is the center of global concern owing to an epidemic of febrile respiratory disease related to the COVID-19 2019-nCoV. In December 2019, an outbreak of pneumonia of uncertain origin occurred in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China, with an epidemiological connection to the Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market, where live animals were also sold (Hui et al. , 2020).

News articles

What follows is a short summary of a few relevant articles used in the data collection in regards to acts of xenophobic behavior linked to COVID-19. Between ten and twenty news articles have been used within the analysis but in this part the focus will remain on the six, three from each perspective (western and Chinese).

Cases in the West

“Coronavirus prompts 'hysterical, shameful' Sinophobia in Italy.” - *Aljazeera*, Liu, Y. (2020, February 18).

The article focuses on the topic of what it defines as "hysterical" and "shameful wave of Sinophobia" in Italy as a consequence of the COVID-19. These acts are directed towards tourists and Italians of Chinese and even simply East Asian descent, suspected of being contagious. Various examples of “assaults, calls for sexual violence, insults and boycott of businesses” are presented in the article. It presents through this a theme of an 'atmosphere of hate' being present in Italy.

“The coronavirus and the long history of using diseases to justify xenophobia.” - *Perspective* Liu, M. (2020, February 14).

In this article, they collected many cases of xenophobic behavior from the USA. After the rise in the COVID-19, mostly Chinese but also, other East Asians have been faced with varied xenophobic behaviors by fellow Americans. It discusses how when thinking of Chinese, Americans think of people with slanting eyes and cheap technological tools. Now, people think of COVID-19, bad eating habits (eating everything). The media and its discourse have a huge place/effect on this.

“Racist Graffiti Scrawled on Michelin-Starred West Village Korean Restaurant Jeju” - *Eater New York* Erika Adams (Apr 13, 2020)

This article focuses on Anti-Asian harassment taking place in the USA, centering specifically on xenophobic behaviors regarding East Asian eating habits. It states that East Asian-Americans have been treated as a monolith in the stereotypical perspective on their eating habit centering around dogs and other ‘unusual’ animals. It depicts the struggle that an owner of a Korean restaurant in New York has had to face after someone wrote “Stop eating dogs” on the window of his establishment.

Cases in China

'They see my blue eyes then jump back' - *The Guardian* Kuo L., Davidson (March 29, 2020)

At the beginning of the epidemic, as the number of cases in China increased and spread to the world, a serious increase in xenophobia was observed towards Chinese people or anyone that resembles them. In this article, the authors, Kuo and Davidson, observed the change in the xenophobic attitude towards Chinese people and from them. As the situation got reversed, the Chinese have started showing increasing discrimination against Westerners in their country, so far as to call them 'foreign trash'. It presents several cases of Chinese citizens avoiding fear of Westerners in public spaces.

“The Coronavirus Crises: China Capitalises on COVID-19 By Blaming Foreigners.” - *Byline Times* Werleman, CJ. (March 30, 2020)

Yet another aspect is the immigrants, who are already living in China. Werleman problematizes the situation of immigrants in major Chinese cities and he observes that they face a “fresh wave of discrimination”. After the Chinese Ministry of Justice announced that immigrants can't apply for a permanent residence permit, they were attacked not only through social media but also offline. He even wrote that the outbreak of the COVID-19 marks the beginning of a New Cold War between China and the West.

“Sheffield teacher faces xenophobia in China over coronavirus.” - *The Star* George Torr (March 25, 2020)

In this article, the central focus is on Rachel Ford, a teacher from the UK who has been residing in Shanghai since August 2019. She tells of how she has started to notice small acts of xenophobia from the locals, who were questioning her health only based on her being a foreigner. Then she and other friends were denied access to a bar with the excuse that “they weren't allowing so-called 'outsiders' in because of the belief now as they were bringing the virus back”. To all of this, Ms. Ford defined it as "just pure xenophobia.”

Theory

Intergroup Bias - Henri Tajfel and John Turner

Humans, as social animals, establish bonds with others leading to the formation of groups. These groups can be based on simple things such as the preference of one football team over the other, or more complex ones such as race, religion, sexual orientation, nationality, etc. The tendency to prefer people from one's group brings to what is called ingroup favoritism (ingroup bias). This act of ingroup favoritism is usually accompanied by a dislike of the outgroup, in fact the theory is also known as Intergroup bias.

In social psychology there are two notable theoretical perspectives on this topic. One is the Realistic Conflict Theory by Donald Campbell, it proposes scarce resources as being the central focus of Intergroup bias and conflict. The other one is Social Identity Theory by Henri Tajfel and John Turner, which aims to present one's social identity, that of a feeling of belonging to a social group, as the cause of ingroup-outgroup bias. The second approach will be the one utilized in this paper. The need to reach a positive social identity as a result of belonging to a specific ingroup is what brings to the action of outgroup discrimination (Sanchez-Mazas, Roux & Mugny, 1994). Tajfel presents this kind of discrimination as being expressed in various ways but also being “depressingly similar regardless of the constitution of the "ingroup" and the "outgroup" (1970). The need for order in one's surroundings, combined with surrounding hostilities present in intergroup relations, are what bring to the emergence of unspoken rules of outgroup related conduct. Through these observations we come to understand that intergroup tensions do not have to depend on the way the groups are formed and are regulated by socially implied rules of conduct towards the outgroup. Tajfel presents “objective indexes of a social, economic and demographic nature” (1970) as the main patterns to follow in understanding the possible causes of intergroup discrimination.

Regarding Tajfel's notion of implied rules of conduct towards outgroups; this norm of prejudice based behavior leads to certain consequences. One is that discrimination may occur towards an outgroup even if there is no personal profit (interest) to be gained from this action

by the individual (ingroup). Another is that these acts of discrimination might not be lead by any prior feelings of hostility or dislike towards the outgroup and might not even be accompanied by (yet to be formed) feelings of prejudice (Tajfel, 1970). This suggests that “discriminatory intergroup behavior can sometimes be expected even if the individual is not involved in actual (or even imagined) conflicts of interest and has no history of attitudes of intergroup hostility” (Tajfel, 1970). This brings to mind the many acts of xenophobic behavior shown by Westerners (ingroup), both in Europe and the USA, towards anyone of East Asian descent (outgroup). The ingroup, in this case, showed discriminative and xenophobic behavior towards anybody associable to the Country of origin of COVID-19, even though it was very soon clear that anybody could be a carrier of the disease. As Tajfel explains, there is no true conflict of interest between these two specific groups of people (Westerners and East Asians) as the virus can be carried by anybody, and in many cases, there was no prior intergroup hostility. This brings to the question of why these feelings of fear, hostility, and the consequential xenophobic acts stem from. As will be presented in the following theory, Parasite-stress plays a key role in this context.

Parasite-stress Theory of Values and Sociality - Thornhill and Fincher

Xenophobia, the fear of others, of the unknown, is a part of people that is not always manageable, it is almost as if it is a primordial instinct. Fearing and being wary of the unknown is part of the nature of many animals, to be able to protect themselves from danger. But throughout human evolution, and within the modern setting people seem to still be fearful of what is unknown, what may or may not bring harm. This is also why humans as animals tend to form ingroup and outgroup social formations, to stay with who is similar to them and far away from who is different. One possible example of the presence of xenophobic tendencies in humans can be attributed to parasites (infectious diseases) and the stress that comes with them.

Parasite-stress Theory of Values and Sociality is a book written by Randy Thornhill and Corey Fincher (2014). The book lays out a recent human evolutionary theory. It explores the correlation between the parasites - infectious diseases - that have plagued humanity throughout history and the societal values people have consequently developed.

Having ‘high parasite stress’ is repeatedly used in the book and it refers to the high levels of stress present within a group of people - society/population - due to the presence of infectious diseases in their region. High levels of parasite stress within a specific geographical region and at a specific point in time influence the features of human social behavior and their values, but if these levels drastically change with time the values may change with them (Thornhill & Fincher, 2014, p.8). The authors go so far as to claim:

“For modern humans, parasites appear to be the number one cause of evolutionary change. Geneticists who study the evolutionary change in genes of the human genome... report that parasites account for more evolutionary action... than other environmental factors that are also sources of selection" (Thornhill & Fincher, 2014, p. 59)

Parasite stress has influenced the way humans act, think, and develop as they evolved. It has left certain codes in their genetic structure that impact everyday life.

The reasoning behind the influence parasite stress has on human behavior stems from one's immune system. It is possible to recognize two immune systems in humans, both of which hold a defense mechanism against ‘parasites’. The classical immune system defends the body through physiological means while the behavioral immune system is more a preventive method of defense, which uses human psychology and behavior (Schaller & Duncan, 2007). The second one, not only assists humans in avoiding possible contagion but it also helps an individual in handling the effects that might follow if one falls ill (Fincher & Thornhill, 2008). The behavioral immune system consists of “ancestrally adaptive feelings (e.g., disgust), cognition (e.g., worry about contagion), values about and behavior toward outgroup and ingroup members” (Thornhill & Fincher, 2014, p. 60). The need to keep someone who looks different away is an evolutionarily adaptive behavior. It unconsciously creates a connection between someone looking different and having a very different immune system, possibly carrying diseases that place the individual and the ingroup (family/society) at risk of illness.

These factors can bring outgroup dislike and avoidance based on prejudice (xenophobia) and consequently to ingroup favoritism (Ethnocentrism). It is hypothesized that these values (ethnocentrism, xenophobia) have brought to the splitting of populations in the past, bringing to consequential cultural independence of the different groups. Thus bringing to the formation

of ethnic and cultural diversity (Thornhill & Fincher, 2014, p. 76). Ethnocentrism during periods of high parasite-stress is a coping mechanism for the ingroup. It unites immunologically similar people and fostering a supportive social network gives a feeling of security to its members (Thornhill & Fincher, 2011). Xenophobia, on the other hand, is a defense mechanism, meant to install a feeling of wary towards who is different to protect not only one's self but also the ingroup. The higher parasite stress is in a region the higher these two feelings are within its population (Thornhill & Fincher, 2014, p. 334). It is important though to note that not in all cases xenophobia and ethnocentrism go hand in hand, there are certain scenarios in which they are uncorrelated “ethnocentrism was high in traditional societies that experienced catastrophic food shortage, while xenophobia was high where the threat of intergroup violence was high” (Fincher & Thornhill, 2012, p. 78).

Parasite-stress influences people's morals and values both in a familial setting and concerning ingroup and outgroup behaviors and sentiment. This is what is being seen all around the world during the current COVID-19 pandemic. It all began with mainly caucasian Europeans and subsequently Americans. In fear of getting ill these groups directed their dread towards who was initially associated with the illness, anyone with Chinese-like features. And even though in a short time the reality was that anyone could potentially transmit this disease, the fear remained directed towards those who are different from the ingroup (xenophobia). Similarly in China those that look different are being pointed out as the ‘others’ as well, the threat.

“As parasite stress increases in a region, outgroup members become increasingly dangerous as sources of contagion” (Thornhill & Fincher, 2014, p.12)

Normative theory & Bio-cultural theory

“This theory concentrates primarily on the transmission of ethnic prejudices through the socialization process and social situations that compel discriminatory behavior.” (Odiaka, 2017). Since the focus in this paper is on how people from western countries have been acting xenophobic towards East Asians and on the other hand how Chinese people are acting in a xenophobic manner as well towards Westerners, this theory is well suited.

Many Westerners have stereotypical prejudices towards the Chinese, such as that they eat a lot of things which are considered 'weird' within western culture, that a lot of illnesses may have come from them, etc. Likewise Chinese people also have developed prejudices towards Westerners since the virus has spread much more in Europe and the USA (while the numbers are declining in China). As a result Chinese citizens are scared and tending to be more xenophobic, assuming that all western people could have the virus.

The Bio-cultural theory is very related to the Normative theory, and they can, therefore, be put together. The Bio-cultural theory is an approach that explains that xenophobia operates on the level of physical and cultural appearance, therefore animosity towards the other is not a result of competition for resources but a "product of early political and value socialization." (Odiaka, 2017) This theory brings to mind in particular an article about Chinese people being "scared of the blue eyes" (Kuo & Davidson, 2020). They associate the blue eyes to Westerners, which through this feature are categorized as an outgroup. Due to the higher numbers of COVID-19 cases in western countries at the time of this news article, this 'outgroup of Westerners' is deemed as a threat and thus is treated with prejudice and xenophobic behavior such as avoidance. Another similar example can be seen in the use of facemask within the East Asian community, even before the pandemic. They often stigmatized this 'cultural appearance' associating it to East Asians and seeing it as a cause of unnecessary panic (Xu, 2020).

The difference between the two theories is simply that the Normative theory explains that people's different cultural behaviors are the ones that bring forward prejudice. An example may be that of people's culinary habits or hygiene practices. The act of eating what is considered exotic animals - by western standards - within Chinese culture, is something frowned upon by many western countries, bringing forth prejudice. On the other hand, the Bio-cultural theory concentrates on the physical differences there might be between two ethnic groups which might cause fear of the other or different forms of prejudice.

Method & Methodology

Methods

Survey

With internet access becoming available all over the world, various data collection methods have been developed. To reach a larger audience and thereby collect more data on the target group, a decision to conduct an online survey has been made. The survey aims to obtain information regarding the Chinese public opinion on xenophobic ‘development’ in their country. It has been argued that conducting a survey can be highly effective in providing clear information on the extent to how common attitudes and perceptions are among a sample of a defined population (Veal & Darcy, 2014). The web-based or online survey which is a cost-effective and easy return survey, seems the best option to reach Chinese people quickly without face-to-face communication and it provides ease of reaching a large number of potential participants. Furthermore, a database where all completed survey data is classified and stored for later analysis is often conducted directly by the web-based survey (Lazar & Preece, 1999; Schmidt, 1997).

In this project, the Wisp Form has been chosen as an online survey platform. Questions have been prepared following the research question and transitions between the questions have been made according to the logic jump feature based on the answers of the participants. By this feature, participants can face the questions directly proportional to their ideas.

By using open-ended text response questions and numerical scale based and its interpretation questions the variability of the results can be reduced, facilitating an effective analysis and interpretation of the data. Although the authors have derived results based on the analysis of the collected data by corresponding the survey, it is critical to mention certain limitations to define the applicability of the findings. There are certain limitations to be made on the data collection process. The survey for the primary data collection has been conducted through the online platform. However, the potential for technological problems to decrease the return

rates may be observed in the case of online surveys. Due to the questions being written in English instead of Mandarin which is a local language of Chinese people, participants may not understand the questions clearly. According to Chinese people, there are no semantic differences between some words such as ‘ethnicity’ and ‘nationality’. Therefore, they may not fully grasp the logic of the questions, which may bring unclear answers. The other limitation is that the questionnaire may not be satisfactory in terms of the number of responses since the survey may not have reached a large audience online. Furthermore, it should be considered that the survey participants may be unwilling or unable to provide the desired information e.g. respondents may not express their thoughts correctly after the psychological hardship caused by COVID-19, they may contradict themselves, therefore, their answers might not be completely authentic. The approach of combining quantitative research with social observation has been argued to be conducive to establishing a holistic understanding of the quantitative data (Jick, 1979).

When the questions themselves, their structure, the connections between them and link to the research question had been validated, the survey was shared with contact people and it has been sent online through WeChat and Sina Weibo which are the required online platforms for communication with Chinese people and responses have been submitted anonymously by respondents. This preserved the privacy of respondents and ensured that respondents felt secure in providing their answers for data collection (Veal & Darcy, 2014).

Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis which is a common qualitative research method underlines the contextual meaning of language. Discourse analysis can be performed with several approaches such as examining the text in terms of vocabulary, grammar, and structure. To give an example, analyzing of phrases and words can be performed based on ideological associations, formality, and euphemistic and metaphorical content (Luo, 2019).

According to Luo (2019), both the details of the material itself and the contextual knowledge can be a base for interpretations. Because there is a limited number of articles related to xenophobic attitudes from the Chinese against Westerners, discourse analysis will be applied

not only to the news article but as well as on the survey data. We are going to touch on critical discourse analysis, discursive psychology, mediated stylistics, ethnography all of which are seen as subgroups of discourse analysis. We will look at it from cultural, social, psychological, and media perspectives.

Methodology

To conduct data collection and to interpret it, the following methodological approaches will be adopted: deductive, realistic, and post-structuralist. Deductive reasoning moves from broad generalizations to specific observations and it starts with the existing theory and it is followed by problem formulation based on the theory, data collection for testing hypotheses, and analyzing data. (Streefkerk, 2020). The realistic methodological stance is adopted since the information is regarding xenophobic behaviors caused by a pandemic that concerns the whole world and it is accessed through a questionnaire. Thus driving the research towards an answer as 'realistic' as possible. Post-structuralism is still present though as the data collected is also based on current discourses waving through different societies.

Analysis

The following analysis will be structured through factor analysis which aims at grouping data into common features - 'themes' - creating thus an underlying format and a more defined structure. The 'themes' that have been chosen are Physical Appearances, Intergroup Bias, Physical Assault Cultural Behaviours, and Verbal Assault. They are based on the various ways in which COVID-19 based xenophobia has been manifesting and are not to be seen as fully separate from one another due to the fact that they often overlap and even occur simultaneously. Due to the distinct geographical, historical, and cultural differences between the parties involved - namely Europe, the USA, and China - the way in which xenophobia has been acted upon is therefore different. The aim is to pinpoint these different 'themes' - within the various news articles and through the data obtained in the surveys - and find a deeper understanding of these actions and the way they differ in the West and in China through the use of the theories.

Physical appearances

This section of the analysis takes into consideration xenophobia based on physical appearances and will be structured through theories.

The first theory that will be presented is the Parasite-stress theory. The Parasite-stress theory refers to a high level of stress directed towards a specific group, because of the presence of an infectious disease in the area where they live (Thornhill & Fincher, 2014). The first interesting quote which can fit with this theory is about a french newspaper that used "Alerte Jaune" (yellow alert) and "Le péril Jaune" (the yellow peril) as a title for the article followed by a picture of a Chinese woman wearing a protective mask. This is exactly the case here. At the beginning of the pandemic, the most affected part of the world was Wuhan, in China. The fact that this newspaper uses "alerte Jaune" (yellow alert) accompanied by a picture of a Chinese woman wearing a face mask, reveals that the people who wrote this are feeling stressed in regards to Chinese people and risk spreading this stress to other people in the country. It is interesting to note that not only is an East Asian person being depicted but is

also wearing a face mask which apart from the association with illness and contagion is also a typical item associated with East Asian cultural norms (Van Der Haegen, 2020). The terms “Alerte Jaune” and “Le péril Jaune” are very xenophobic. Regarding this it is common nowadays that people make jokes about Chinese people’s skin color which has stereotypically been defined as yellow throughout history. By using those terms it is as if they are presenting all Chinese people, if not even all East Asians, as being something negative, and it is time to ‘activate the alert against them’. Another quote that can correlate to this theory is “He thought the family was Chinese, and infecting people with the Covid-19," (Reinstein, 2020). Here again, the person who harassed this family thought they were from China just because of the way they look. He hypothetically harassed them because in his mind, the virus is coming from China, and since he considered those people Chinese, in fear of infection (parasite stress) he decided to harass them, because he saw them as a threat.

The focus in this paragraph will be centered on the Bio-cultural theory. The Bio-cultural theory explains that xenophobia operates on the level of physical and cultural appearance (Odiaka, 2017). Here, two quotes are on point with this theory “I wish I could change my face” which was said by a Taiwanese American writer after seeing violent reactions towards East Asian Americans on Twitter (Liu, M. 2020). The second quote is “It just made me more aware that I have an East Asian face, and I may not be the most welcome in this country right now”(Liu, M. 2020) which was said by Leung who is thirty years old photographer. Since China was hit the hardest by this pandemic in the first month, people have assumed that the virus could only come from there, more precisely from Wuhan. Therefore bringing forth a wave of xenophobia towards the entire East Asian community in western countries. The two people are being xenophobically targeted due to having what are considered to be East Asian features, consequently associated with China. People don’t seem to care where they come from, the only thing they see is their appearance which makes them think that this person is carrying the virus.

Some cases of xenophobia related to physical appearance have happened in China towards Westerners as well. One example is “I’m walking past someone, then they see my blue eyes and jump a foot back,” (Kuo & Davidson, 2020). Here, the Bio-cultural theory can be seen exactly in the same way as the previous examples. While the number of cases went down in China, it drastically increased in western countries - Europe and the USA. This brought to xenophobic behaviors from Chinese people who live in China towards Westerners. In the

quote it is understood that they associate the blue eyes with people who come from the western part of the world, and due to higher infection rates in that area they might be infected themselves. This brings to mind how Westerners think when they see East Asian people during the pandemic.

Intergroup Bias

The following section of the analysis will focus on the common feature found within the data of ingroup belonging and the categorization of people into an 'updated' outgroup. What was once a group of Chinese citizens, Americans or Italians, people that felt they belonged to that group no matter their ethnicity, has developed into an 'Us' and 'Them' scenario.

In an article from The Washington Post titled "The coronavirus and the long history of using diseases to justify xenophobia" (Liu, M. 2020) the author points out the status of East Asian Americans in the USA. Due to their non-Caucasian features (Bio-cultural theory), their differing cultural habits (Normative theory), and their history of being appointed blame for importing disease (Parasite stress) they have been categorized as 'forever foreigners. It is also mentioned that "Outbreaks often have been attributed to marginalized groups in society or the "other," experts say" (Liu, M. 2020) and this brings to mind the notion of Intergroup bias. As the Parasite-stress theory states, the fear of contagion is what brings to xenophobic behaviors, exclusion, and fear of those who are different; COVID-19 can be seen as the root of labeling East Asian Americans as 'other', as the outgroup. This framework is not only limited to the East Asian American population but can also be seen within that of the East Asian European one and that of Westerners in China. In an article from the New York Times this act of Outgroup bias towards a community, caused by disease, was given a particular name, "Other-ize" - to assert that community as an 'other' (Bosman, Stockman & Fuller, 2020). This process of 'otherizing' is further acknowledged in the case of a man in the USA who's Korean wife and mixed-race son experienced xenophobic behavior in a shop, he states "It just reminds me that when people look at us, they don't see us as American" (Escobar, 2020). This

comes to show that individuals of East Asian descent, born and raised in Europe or the USA, have started to feel ostracized by the community they have always known as their own.

On the other hand in China COVID-19 has been referred to as the 'Italian Flu' by some (Shepard, 2020), in an attempt to acknowledge that infection numbers are much higher in Europe than they are in China, thus distancing one's own 'group'. This desire to create a disassociation between the pandemic and the Chinese is leading to xenophobic attitude towards those who are more affected by it at the time being, Westerners. As mentioned previously in this paper many Westerners are being prevented from entering restaurants, shops, and many more locations. What is shocking to some of them though, is that they are being denied entry in their apartment complexes by security personnel. A Brazilian national living in Beijing for the past four years was denied entry in the apartment complex where he has been residing for two years, even though he presented the police registration document that stated he lived there (Shepard, 2020).

These actions and those of restaurants and shops hanging signs with writings such as "We do not accept foreign friends and people whose temperature is above 37.3 temporarily." (Davis, 2020) are synonymous with Intergroup-bias. The act of placing a sign at the entrance of a public location, that directly negates the entrance to a specific category of people can be interpreted as an act of discrimination from the ingroup towards what they consider the outgroup. In a similar manner in Northern Italy "posters proclaiming: "Coronavirus? Buy Italian. It's a moral duty" were plastered to the storefronts of dozens of Chinese Italian owned businesses in late January." (Liu, Y. 2020). This action presents an example of Intergroup bias being used to rally other ingroup members against the outgroup with the excuse of protecting the ingroup's economy and presents it as a moral duty. By using 'moral duty' as a coercer, those creating these posters are attempting to convince ingroup members that if they do not follow the demand they will be 'betraying' the ingroup.

Within the survey when asked if the informant noticed people becoming more nationalist in this time of crisis (in China) on an average of thirteen answers only one said no, this comes to show that there is a rise of ingroup favoritism. When asked to give an example of this rising nationalist sentiment, two reasons stood out. One was that the media had a strong influence on people's views; one informant even stated that "I've noticed the media, both in and outside China, is more nationalist than before. I can feel a more hostile media environment towards Chinese outside China. And the same applies to the media inside China, towards westerners."

(Appendix, Response 4). The other was in a more political fashion, the answers regarded how the President of the USA, Donald Trump, has been talking about the virus. These are the informant's answers " It is more an online issue. Especially when Chinese people heard how the American President or politicians stigmatize the virus or blame China."(Appendix, Response 7) and "Donald Trump by saying Corona-19 is a Chinese Virus would be a good example."(Appendix, Response 13). Both answers present the issue of a foreign leader being opinionated on a matter that concerns an entire ethnic group of people - because anyone even assumed to be Chinese has been targeted. If an individual, such as the President, seen as a representative leader of an ingroup is heard targeting an outgroup, this may bring to conflicting opinions on the matter. The base of both this conflict of opinions and of the necessity in the first place for a head of state to blame (AFP, 2020) another country (outgroup) for a world crisis, in this case might stem from parasite stress. The fear of contagion, death, and economic instability creates tension and prejudice between these two groups, leading to acts of xenophobic nature.

Physical Assault

In this section, the analysis will be carried out in regard to acts of physical assault that have been caused by xenophobic attitudes following COVID-19. After the dramatic increase of confirmed COVID-19 cases not only in China but also in the rest of the world, reports have shown an increase in various xenophobia driven cases of physical assaults against East Asians in the West. The rationale behind these assaults has been primarily based on Westerners blaming the Chinese for the creation and spreading of the virus. However, it is also possible to see from news articles that non-physical (verbal) assaults have been performed towards Westerners in China. This came to be following the rise of infection in the West, surpassing China, leading to further xenophobia from both parties.

Bologna Today (newspaper) reported that a fifteen-year-old boy of Chinese descent was punched and kicked in the face by an Italian boy, as he was blaming him for the spreading of the virus in Italy, regardless of the fact that the boy was an Italian citizen (Liu, Y. 2020). Before this physical attack, the Chinese boy was also exposed to verbal abuse such as "What are you doing in Italy? Go away! You're bringing us diseases" (Liu, Y. 2020), further

supporting the xenophobic rhetoric. Another similar example occurred in Cagliari, Italy, where a group of young men attacked a thirty-one-year-old Filipino man while blaming him for "bringing the virus" to Italy as they were assuming he was Chinese (Liu, Y. 2020). According to these examples, it can be understood that ingroup favoritism and outgroup bias have transpired within Italy and that East Asians have been excluded by Italians - representing the West. Therefore, these cases can be supported by the Intergroup bias theory which has been introduced beforehand. It can be seen in the Westerners' actions that have united them (ingroup) against Chinese and East Asians by defining them as an outgroup. Similarly, *Today Online* (2020) has indicated that a Singaporean student was attacked in the middle of London due to Westerners blaming him for the spread of COVID-19 in their country. While being kicked, he was reportedly told; "I don't want your coronavirus in my country" (Today Online, 2020), which is a statement that directly correlates a global pandemic with a group of people, regardless of their residence or even their roots. In another case an East Asian woman was reportedly harassed by a man, as he blamed her for the spread of COVID-19 while slapping her phone to the ground (Kaufman & Staff, 2020). Besides, a group of Chinese students has encountered severe vandalism at the student dormitory of Wageningen University (Zegers, 2020). Littering an elevator with feces and urine, and tearing the Chinese flag from a student's door can also be seen as severe examples of physical assaults that Chinese individuals have encountered by the hand of Westerners (Zegers, 2020). Furthermore, a man has reportedly stabbed three people from an East Asian-American family in Texas, as he blamed them for the spread of the COVID-19 in the United States (Reinstein, 2020). Another physical assault has been reported when a woman was punched and exposed to racist anti-Asian statements by another woman in New York, solely because she was not wearing a face mask in public (Reinstein, 2020). In another case in the USA, a sixteen-year-old boy was accused of carrying the COVID-19 and was physically attacked by bullies (Reinstein, 2020). The reasoning behind these physical attacks, carried out mainly by Westerners, is that in fear of infection (parasite stress) they got anxious and were driven by the instinct to protect themselves as well as their ingroup. Although this anxiety does not justify these actions, as mentioned in Parasite-stress theory, people can experience heightened stress during a pandemic till the point of resorting to xenophobic behaviors - as a defense mechanism - which may lead to physical altercations. Due to the level of parasite stress

varying from person to person, the responses to this stress have reported varying as well from smaller cases of vandalism to cases of attempted murder.

One thing to keep in mind here is that, while carrying out acts of physical assault, people did not ask or consider whether the victims were Chinese, whether they have contacted any Chinese that returned from China during the outbreak, or whether they have simply been to China in the past months or not. Hence, it can be inferred that by correlating a virus with one specific group of people, Westerners have become xenophobic, and not solely acted within the parasite stress rationale. Finally, although there have been multiple news reports that mention physical assaults from Westerners towards East Asians or people of East Asian descent, none have been found presenting a reversed situation in China, where Westerners were victimized similarly. Therefore, it can be concluded that although there have been multiple xenophobic acts by Chinese citizens towards Westerners in China, the level of parasite stress, Intergroup bias and xenophobia have not been high enough to bring to acts of physical assault, as they have in the West.

Cultural Behaviours

In this part, cultural behaviors such as food and hygiene customs will be at the center of the analysis. It will be explained how xenophobic acts towards East Asians and Westerners have correlated with eating habits and hygiene rules during COVID-19. Among other cultural behaviors, this section will focus more on these two different cultural attitudes, which are perceived to be more relevant. Overall, Westerners have claimed that the spread of the virus is an outcome of Chinese eating habits, while, especially following the recovery of the situation in China, Chinese citizens have been accusing Westerners of not wearing masks, which Westerners do not have as a cultural habit, unlike many East Asian countries.

The Guardian reported in February that “a wet/wildlife market in Wuhan, China, called the Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market, is believed to be the source of COVID-19” (Retamal, 2020). Due to the perception that the pandemic is the outcome of Chinese eating exotic animals, many people around the world have started to develop a fear against Chinese and East Asians accompanied by a strong prejudice towards their culinary habits. Westerners started showing xenophobic attitudes against Chinese and East Asians because of the

difference in their cultural behaviors (Normative theory). This can be associated with the Parasite-stress theory which suggests that people show prejudice against what is not familiar to them in fear of infection (Thornhill & Fincher, 2014). In the case of COVID-19, Westerners do not know what it is to eat wild animals since it is not part of their culture. However, they still develop anxieties against this unknown phenomenon. To illustrate with an example, East Asian American writer Monica Sun shared her experiences with xenophobic reactions in social media that she read in multiple online arguments. This occurred particularly while answering posts such as “Maybe they should stop eating everything.” referring to the possible emergence of COVID-19 from bats or pangolins at a market in Wuhan, China (Liu M., 2020).

There are also examples of cases, in which Chinese people were exposed to verbal violence merely because of their cultural habits. Such a case was reported by *Corriere Bergamo* where the mayor of Solto Collina, Italy Maurizio Esti shared on Facebook a highly xenophobic comment “These f***** Chinese, they eat everything. Bats, snakes, dogs, and insects, they should be the only people to die in this epidemic.” (Liu Y. 2020). He engaged in verbal violence against all Chinese people merely because of their culinary habits. As the Normative theory suggests this behavior is the result of the perceived ‘weirdness’ (otherness) of Chinese cultural behaviors in the minds of Westerners.

Another problematization of this aspect can be observed in the responses from the survey. One informant claimed “We don't think it is caused by wild animals, because China is not the only country that has people who eat wild animals (Appendix, Response 8)”. Although, it is scientifically proven that among the causes of the virus lies a link between humans and wild animals, the argument of the respondent still makes sense regarding prejudice based behaviors. It is not simply the fault of all Chinese people, because of their eating habits. It is the nature of the virus that can be blamed, however, instead, what is being witnessed is the accusation of Chinese cultural behavior. Another informant clearly expressed “It is a bat-related virus does not literally mean Chinese people eat bats because it is not our eating-habit or cultural-habit either. (Appendix, Response 7)”.

When reflecting on why Westerners engage in such discriminatory behaviors can be explained as well through the Intergroup bias theory. Tajfel (1970) argued that such discriminatory behaviors can be observed even when the actual (or imagined) conflict of interest is absent. There is no conflict of interest between these two specific groups of people,

Westerners, and East Asians, since anybody can be a carrier of the virus no matter their ethnicity or nationality.

On the other hand, as the number of COVID-19 cases decreased in China, fear of foreigners rose especially in regards to their cultural behaviors. Among them, the most observed ones are the lifestyle of Westerners concerning their alleged disposition towards not obeying the rules and their hygiene practices. Linder (2020) argued that the fear of imported COVID-19 cases that may potentially initiate a 'second wave' in China has been the main factor in triggering anti-Westerner sentiments.

The notion that Westerners were not following the measures taken by the Chinese government is reported in the news in Beijing. *Shanghaiist* wrote about the children of a Danish diplomat, who went out to take their dogs for a walk during quarantine times and criticized them by stating "Many criticized their disdain of Chinese laws and while everyone else is following epidemic prevention rules, diplomats should not be expected.... If they cannot follow community rules, then they shouldn't be in the community," (Linder, 2020). This criticism is observed in the reactions of Chinese people as well. Among the survey responses, it is stated "They didn't quarantine themselves well and hang out outside. It's awfully irresponsible. This is why Chinese people fear." (Appendix, Response 5). Through this the ingroup members (Chinese) are perceived to be less dangerous than outgroup members (Westerners), despite it involving the same risks. They discuss more harsh measures against outgroup members, such as the cancellation of visas (Yan, 2020), which depicts a case of Intergroup bias (Tajfel, 1970).

Westerners were also exposed to discriminatory behaviors based on hygiene practices. Among the responses, it is observed that Chinese people accused Westerners of not being careful enough with hygiene measures. Among the responses there were statements such as "The problem can be if a western refuse to accept the general rules (eg. wearing masks) of the Chinese society, they could be noticed and judged" (Appendix, Response 4). and "Foreigners, especially Westerners, didn't get used to wearing face masks and didn't follow the directions from the Chinese government" (Appendix, Response 5). These remarks by Chinese people can be understood through the Normative theory, regarding the emergence of prejudice based on people's different cultural behaviors. Chinese people see themselves to be more careful with hygiene practices, as they think that they are more careful in regards to wearing masks, while Westerners are negligent about wearing them.

Verbal Assaults

After the worldwide spread of the COVID-19, many xenophobic verbal assaults were reported both from Westerners towards East Asians and also from Chinese towards Westerners. Acts of verbal assault will be at the center of this section of the analysis, it is important to note that written xenophobic acts - such as vandalism, signs, and banners - will also be taken into account as verbal assault.

While it is possible to argue that the following cases of verbal assaults were caused by many underlying reasons, the reports have shown that they were especially aimed at blaming the Chinese by holding them responsible for the transmission of the virus to other countries. As cited in an article titled “Asian Woman Harassed About Coronavirus In Rego Park: NYPD“ the assailant told the East Asian woman “You're the one who brought the virus here, we're watching you" and "take the Chinese virus back to China."(Kaufman, 2020). Several news articles have also shown that some cases of verbal assaults stemmed from the rationale that East Asian people and their cuisine were considered disgusting from a western point of view. Such as “Stop eating dogs” written on graffiti, and comments such as “every disease has ever come from China, they're disgusting” (Adams, 2020). These reported verbal assaults are highly related to Normative and Bio-cultural theory, due to their nature of discrimination on a cultural and physical basis.

In the first examples, regardless of whether the assaulted victims were Chinese or not, or whether they were even from China or not, it can be seen that Westerners have judged them according to their appearances and established prejudice towards them. These prejudices however, can be explained by the Bio-cultural theory because it is based on the notion that prejudice comes forth in accordance with one's physical appearance and ethnic features. The verbal attacks that appeared in the last two examples arise directly from stereotypical ideas of Chinese culinary habits, fueling the prejudice against the Chinese culture. This dives into the

Normative theory, that presents one's cultural habits and behaviors as being the basis of prejudice, showing that the attacks can as well be interpreted through the Normative theory.

Although it was seen that xenophobic verbal assaults by Westerners towards Chinese and East Asians can be clarified through Normative theory and Bio-cultural theory, it can also be further explained through different theories. Through ingroup and outgroup examples, also known as the Intergroup bias, it is possible to observe cases of verbal attacks by Chinese citizens against Westerners in China.

As an example, in the article titled “Chinese restaurant hangs a huge banner to CELEBRATE the coronavirus epidemic in the US and Japan” (Jiang, 2020) Chinese people have been witnessed wishing to celebrate the rise in COVID-19 cases in Japan and the USA and the harm it has brought. The banner read “Huge congratulations to the American epidemic and long live the epidemic in little Japan” (Jiang, 2020). In this case, it was observed that the Chinese saw the USA and Japan as outgroups and have reportedly carried out hate speeches after the pandemic shifted towards the West. In another article titled “Foreigners Collateral Damage as China Curbs Imported Infections,” it is reported that locals in Beijing did not allow foreigners entry in a shop with a sign that read, “We do not accept foreign friends and people whose temperature is above 37.3 (degrees Celsius) temporarily.” (Davis, 2020). This emphasizes the Chinese desire to define foreigners/Westerners as the outgroup under all conditions while accepting people from the ingroup - within a limit of 37 degrees celsius body temperature.

As shown by these examples, these xenophobic verbal assaults by Chinese people toward Westerners are highly related to ingroup and outgroup (Intergroup bias theory) relations.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper is to attempt to find out in which way xenophobia manifests during a pandemic, and how does the fear of the COVID-19 affect both Chinese and western attitudes. But more precisely, the aim is to find out how xenophobia has developed into a multi-directional phenomenon, starting in the West (towards East Asians), and then flourishing in Chinese (towards Westerners).

In an attempt to find relevant answers to the questions, the group created a survey that was aimed towards Chinese people and also online articles to find testimonies of xenophobia from both sides. After finding the articles and gathering the survey data, the theories chosen to analyze them were the Intergroup bias theory, Parasite-stress theory, as well as the Normative and Bio-cultural theory.

The findings of the analysis have shown that xenophobic behaviors from Chinese citizens directed towards Westerners appear to be of a more passive nature. In fact, this is much more political and law-based, like putting restrictions. Chinese people might act in this manner because as they were the first country to be severely touched by this pandemic, once their numbers of infected started to go down, they fought to avoid a second wave. On the other hand, xenophobia initiated by Westerners is much more dynamic since it has often happened to be manifested through a physical and verbal assault. The fact that xenophobia is much more violent from Westerners towards the East Asian community can be justified by the fact that the virus initially occurred in China, which led to growing hostility. Another characteristic was recognized in xenophobic behaviors in China towards Westerners. They appear to be much more Intergroup bias-related compared to those of the West. The latter on the other hand is found to be more influenced by characteristics of Bio-cultural and Normative theory.

As a conclusion, the project found that xenophobia in western countries was fueled by a fear of contagion from what was initially considered a foreign and unknown virus and grew because the levels of parasite stress rose as did the numbers of infected. In China xenophobia manifested due to a fear of the second wave of infection, possibly imported by foreigners, and

might have grown even more because of the developing world rhetoric that China and its population were to blame for the pandemic.

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