

Love Thy Neighbor:

The Racialization and Social Exclusion of Korean Communities during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Extended Abstract

The racialization and social exclusion during the COVID-19 pandemic have contributed to a sharp increase in anti-Asian violence and discrimination on a global scale. Korean communities in the United States have increasingly been targets of racial/ethnic hate incidents, violence, and racism. These pandemic-induced social, economic, and political crises have thus disturbed the lives of Korean communities in the United States in all aspects.

This study delves into how Korean individuals and communities in the United States have redeveloped their national and ethnic identities as Koreans as well as where they have located their racial/ethnic identities on “the global field of whiteness” during the process of anti-Asian violence and racism in the pandemic era. In particular, this study seeks the answers to the following research questions: 1) What kinds of experiences in racial/ethnic exclusion and victimization did they undergo during the pandemic? And how did they respond to this racial/ethnic discrimination and victimization? 2) What reasons for Anti-Asian hate during the pandemic affected Korean communities to make different perceptions and strategies on racialization and social exclusion? 3) How did the experiences of the pandemic and racial/ethnic exclusion affect the reinforcement or disintegration of the national and ethnic identity of Korean communities and their relationships with other racial/ethnic groups?

One of the striking findings of this study is to identify the increasing anti-Chinese sentiments and rising ethnonationalism among Korean individuals against racial/ethnic discrimination and victimization. However, the level of this ethnonationalism varies by individual perception, collective experiences of them, and embeddedness in the society. Therefore, on the layered crises, Korean individuals have been positioned at some point between a *strategy of exclusion* toward ethnonationalism and a *strategy of inclusion* toward pan-Asian ethnicity. By investigating pandemic experiences from Korean communities in the United States, this study further explores the structure and dynamics of social exclusion for disadvantaged populations in disastrous conditions like the pandemic.