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To cite this version:

Simeng Wang, Xiabing Chen, Yong Li, Chloé Luu, Ran Yan, et al.. ‘I’m more afraid of racism than of the virus!’: racism awareness and resistance among Chinese migrants and their descendants in France during the Covid-19 pandemic. European Societies, 2020, 10.1080/14616696.2020.1836384 . hal-02994962

HAL Id: hal-02994962

https://hal.science/hal-02994962

Submitted on 20 Dec 2021

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European Societies

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/reus20

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To cite this article: Simeng Wang, Xiabing Chen, Yong Li, Chloé Luu, Ran Yan & Francesco Madrisotti (2021) ‘I'm more afraid of racism than of the virus!’: racism awareness and resistance among Chinese migrants and their descendants in France during the Covid-19 pandemic, European Societies, 23:sup1, S721-S742, DOI: 10.1080/14616696.2020.1836384

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2020.1836384

Published online: 29 Oct 2020.

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EUROPEAN SOCIETIES
2021, VOL. 23, NO. S1, S721–S742
https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2020.1836384

'I'm more afraid of racism than of the virus!': racism awareness and resistance among Chinese migrants and their descendants in France during the Covid-19 pandemic

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ABSTRACT
This article focuses on the discrimination and racism experienced by Chinese migrants and their descendants during the Covid-19 pandemic. It analyses this group's increasing awareness and activism toward racial discrimination in French society. The paper is based on an empirical investigation using qualitative and quantitative research methods (online surveys and interviews) with people of Chinese origin living in France. In addition, qualitative data from news media and activists is also crucial to this study because of the important role they play in the social construction of the anti-racism movement. This study shows that the Covid-19 pandemic highlights how the discrimination and racism experienced by people of Chinese origin can take various forms. The epidemic has become a catalyst for Chinese immigration to resist racism, especially among descendants, and among more recent and highly-skilled Chinese immigrants, who have broken their silence, united, and participated in a more activist manner.

KEYWORDS Racism; Covid-19 pandemic; Chinese migration; France; descendants; resistance

In December 2019 Covid-19 was first detected around Wuhan, China, prior to becoming a global pandemic. Europe is one of the most affected regions in the world. In France, the first case of Covid-19 was detected on January 24, 2020, almost two months before France went into lock-down. This health crisis has also spread throughout the world's economy, politics, and society. The Covid-19 pandemic has revealed and reinforced social and ethno-racial inequalities rooted in time (Fassin 2020; Desgrées du Loû 2020; Brun and Simon 2020;

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Calame 2020), leading to many discriminatory acts across France and in other countries. As the epidemic began spreading outside of China, some media sources began using the term 'Chinese virus' to describe Covid-19 (L'Obs 2020). People perceived to be 'Chinese' or 'Asian' [1] have been associated with the Coronavirus and consequently are suffering from discrimination, unfair treatment, and racism; including, in some cases, physical attacks (Mandjou 2020). Indeed, in the French context, the terms 'Asian' and 'Chinese' tend to be interchangeable in both racist discourses and in everyday language. This generalization and homogenization of all Asians participates in turn in discriminatory practices. However this paper pays attention to distinguish Chinese people from other East and Southeast Asians, and mainly focuses on the experiences of people who identify themselves as Chinese. This paper will also compare the experiences of different subgroups of people from Chinese background in France.

As the Covid-19 pandemic spreads around the world, discrimination and social exclusion against people of Chinese origin are becoming an increasingly global phenomenon. According to an online survey of 1,904 Chinese residents across 70 countries, 25% of respondents experienced discrimination of various forms (He *et al.* 2020). On a European scale, many studies have been produced recently on the fate of Chinese communities during the pandemic in different European countries. In Britain, a 'shocking level' of anti-Chinese racism has raised awareness of racism among people of Chinese descent, and triggered forms of solidarity (Pang 2020). In Italy, Chinese migrant individuals were more proactive than local populations in helping to curb the spread of the virus in the town of Prado, near Florence, yet they have been widely accused of being the source of and vectors for Covid-19 (Adja *et al.* 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic is prompting researchers of Chinese origin to reflect on racial inequalities in academia, the vulnerability of ethnic minorities in democracies, and the need to raise their voices in public space (Gao and Sai 2020; Zhang and Xu 2020). More generally, scientists, researchers, and health practitioners are engaging in a battle against the 'epidemic of prejudice' by publishing articles, open letters, columns, and editorials that call for policy and media inclusiveness in

[1]The term 'Asian' is a problematic generalization: in the French context, 'Asians' ('Asiatiques') historically refer to people coming from the ex-Indochinese countries (Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos) where some of those people were ethnically Chinese. Nowadays, the term 'Asian' includes people from East Asia and Southeast Asia and they are usually perceived as a homogeneous racial group. For more readings on the distinction between Chinese and other Asians and on the different subgroups within Chinese population in France, please see: Ma Mung 2000; Live 1993; Wang 2017.

the face of this public health emergency (He *et al.* 2020; Lawrence 2020; Nature 2020; Sotgiu and Dobler 2020).

In France, the Covid-19 pandemic arouses nationalist and culturalist rhetoric from the government and also among ordinary citizens. The political scientist Speranta Dumitru (2020) points to a nationalist bias in the French government management of Covid-19. The slow dawning of awareness by French public actors in the face of the pandemic is underpinned by culturalist prejudices. France is relatively immune to a virus perceived mainly as 'Chinese'. With the arrival of the virus at Europe's door; France, like most European countries, experienced a rising tide of anti-Asian xenophobia. Manifestations of racism in the pandemic are part of a larger phenomenon of stigmatization (Goffman 1963), whose targets have gradually changed with the evolution of the pandemic (Pellegrino 2020). Since the emergence of many epidemic 'hot spots' throughout Europe, anti-Asian racist discourse in France continues to coexist with discriminatory discourse towards migrants of all origins, towards foreigners, and towards anyone who recently has experienced international mobility (Tisserand and Wang 2020). This public health stigmatization, which is linked to the virus and targets real or supposed virus carriers of all nationalities, ethnic origins, or social backgrounds, also targets Chinese and other Asians people but not exclusively. According to Geisser (2020), 'racisme sanitaire' is reflected in discourse, attitudes, and behaviour that invoke suspicion and rejection towards tourists, migrants, residents or national citizens of very distant Asian origin. With the spread of Covid-19 in France and the announcement of confinement in March 2020, the mainstream media and social networks began focusing on the alleged public health incivility in the Parisian suburbs among populations of North and Sub-Saharan African migrants and their descendants. These populations are accused of endangering the entire nation by their alleged failure to comply with barrier gestures and containment measures (Metropop 2020; Aeschimann 2020). If in both African and Asian cases, migrants and racialized minorities become the scapegoats and victims of discrimination during a health crisis[2] (Dely *et al.* 2020), Chinese migrants and their descendants show the 'reversibility of migratory myths' (Geisser 2010): while commonly considered 'exemplary migrants' and 'integration models,' they

[2]In France, if the statistics published regularly on the epidemic are silent about infection and mortality rates of immigrants and their descendants, a study by INSEE shows that immigrants have an excess mortality higher than the majority population during the Covid-19 pandemic (Papon and Robert-Bobée 2020).

are singled out as the main culprits for the spread of the virus within the national body. Some researchers have discussed the fate of the Chinese in France during the pandemic in medical settings (Sirna and Wang 2020) or in the media and political arena (Laurentin and Boursier 2020; Assemblée Nationale 2020). However, scientific research that studies the experience of racism, the process of consciousness-raising, and the forms of collective resistance among racialized subjects is still very rare (Wang and AVE 2020).

This paper aims to analyse the exacerbation of anti-Asian racism in France within the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, and to highlight the racism awareness and resistance among people of Chinese origin living in France. The people in this study can be divided into three groups according to their migratory status: born in France, born outside France of non-French nationality, and born outside France but naturalized as French citizens. Alongside the scientific research mentioned above, this article might also help to understand a broader phenomenon that goes beyond French cases to offer a comparative perspective with other European countries.

The paper is based on an empirical investigation using a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods (online surveys and interviews) with people of Chinese origin, both newcomers and their descendants, living in France.[3] Quantitative data has been collected from 255 questionnaire responses received up to September 17, 2020. Respondents are mainly composed of young people (two-thirds are 30 years old or younger; the median age is 26). They are educated (19.22% have a high school diploma, and 72.95% have a college degree) and skilled (45.88% of respondents are students; 21.96% are professionals and managers). Respondents fall into several different migratory categories: 50.59% were born in France, 43.92% were born in China, and 5.49% were born in other countries. The same is true for their nationalities; 37.25% are French by birth, 20.39% are French by acquisition, 40% are of Chinese nationality, and 2.35% have other nationalities. It should be noted that women are in the vast majority among the respondents (76.08%).

[3]The MigraChiCovid Research Project ("Chinese migrations in France facing Covid-19: the emergence of new forms of solidarity in times of crisis") is funded by the French National Research Agency (ANR-20-COVI-0046-01). Cf. the presentation of the project: https://www.migrations-asiatiques-en-france.cnrs.fr/projet-migrachicovid/resume-scientifique-du-projet-migrachicovid.

All authors are members of the MigraChiCovid Project. The authors gratefully acknowledge the opinions of anonymous reviewers of the journal, as well as the English language assistance provided by Sophie Haas for the final version of this article.

The online questionnaire is distributed by the team members following the snow-ball sampling method, through various channels to reach different subgroups of Chinese in France such as student alumni, Chinese descendants in France, elderly people, skilled migrants who can also be parents of young children born in France, etc. The online questionnaire[4] is available in both French and Chinese. It is composed of approximately 90 questions on the following six aspects:

(1) Information consumption practices during the Covid-19 crisis;
(2) Collecting, sending and receiving medical equipment (masks, medicines, etc.);
(3) Attendance at Asian restaurants and consumption of Asian cuisine;
(4) Health status and health care and prevention practices;
(5) Social environment and experiences of discrimination under the Covid-19 crisis;
(6) General information (migratory paths, housing conditions, family relationships, etc.)

The questionnaire is still available online. This paper is thus based on the first empirical materials (notably by cross-analyzing data collected in categories 4 and 6) and presents the preliminary findings.

Qualitative data includes comments filled in the free field of the 255 online questionnaire responses, 21 interviews collected by research team members, and 12 testimonies reported to a Franco-Chinese activist organization (cf. details infra). The 21 people interviewed represent a diverse profile of migratory generation, age, gender, regional origin, level of education, and professional occupation. However, unlike the questionnaire responses and interviews, the testimonies reported to the activist organization were not collected by research team members, and thus have fewer personal details. For the sake of epistemological reflections, these three distinct types of qualitative material have been specified. Nonetheless, all of the qualitative data collected complies with the rules of ethical research and the anonymity of all participants is guaranteed.

In addition, this study relies upon the crucial role that media sources play in discrimination and in the anti-discrimination movement. Since January 2020, research team members have been doing media

[4]The on-line survey address: https://www.migrations-asiatiques-en-france.cnrs.fr/actualites/187-questionnaire-migrachicovid-migrations-chinoises-de-france-face-au-covid-19.

monitoring in three languages (French, Chinese and English respectively), by choosing over 30 presses most read or most represented in its language. In this paper, the content analysis is provided concerning media coverage of the pandemic predominantly in the French press, but also in English (including 14 newspapers, radio and TV channels, cf. references cited) along with information exchanged on social networks via activist partners.

The following pages will present preliminary quantitative and qualitative findings. The first part will analyse individual experiences of discrimination and racism related to the Covid-19 pandemic. The research demonstrates different forms of racism, with greater or lesser intensity, according to migratory status and social profile. The second part will show that the shared experience of racism during the pandemic is fertile ground for new forms of solidarity and mobilization among the Chinese people in France, and focus on the blunt public discourse against racism, as expressed through the lens of activism.

Discrimination and racism experienced by Chinese migrants and their descendants during the Covid-19 pandemic

In France, the media plays an important role in the production of racist prejudices and behaviours against the Chinese and other Asians. At the point where the epidemic was beginning to spread beyond China, the French mainstream media focused on the Chinese government's failure to contain the Coronavirus. In January 2020, with the appearance of the first cases among Chinese migrants and tourists in mainland France, a flow of racist speech began to be witnessed in news media and on social networks. The words 'pangolin' and 'bat' are very frequently used and connected with a point of origin in China, insinuating that the Chinese are responsible for the pandemic because of their poor hygiene and their exotic culinary habits. After the creation of a French Covid-19 telephone patient-care hotline in mid-March, many people called because they had recent contact with people of Chinese origin, they had received a package from China, or they ate Asian food. Masks were also controversial. At the beginning of the epidemic, when French authorities considered wearing masks unnecessary, people of Chinese and other Asian origin wearing masks in public were frequently suspected, harassed, even attacked, and considered to be vectors of the virus. When Europe became the epicentre of the pandemic and wearing masks became mandatory, many people accused Chinese

migrants of having 'wrapped up all the masks' to send them back to China. Also, the idea that the Coronavirus had been genetically manipulated in a laboratory in Wuhan (Audureau 2020) has been widely disseminated in the French news media and on social networks. Thus, fear of the virus becomes a virus of fear. Some French people give in to paranoia (Barbezat 2020), which has a real impact on the lives of people perceived as Chinese in France. Many interviewees agreed that since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, attacks and discrimination against Asians are linked to the fact that some French media sources have chosen to use terms such as 'Chinese virus' or 'yellow alert' (Courrier Picard 2020). The anti-Asian racism reactivated by the Covid-19 pandemic takes its roots in the 'Yellow Peril', dating back to the end of the nineteenth century, which stigmatizes Asian people, targeting in particular the Japanese and Chinese. However, the racism and discrimination experienced by the Chinese people during the Covid-19 pandemic have taken on new forms since they are based above all on fear of illness and public health stigmatization (Paroles D'Honneur 2020).

The data from the online survey show not only the extent and intensity of discrimination experienced by the respondents during Covid-19, but also a social differentiation in the perception of racism among people of Chinese origin in France. While nearly a third of respondents (32.8%) declare having experienced at least one discriminatory act since January 2020, young people (30 years old or younger) are much

Table 1. Feeling of being discriminated against since January 2020 by six subgroups (crossed according to 'migratory status' and 'age')[a].

		Have you encountered any discriminatory treatment since January 2020?				
Migratory status	Age	I don't know	No	Yes	Total	Nb
Born in France	30 years old or under	38 32,47%	33 28,20%	46 39,31%	100%	117
	Over 30 years old	1 8,33%	7 58,33%	4 33,33%	100%	12
Born outside France and French citizens	30 years old or under	1 16,66%	1 16,66%	4 66,66%	100%	6
	Over 30 years old	4 25%	10 62,50%	2 12,50%	100%	16
Born outside France and not French citizens	30 years old or under	13 28,88%	18 40%	14 31,11%	100%	45
	Over 30 years old	9 15,78%	35 61,40%	13 22,80%	100%	57
	Total	66 26,08%	104 41,10%	83 32,80%	100%	253

[a]$N = 253$. The construction of 6 categories of analysis excluded two respondents who were French citizens born abroad (having at least one French parent) and came to France as adults.

more inclined to declare being victims than their elders (over 30 years old) (see Table 1). Furthermore, French citizens are more likely to report being discriminated against than non-French citizens. Compared to other groups, French citizens, especially young people, are proportionally more likely to feel that discrimination against Asians has increased since March 2020, with the outbreak of the epidemic in France (Table 2).

Discrimination against Chinese people is mainly manifested in public spaces such as transportation. Up to September 17, 2020, among the 255 respondents who answered our on-line questionnaire, more than 41.57% suffered from ethnic discrimination in public transport, 34.9% noticed similar discrimination in open public spaces, and 14.51% represented such discrimination in closed public spaces such as cafés and restaurants. At school, respondents frequently experienced discrimination from other students; while in the workplace, discrimination from co-workers is often reported.

Discriminatory behaviours can take many forms, ranging from suspicion, avoidance behaviour, and rejection, to verbal and physical aggression (cf. the cross table below, Table 3). 47.03% of respondents experienced situations such as other people changing their seats in public transport or covering their mouths when they arrived in a public space. Five respondents were deprived of their rights to access spaces such as restaurants, bars, cafés, hotels, or places of leisure.

Table 2. Judgement on the trend in discrimination occurrence since March 2020 by six subgroups (crossed according to 'migratory status' and 'age').

		Do you think that since March, discriminatory behaviour towards people of Asian origin has:					
Migratory status	Age	Increased	Decreased	Stayed the same	Without opinion	Total	Nb
Born in France	30 years old or under	97 82,90%	3 2,56%	6 5,12%	11 9,40%	100%	117
	Over 30 years old	6 50%	2 16,66%	2 16,66%	2 16,66%	100%	12
Born outside Frane and French citizens	30 years old or under	5 83,33%	0 0%	0 0%	1 16,66%	100%	6
	Over 30 years old	5 31,25%	0 0%	5 31,25%	6 37,50%	100%	16
Born outside Frane and not French citizens	30 years old or under	22 48,88%	3 6,66%	4 8,88%	16 35,55%	100%	45
	Over 30 years old	28 49,12%	1 1,75%	9 15,78%	19 33,33%	100%	57
	Total	163 64,42%	9 3,55%	26 10,27%	55 21,73%	100%	253

Table 3. Forms of discrimination encountered by migratory status.

Migratory status	During the Covid-19, did you ever face any of these situations										
	Contempt		Insults		Physical assault		Deprivation of rights		Accusations of spreading disease		
	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Nb
Born in France	57	72	102	27	129	0	127	2	50	79	129
	44,18%	55,81%	79,06%	20,93%	100,00%	0,00%	98,44%	1,55%	38,75%	61,24%	
Born outside France and French citizens	19	3	21	1	22	0	22	0	12	10	22
	86,36%	13,63%	95,45%	4,54%	100,00%	0,00%	100,00%	0,00%	54,54%	45,45%	
Born outside France and not French citizens	79	23	82	20	100	2	99	3	72	30	102
	77,45%	23%	80,39%	19,60%	98,03%	1,96%	97,05%	2,94%	70,58%	29,41%	
Total	155	98	205	48	251	2	248	5	134	119	253
	61,26%	38,35%	81,02%	18,97%	99,20%	0,79%	98,02%	1,97%	52,96%	47,03%	

38.35% of respondents were despised by their interlocutors and 18.97% of respondents were insulted. Two respondents were physically assaulted.

French citizens of all ages are also more inclined to describe the discrimination they have experienced as racist acts linked to their physical appearance, the long-lasting racial prejudices in French society, and racist media discourse (see Table 4). In the same way, the collected qualitative data demonstrates a semantic difference in the accounts of racist experiences among different social groups. These findings reveal three different attitudes: a denial of racism, a recognition of racism, and a militant denunciation of racism. Collected quantitative data offer an initial insight: firstly, the denial of racism is significant among newcomers (notably, older newcomers); secondly, the recognition of racism is common among both young, skilled newcomers and descendants born in France but the rates are much higher among the later; and finally, the militant denunciation of racism is mainly present among the descendants of Chinese migrants.

The findings drawn from the quantitative data are confirmed by the qualitative data. Among the interviewed Chinese newcomers who arrived in France between 1980 and 1990, almost everyone says that they have never experienced discrimination or racism. However, during the course of the interviews, in particular when the interviewers recount their own personal experiences, respondents occasionally reformulate their answers. This can be seen in the example of Mrs Jiang, a 55-year-old who came to France in 1990 for higher education. She works in the field of art today.

> I say I personally have never been subjected to this kind of direct this (discrimination). On the contrary, the people around me were very friendly to me, yes. I think that (talking about the discrimination and racism) is exaggerated. Or because I, I haven't encountered it, yes. (Later …) Well that still happens, one time it was … I had a mask on, and then I was walking on my main road. And then there was one person in front of me who wasn't wearing a mask. I was just … I was just walking like this. Then he came to me and said: 'ah, with a mask, too bad for you'. (Laugh of interviewee), this is the only time …

For new Chinese immigrants, especially Chinese students who recently arrived in France, they are 'shocked', distraught by anti-Chinese violence that they have only just discovered among French people. Inhibited by a feeling of guilt, because 'the virus comes from China,' many hesitate to describe their experiences as racist. Some of them consider that the disproportionate reactions of their 'French hosts' result from

Table 4. Interpretation of the factors explaining the experienced discrimination by migratory status.

Migratory status	How do you explain these instances of discriminatory behaviour?								
	Media Discourses			Pandemic Started in China			Prejudices		
	Without opinion	No	Yes	Without opinion	No	Yes	Without opinion	No	Yes
Born in France	32	27	70	32	16	81	32	22	75
	24,80%	20,93%	54,26%	24,80%	12,40%	62,79%	24,80%	17,05%	58,13%
Born outside France and not French citizens	54	24	26	52	23	27	52	24	26
	50,98%	23,52%	25,49%	50,98%	22,54%	26,47%	50,98%	23,52%	25,49%
Born outside France and French citizens	12	4	6	12	2	8	12	7	3
	54,54%	18,18%	27,27%	54,54%	9,09%	36,36%	54,54%	31,81%	13,63%
Total	96	55	102	96	41	116	96	53	104
	37,94%	21,73%	40,31%	37,94%	16,20%	45,84%	37,94%	20,94%	41,10%

How do you explain these instances of discriminatory behaviour?									
My accent			Asian physical appearance			I wore a mask			
Without opinion	No	Yes	Without opinion	No	Yes	Without opinion	No	Yes	Nb
32	96	1	32	5	92	32	70	27	129
24,80%	74,41%	0,77%	24,80%	3,87%	71,31%	24,80%	54,26%	20,93%	
52	49	1	52	17	33	52	23	27	102
50,98%	48,03%	0,98%	50,98%	16,66%	32,35%	50,98%	22,54%	26,47%	
12	10	0	12	1	9	12	9	1	22
54,54%	45,45%	0,00%	54,54%	4,54%	40,90%	54,54%	40,90%	4,54%	
96	155	2	96	23	134	96	102	55	253
37,94%	61,26%	0,79%	37,94%	9,09%	52,96%	37,94%	40,31%	21,73%	

misinformation. According to them, better information on the characteristics of the virus could dispel this 'misunderstanding'. However, others interviewees verbalize and denounce the discriminatory treatment they experienced.

Pan, a 33-year-old Chinese PhD student studying in a small town in central France was shocked and saddened when he encountered racism from children. Following the end of the lockdown in France on May 11th, he visited the city zoo with his Chinese friends: 'There were a lot of kids there. When they saw us, they shouted, 'Mom, it's the Chinese, they have the virus!' These kids are very small, some maybe 10 years old, others 7 or 8. The youngest is maybe 3. He's sitting in a baby stroller and he can't even say the word 'virus', he's just screaming, 'They're sick!' This has happened three times, and all with (White) children.'

Another female Chinese Ph.D student, who is 28 years old and lives in the 15th arrondissement of Paris, reported 'the most incredible discrimination and attack' which she encountered because of her race. In April, on her way to the post office, the student was wearing a mask and crossed paths with an old lady, who stared at her viciously and spat at her. The old lady then walked quickly away while the student stood there in a daze because she had never encountered such a thing.

In contrast to young skilled Chinese newcomers who are only beginning to become aware of and verbalize ethno-racial discrimination, narratives from the descendants of Chinese migrants are characterized by increased victimization. The current episode they are experiencing during the Covid-19 pandemic sadly reminds them of experiences of racism in school and in everyday life during their childhood and adolescence. Overwhelmed by the scale and intensity of anti-Chinese racism during the pandemic, they do not hesitate to denounce and protest the treatment they are suffering as racist and xenophobic.

A 19-year-old working woman, born in Paris and of Chinese descent, described her personal experience as follows: 'I always feel like I am being watched, judged. I am afraid of coughing, whether it is outside or inside my apartment (I share an apartment with others). This is not just my experience. I also saw a young Asian girl (about 6–8 years old) wearing a mask on the bus and being pointed at. People looked at her with contempt, disgust … '

A 23-year-old French student of Chinese origin, born in Réunion said: 'The Covid-19 crisis makes the French public aware that anti-Asian racism does exist. And many people still hide this racism under the

pretext of 'fear of disease' rather than in fact 'fear of the other', In short, personally, I'm as afraid as ever of racist attacks.'

This feeling of injustice also occurs among people who are not Chinese but perceived as such. Following a call for testimony on their Facebook page launched by the AJCF (Association of Young Chinese in France)[5] many people posted comments. Among these witnesses, we find Korean students travelling to Paris, a young Frenchman of Filipino-French parents, and a young Frenchwoman of South Korean origin. These groups are also affected by racist acts during the Covid-19 pandemic, highlighting an essentialist bias in the perception of Asians as a homogeneous group by French people. It is also part of the culturalist and racist readings of the pandemic that dominate in France, likening Coronavirus to a 'Chinese virus', an 'Asian virus' or even a 'yellow virus' (Tremblay 2020).

Rallying against anti-Asian racism

While it was only a part of the Chinese population living in France, as shown above, that was aware of the racism to which they were subjected, and has actually been organizing for the recognition of their rights, the Covid-19 pandemic highlights this emerging consciousness and expression among the majority of them. Indeed, and as noted above, the pandemic has led to more blunt and violent manifestations of racism against people perceived as Asians. While all recent incidents covered in the media are specifically qualified as 'racist', previously this had hardly been the case, since 'race' remains a slippery word in France. Saïd Bouamama and Pierre Tévanian (2006: 246) have shown that French institutions rest upon a 'republican universalism', which tends to ignore and reject cultural differences and a sense of belonging to different ethnic groups. In their words, immigrants and their descendants have to 'integrate themselves or be integrated.' The French journalist Rokhaya Diallo (2020) suggests that France has 'long avoided discussion about race, hiding behind the 'colour-blind' philosophy of the Republic.' It should be remembered that 'republican universalism' and 'color blindness' in France is a polemical subject, which divides researchers in Sociology and History (Wieviorka 1997; Raissiguier 2010; Noiriel 2006; De Rudder *et al.* 2000; Amiraux and Simon 2006).

[5]The AJCF Facebook page has also received messages from French spouses of Asian migrants who testify to the racist experiences of their family members.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, discussions on racism, especially anti-Asian racism, were brought back into the media spotlight and discussed openly (France2 2020).

As a part of the global landscape of debates dedicated to racism issues during the Covid-19 pandemic, academics tackle the matter of anti-Asian racism as well, based upon the requests of politicians, cultural bodies, associations, media outlets, etc. Besides conferences organized by activists, such as those organized by the Association of Young Chinese in France (Dao *et al.* 2020; AJCF and MAF 2020), the French National Museum of History of Immigration organized on 10 June a conference about how the Covid-19 pandemic may be creating scapegoats among people from working-class neighbourhoods and among Chinese immigrants. Both social groups have been held responsible for the propagation of the virus (Dely *et al.* 2020). In addition, the French National Assembly invited on 7 July two sociologists who work on Chinese migration, to a committee hearing about the emergence and evolution of anti-Asian racism (Assemblée Nationale 2020).

Media coverage and increased representation of racism towards Asians in France during the Covid-19 pandemic have enabled a growing awareness within the Chinese and other Asian-perceived communities. However, the process also attests to a prior awareness among certain members of these communities, as it was the rise of the most militant voices speaking for themselves about racism that has promoted increased media coverage. These voices and this growing awareness in France cannot be separated from the wider global context of anti-Asian sentiment and racism, which has directly informed the anti-racist attitudes seen among the Chinese origin respondents in this study.

In the end of January, an Asian woman posting anonymously on Facebook[6] denounced how the health crisis has fuelled hate speech and racist acts against 'Asian-labelled' people, believed to be majority-identified as Chinese. In this post, witnessed racist events, and stories about them, are connected to a more general and systemic racism (Gay 2020). The post created the hashtag #JeNeSuisPasUnVirus (I am not a virus) which has been widely used by the French Asian community on social media such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

None of this means that media coverage of the pandemic single-handedly has raised awareness about racism within the whole Chinese

[6]The Facebook post unfortunately doesn't exist anymore, but an afro-feminist activist shared its screenshots on Twitter.

community. Depending on migratory status and age, the different groups of respondents are more or less aware about this issue. Many French second-generation Chinese migrants have been tracking news coverage about racism for years. Florent, 23, and Denis, 21, two French-born Chinese interviewees, both mention that during the pandemic, cases of racism might be getting worse and more visible, but they both also note that racism against Chinese and Asians has existed for a long time, and voices already have been speaking out against it. Florent alludes to the 2017 Paris protests by the Chinese community surrounding the death of Liu Shaoyao[7], which showed him that 'Chinese people can go in the streets as well'. Both of them hinted that their generation stands out from their parents', who did not raise their voices against racism. However, both of the interviewees did not realize that they were also standing apart from Chinese recent immigrants close to their own age, for whom the aggravation of racism against Asians during the Covid-19 pandemic has been a catalyst in raising their awareness of discrimination.

In essence, for the majority of Chinese descendants living in France, the Covid-19 pandemic does not represent a turning point in their understanding of racism. However, this is the case for recent Chinese immigrants. Many of them did not grow up stigmatized as non-white Others in France, and thus may discover the existence of racism against their community during the pandemic and the increase in visible racist acts to which it has given room. Many young Chinese skilled newcomers thus are speaking up about racism for the first time, showing an unprecedented level of involvement and activism. In February, in reaction to the spread of both Covid-19 and racist acts against Asians, the group Audio Video Exprimō (2020), an audiovisual collective founded by recent Chinese immigrants, directed a short movie, The Outbreak's Memory, to testify about discriminatory acts to which they have been subjected. They call for a more critical perspective from their fellow French citizens, to help dissociate Covid-19 from Chinese migrants. In addition, one 25 years old Chinese master's degree student who currently lives in a town in the south of France explained that she tried very hard to fight back every time she was discriminated against, rather than just swallowing her anger. 'It is the time to go over and talk to them: if you speak out and explain it clearly to them (those who discriminate), they will instead respect you more, but if you dodge, they will continue to repeat their behavior, even more offensively.'

[7]In 2017, a Chinese newcomer was murdered in his home by a policeman.

While young Chinese graduates are more inclined to talk about racism, their predecessors – Chinese newcomers now in their 40s and 50s – are still in denial of racism. These generational differences deserve to be studied in depth in a further empirical investigation.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, people of Chinese origin in France from different backgrounds – especially in terms of age and migratory status –, are raising their voices against racism. While for recent young immigrants racism can be perceived as a new topic, for other Chinese descendants and earlier immigrants it is more deep-rooted. Thus, activists of Chinese origin may conceptualize their struggle as anti-racism, as a movement for agency in society which is sometimes combined with the anti-racist struggles of other Asian-perceived people and other people of colour, as well as struggles for other issues related to gender, sexual identity, etc. For example, some of interviewees who are descendants of migrants, are in solidarity with emerging mobilisations against anti-Black racism, 'Black Lives Matter', in the USA and France. As a consequence, while activists of Chinese origin in France may express their struggles in various ways, their voices all intend to deconstruct the stereotypes and prejudices arrayed against them.

Discussion

In the French academic context—in which studies on migrant populations and immigrants' descendants are still lacking, and the few that exist are often unilaterally conducted—the main contribution of this research is that it makes the effort to present the heterogeneity of Chinese people living in France. Although the studied sub-groups in this research are not exhaustive and we focus mainly on high-skilled newcomers and young descendants born in France, this study has collected empirical data on the views of people from very different backgrounds within populations of Chinese origin in France in an unprecedented way. Without a large-scale empirical survey, it is difficult to access the views of the most invisible and silent people in this population. It is extremely rare to obtain the differentiated experiences of these citizens, particularly in terms of experiences of racism and discrimination, a very controversial subject in a French context that promotes republican universalism. Compared to other non-academic interventions about racism against Chinese people during the Covid-19 pandemic, interventions based solely on news sources and social media analyses that showcase the views of the most militant people (cf. references cited supra), this

academic study gives a view of the diversity of discrimination and racism experienced by the various sub-groups of Chinese in France[8] as well as the different ways they respond to it. While the Covid-19 pandemic forced some young skilled Chinese newcomers to become aware of racism against them, these concerns have existed for a long time among descendants of Chinese migrants and remain denied among the older newcomers. This question of racism denial among Chinese newcomers recalls general research concerning the political re-socialization of newcomers during the migration process. Generally speaking, this research demonstrates an awareness of racism and a willingness to gain visibility in the public arena among Chinese population living in France. The French case analysed here might shed light on the similar process of emerging racism and discrimination toward Chinese people during Covid-19 pandemic observed in other European countries.

This survey can also enrich general debates on the differential treatment experienced by migrants and their descendants in France, where a republican model of integration dominates and where ethnic statistics are not allowed, but also where questions about racism have started to gain prevalence during the Covid-19 pandemic. The goal of the current survey is to measure the extent and the intensity of discrimination related to Covid-19 experienced by the Chinese population in France, and the qualitative survey allows a better understanding of the various subjective experiences of that discrimination. Generally speaking, racial colour blindness, which can also mean blindness to differential treatment experienced by migrants and their descendants, precisely reinforces systemic racism, both in daily interpersonal interactions and in access to rights. During the Covid-19 pandemic, and contrary to the republican universalism promised, the descendants of Chinese migrants encounter difficulties concerning their full access and unsuspected belonging to the French Nation because of their physical appearance. This research thus provides an overview of how useful and enlightening detailed studies on the experiences and living conditions of racialized people could be.

In summary, this paper has three main contributions: first, it has empirically demonstrated the persistence of the feeling of injustice among the Chinese population in France. Discriminatory treatment as experienced by migrants and their descendants is a European phenomenon, and has been statistically proven in other European countries.

[8]For more information about discrimination and racism experienced by Chinese people and their descendants in France before the period of the Covid-19 pandemic, please see: Li 2019; Luu 2020; Wang 2019.

But this paper has empirically revealed this phenomenon in the Chinese population in France, while allowing for nuances within that population. Secondly, this paper has shown the rising awareness of racism in the newcomer group, which has been catalyzed and accelerated by the Covid-19 epidemic; in contrast, descendants were already attuned to it before the health crisis. Finally, this paper has analysed the struggles and different forms of mobilisations against racism among young people who identify as Chinese, both newcomers and descendants. The paper has also shown that their struggles and commitments are part of a more general anti-racist movement occurring in French society.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was supported by Agence Nationale de la Recherche: [Grant Number ANR-20-COVI-0046-01].

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