

Empowering Asian Educators in the Time of Crisis

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Abstract

In this article, I draw from my experience working as a Korean American music teacher in the US. I reflect on what it means to be Asian American and to bring Asian narratives to the forefront. I examine the distinct challenges of social justice in the context of Asians and Asian Americans' lives—particularly through the lens of the “model minority.” The COVID-19 pandemic has spotlighted Asians and Asian Americans' lived experiences in ways unlike before. I discuss perceptions of Asians throughout US history and the current representativeness of Asian music in the framework of multicultural education. Grounded in Erving Goffman's notion of *covering*, Kenji Yoshino's extension of this concept (the *four axes* of covering), and Edward Said's *Orientalism*, I make seven recommendations to empower Asians and Asian educators in this time of crisis. The article explores and situates the current challenges of anti-Asian racism, connecting it to aforementioned theories and briefly proposes the concept of 홍익인간 (Hongik-Ingan) to course-correct, support, and acknowledge Asian educators' multiplicity of identities as allies.

Keywords

Asian American, Orientalism, covering, microaggressions, music education, pandemic, COVID-19, anti-racist education, multiculturalism

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, anti-Asian sentiments and crimes have been on the rise (Gover, Harper, and Langton 2020). The 2021 US National Report for Stop AAPI Hate (Asian American Pacific Islander) recorded a 36% increase in hate incidents from April to July of 2021 (Yellow Horse et al. 2021). In the early months of 2022, Asian communities reeled again, this time from the tragic deaths of Yao Pan Ma, Michelle Go, and Christina Yuna Lee. In April 2021, Ma was brutally attacked in East Harlem while collecting recycled bottles and succumbed to his injuries on New Year's Eve after months of being in a coma (Kelly 2022). Go, who was waiting for a train at the New York Times Square station, was violently shoved onto the subway tracks and killed by the oncoming subway car (Tully and Southall 2022). Lee was followed home and fatally stabbed inside her apartment (Southall, Watkins, and Singer 2022); all three were victims of unprovoked attacks. With a massive 164% increase in Asian-targeted crimes in the first quarter of 2021, these incidents have and continue to exhibit a bleak and demoralizing reality for Asians and Asian Americans living in the US (Center for the Study of Hate & Extremism 2021).

There are speculations about the sudden uptick in anti-Asian attacks. During a White House press briefing on March 19, 2020, former President Donald Trump's reference to the novel coronavirus as the China Virus, having previously called it the Wuhan virus and Kung Flu, sparked much controversy (Rogers, Jakes, and Swanson 2020). Adding fuel to the fire, Trump's repeated self-labeling as "the least racist person" continued to make headlines in the news (Capehart 2019; Scott 2018). Many argue that the ongoing violence, discrimination, and racial tropes against Asians and Asian Americans are largely due to Trump's recurrent use of xenophobic language—particularly in his attempts to distort and grotesquely exaggerate all facets of Asian cultures (Bailey and Moon 2020). However, some argue that it is simply history repeating itself (Horsey 2021; Kimura 2021).

Roots of Anti-Asian Racism in America

The first Asian immigrants in the US were Chinese laborers looking for new work opportunities following the aftermath of the First Opium War (1839–1842) (Chan 1991). The Treaty of Nanjing between Great Britain and China in 1842 paved the way for the US and China to sign their first official treaty in Wangxia in 1844 (Fitzpatrick and Monteath 2019). The Treaty of Wangxia (1844) comprised many key components taken from the Treaty of Nanjing (1842), most notably, the

establishment of the first five treaty ports in Shanghai, Guangzhou, Ningbo, Fuzhou, and Xiamen for successful Chinese and Western commerce (Bracken 2019; Cartier 1991; Ling and Austin 2015).

By the 1850s, there was an exponential growth in Chinese populations in the US. Most entered through the port of San Francisco during the Gold Rush in California (Daniels 2004), and over time, Chinese immigrants steadily flourished as entrepreneurs in various sectors, including the agricultural, hospitality, and textile industries (Wu 2013). With over 50 Chinatowns across America, San Francisco Chinatown remains the oldest and the largest (Tsui 2010). However, the success and influx of Chinese immigrants during the Gold Rush was less than appealing to many White residents (Chan 1991). Shortly following the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad in 1869, where Chinese workers contributed roughly 80% of the labor, America's economy took a sharp downturn (Chang and Fishkin 2019). The US's economic crises have long been associated with negative consequences for racial minorities, and the impact on Chinese (and Asian) Americans was no different (Krosch, Tyler, and Amodio 2017). From early 1870s to 1890s, anti-Chinese groups spread propaganda and stories about the dangers of "Yellow Peril." Perceived as a looming, existential threat to America's culture, health, military, and economy, Chinese (and Asians) were seen as unfit, unclean, and too uncivilized to be American (Chan 1991; Juun 2007; Lyman 2000). Samuel Gompers, a president of the American Federation of Labor at the time, published a pamphlet in 1902 entitled, "Meat vs. Rice: American Manhood against Asiatic Coolieism. Which Shall Survive?" (Currarino 2007; Gompers 1902). The publication comprised numerous peoples' and his own explanations and rationales for condemning the Chinese population from entering and living in the US. Gompers cited James G. Blaine of the United States Senate, who stated:

Treat [the Chinese] like Christians say those who favor immigration; yet I believe the Christian testimony is that the conversion of Chinese on that basis is a fearful failure; and that the demoralization of the White race is much more rapid by reason of the contact than is the salvation of the Chinese race. You cannot work a man who must have beef and bread alongside a man who can only live on rice. In all such conflicts, and in all such struggles, the result is not to bring up the man who lives on rice to the beef-and-bread standard, but it is to bring down the beef-and-bread man to the rice standard (American Federation of Labor 1902, 22).

Charlotte Smith, representing the Woman's National Industrial League, shared similar sentiments:

Ninety-nine out of every 100 Chinese are gamblers ... the beastly and immoral lives that these Mongolians lead is only too well known in the police courts and of our larger cities, where patrol wagons filled the Chinese gamblers and Sunday school scholars—every Monday morning—goes to prove, as an object lesson, that [the Chinese] can never be Christianized (American Federation of Labor 1902, 25).

With rising tension, California became the focal point of anti-Chinese movements where admitting Chinese migrants to the US was perceived to lower America's cultural and moral standards (Kurashige 2016). As anti-Chinese propaganda and aggression worsened, the California state legislature began to pass a myriad of anti-Chinese statutes to appease their White residents and workers. Spanning from the 1850s, some of the "Yellow Peril" legislations that were passed included the following (Chan 1991; Kurashige 2016):

1. In 1854, the California Supreme Court deemed that Chinese individuals were ineligible to testify against Whites in court,
2. "An Act to Discourage the Immigration to This State of Persons Who Cannot Become Citizens" was passed in 1857,
3. "An Act to Prevent the Further Immigration of Chinese or Mongolians to This State" passed in 1858,
4. Chinese children were denied admission to San Francisco public schools in 1860,
5. Chinese people were denied admission to San Francisco City Hospitals in 1860,
6. The use of firecrackers and Chinese ceremonial gongs was banned in 1873–1875,
7. Regulations were passed on the size of Chinese fishermen's shrimping nets in 1875,
8. Companies and municipal works were prohibited from hiring Chinese workers in 1879.

With a mission to further regulate, limit, and suspend the Chinese from entering and settling in the US, Congress passed the notorious Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 (Gyory 1998). Signed by President Chester A. Arthur, the Act remains the sole immigration law in US history to ban entry based on one's ethnicity; it is often described as analogous to Trump's Executive Order 13769 in 2017, which banned nationals of seven Muslim-major countries (later revoked by President Joe Biden

in January 2021) (Paik 2020). The United States Supreme Court Justice Stephen J. Field, who determined the aptness of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, stated:

As [the Chinese] grew in numbers each year the people of the coast saw, or believed they saw, in the facility of immigration, and in the crowded millions of China, where population presses upon the means of subsistence, great danger that at no distant day that portion of our country would be overrun by them unless prompt action was taken to restrict their immigration... So urgent and constant were the prayers for relief against existing and anticipated evils, both from the public authorities of the Pacific coast and from private individuals, that Congress was impelled to act on the Subject 37. (Field 1888, 295–96).

With a strong backing of the Supreme Court, provisions of the Chinese Exclusion Act continued to expand (Johnson 2000). To further extend the exclusion by ten more years, the Congress passed the Geary Act in 1892, requiring all Chinese residents to carry permits from the Internal Revenue Service stating their proof of residence (Chan 1991). Those caught without permits were subject to immediate deportation unless a “credible White witness” vouched for them (149 US 704). In 1904, the Exclusion Act was extended indefinitely, and in the subsequent year, California’s Civil Code banned intermarriage between Whites and “Mongolians” (California Civil Code, section 69; Tragen 1944).

While Chinese immigrants were the earliest target of immigration bans and anti-Asian violence in the US, migrants from other Asian countries in the late 1880s (e.g., Japanese, Filipino, Koreans) experienced similar treatments (Chan 1991). The Gentlemen’s Agreement (1907–1908) between the US and Japan, endorsed by President Theodore Roosevelt, initially aimed to protect the rights of “good” Japanese American residents who were already residing in the US. In effect, the agreement offered to protect Japanese Americans in exchange for the Japanese government assuming full responsibility for limiting their regular laborers from emigrating to the US (Hsu 2015, 5; Ong, Bonacich, and Liu 1994). However, despite strict monitoring and screening of Japan’s “good immigrants,” anti-Japanese agitation and animosity continued to grow (Hsu 2015, 5). A firm believer in Asians for cheap labor but not as neighbors, James D. Phelan, then the mayor of San Francisco (1897–1902) and later a US senator (1915–1921), proclaimed that the “Chinese and Japanese are not the stuff of which American citizens can be made” (Pearson 2021, 50). By 1924, Congress passed the Johnson-Reed Act to stop Asian immigrants from “polluting the nation’s bloodstream” by establishing strict ethnic origin quotas to deter and permanently ban immigration from Asia (Higham 1999, 50).

Following Japan's surprise attack on the US naval base at Pearl Harbor in 1941, the US officially declared war against Japan and entered World War II (Chan 1991). With concern for US's national security in the event Japan seized the West Coast, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, sending approximately 112,000 Japanese men, women, and children to internment camps, irrespective of their American citizenship; 70,000 were US citizens (Ling and Austin 2015). Vigorous enforcement of anti-Asian immigration laws remained in effect until the Hart-Celler Act of 1965. Signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson, the Hart-Celler Act eliminated the quota system (Chan 1991; Hong 2019; Ling and Austin 2015). In addressing the overhaul of previous immigration policies, he declared, "[The Hart-Celler Act] repair[s] a very deep and painful flaw in the fabric of American justice. It corrects a cruel and enduring wrong in the conduct of the American nation" (Johnson 1965). It was a landmark act that fundamentally transformed the Asian racial landscape (and the cultural makeup) of the United States.

Asian American

Prior to the 1960s, Americans of Asian descent were not institutionally referred to as Asian American but were identified according to their ancestral countries (e.g., Korean, Chinese, Japanese) (Espiritu 1992). The term *Asian American* did not originate until 1968, when students at UC Berkeley founded the Asian American Political Alliance to oppose Asian labor exploitations and anti-Asian political agendas (Wei 1993). The movement also pushed back against the term *Orientalists*, which was widely used and accepted to refer to anyone who looked Asian. The term *Orientalists* remained in government documents until the passing of bill H.R. 4328 in 2016 (Meng 2015). Led by Congresswoman Grace Meng (D-NY) and signed by President Barack Obama, the bill represented a significant step towards affirming Asians and Asian Americans' sense of belonging, acceptance, and permanency in the country.

Current Reality

The notion of belonging for Asians in the US is complex. It runs parallel with the omnipresent casual racism and praise for the "model minorities" (Chou and Feagin 2015, 9). When it comes to fostering Asians' and Asian Americans' sense of belonging in the US; Asians as "model minorities" are presumed to feel that they already

belong (Chou and Feagin 2015, 16). But there is a caveat. Depending on the US's collective racialized antagonism at any given time (e.g., Islamophobia in the wake of 9/11), any affinity toward Asians and Asian Americans quickly shifts and changes. In effect, their belonging is conditional. During the current novel coronavirus pandemic, Asians have modulated from "model minorities" back to "yellow peril," and the stigma against Asians and Asian Americans has become an epidemic itself. The surge of Asian-targeted crimes and the severity of racialized discourses have forcefully revealed their distinctive challenges as they relate to social justice.

The word "social" traces back to *socius*, which in Latin means "friend/ally," and "just" signifies fairness and equality. But what does it mean to be committed to social justice and to be an equal ally for Asians in the current environment? In this time of crisis, what can educators collectively do to empower our Asian colleagues? Social justice and the *act* of being socially just are many-sided, as they involve numerous components that encompass different interpretations depending on the context. Even so, the term, *social justice*, is often used as a catch-all expression, even a "political call to action" that can muddy the waters around what constitutes affirming vs. contradicting actions on grounds of social justice (Benedict et al. 2015, xi). In the context of the current US political and cultural discourse, such debates are frequent and issues surrounding social justice continue to be highly complex, not only for the marginalized populace but for everyone.

We live in a time of contemporary social justice wherein a significant percentage of dialogues occur through social media such as Twitter, TikTok, and Instagram (Oh, Lee, and Han 2021). As a result, more and more advocates are demanding speedier, tangible actions to eliminate racial, gender, sexual orientation, age, and other biases that frequently work as barriers to achieving collective social equity (e.g., in taxation, public health, education). The Black Lives Matter movement in 2020 notably brought issues of social inequity and exclusivity to the world's attention; this and other online and in-person movements have taken the US by storm.

Meanwhile, the state of Asian communities and their collective well-being are in jeopardy. On top of the overwhelming effects of the pandemic, the ongoing wave of anti-Asian violence and prejudice continues to rear its ugly head in ways that are difficult to comprehend. On March 16, 2021, the Atlanta spa shootings perpetrated by Robert Aaron Long took eight innocent people's lives. Six of them were women of Asian descent. Long described himself on social media as a lover of "pizza, guns,

drums, music, family, and God” with a caption that read, “This pretty much sums up my life. It’s a pretty good life” (McLaughlin, Tolan, and Watts 2021). The incident report filed by the Atlanta Police Department at the time stated the attacks were not—nor were they suspected of being—a potential hate crime. Under “Aggravated Assault Factors/Homicide Factors” in the incident report, the shooting is listed as “random” (Atlanta Police Department 2021). Further exacerbating the situation, Jay Baker, who is now a former Cherokee County Sheriff’s spokesperson, publicly described the motive behind Long’s heinous actions as a result of “having [had] a really bad day” who was simply “at the end of his rope” (Chappell, Romo, and Diaz 2021). Since Long’s arrest, he revealed to the police that there was a need to “eliminate [the] temptation” due to his sex addiction and that he only meant to “help others” struggling with similar issues (Brumback and Wang 2021). Long was eventually charged with eight counts of murder and pleaded not guilty to four of them in September 2021. In the end, Long’s official charges did not include any hate crimes due to the failure of subsequent investigations in providing “evidence of racial bias,” as reported by the Cherokee County District Attorney (The Associated Press 2021).

Brief History of What’s Said and Unsaid

The Bubonic Plague, commonly known as the Black Death, ravaged Europe and Asia in the mid-13th century. It was a global epidemic, caused by what is still considered one of the deadliest diseases in human history. The Catholic Church at the time blamed the Jewish population for its spread, claiming they poisoned the water with a ploy to bring down Christianity (Watson 1978). This notion of *othering*, originating in the writings of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, has existed throughout history, such as linking various illnesses with specific populations (Snell 2018). Similar to Trump’s labeling of the novel coronavirus as the China virus and Kung Flu, worldwide epidemics such as Influenza A (H2N2) in the 1950s (labeled as Asian flu), Asiatic Cholera, Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS), Ebola virus, and the West Nile virus, have long been associated with certain races and ethnicities (Radcliffe 2021). However, the geographical labeling of many of these diseases was not always accurate about the origin of their outbreak (Radcliffe 2021). For example, the Marburg virus did not originate in Germany, and contrary to popular belief, the Spanish flu did not originate in Spain; there is a growing body of evidence that the Spanish flu may have started in Kansas in the US (Barry 2004;

Cleveland Clinic 2021; Kansas Historical Society 2021; Trilla, Trilla, and Daer 2008).

The “*epidemic Orientalism*” (Anderson 1996), associating diseases with certain populations, stems from Edward Said’s (1978) theory of *Orientalism*, which conveys the West’s false sense of profound knowledge and superiority over the East (i.e., Orient). The *Orient* has historically been regarded as inferior, exotic, stagnant, and misdirected, and in need of guidance and enlightenment from the West (Said 1978). While Said emphasized that the Orient was neither a specific place nor culture in itself but a European colonial-era construction of the East, he asserted that “the Orient,” nonetheless, was branded as the *other* and *alter ego* of the West (i.e., *Occident*) for the West. In short, portrayals of the Orient are considered authentic and valid as long as they emanate from the West’s psyche and imagination (Said 1978, 113).

Narrative

A 2006 study led by Goodwin and colleagues revealed that nine out of eleven participating Asian American teachers had endured some forms of negative experiences in their careers with parents and school administrators, who “question[ed] the cultural influence [an Asian teacher] could bring into the classroom[s]” (Goodwin et al. 2006, 113). Female Asian American teachers, in particular, shared having to navigate commentaries from their male colleagues related to their youthful appearance and sexual appeal; some were even asked to demonstrate a “correct technique” for giving massages followed by comments such as “she [would] know all about this” (Newton 2016, 79).

Despite Goodwin’s study taking place 16 years ago, my experience working as an Asian American teacher was comparable. Comments, such as “In a [instrument] closet with an Asian girl! Every guy’s dream”; “You don’t act very Asian”; “Have you ever eaten dogs?”; “I bet with [name of person] you’d be Chinese from how you’re playing violin”; and “I love Asian girls! Asian girls make the best wives,” were relatively common. Steering away from these microaggressions in work settings was challenging. The biggest irony was that as long as the commenters felt what they said was with good intent, the negative impact was somehow not on them; it was on the *other* person for (a) taking it too seriously; (b) not having a sense of humor; (c) failing to take a compliment; or (d) the commenters were not serious after all. Such comments and behaviors are reinforced by the fact that most

people view themselves as having “good moral[s]... who never would consciously discriminate” (Sue 2021). These commenters generally perceive their remarks to commend Asian peoples’ positive attributes. But the “model minority” stereotype¹ (Tuan 1998) illustrates the fallacy of these good intentions. Seen through the model minority lens, such commentaries visibly lack cultural competency and understanding and bolster the widespread, prejudiced beliefs about Asians and Asian Americans.

Similarly, Trump’s consistent efforts to defame and deplore China’s civilization and his claims of Chinese labs releasing the virus have further perpetuated *othering* through polarization, bias, and aggression toward Asians. The far-reaching consequences of one man’s poor rhetoric reflect much of Said’s assertions of *Orientalism*; namely, the West’s justification for their actions in the colonial era, which are often reduced to a heroic interpretation of taking on the “burden” of civilizing the savage East (Said 1978, 40). Throughout history and the COVID-19 pandemic, it is not uncommon for those affected by *othering* to scrutinize themselves from the lens of their perpetrators, consequently causing them to *cover*.

Covering

The United States is, by and large, “a unique multiracial and multiethnic society” with schools that value and celebrate diversity (Ramanathan 2006, 34). Yet discussions of bias against Asians and Asian Americans in the US relating to its political, economic, and socio-cultural contexts are neglected, as many people continue to perceive racism predominantly in binary terms (i.e., Black, White) (Alvarez, Juang, and Liang 2006; Hune 2019). As a result, Asians are often met with skepticism or indifference upon sharing their “lived racial realities” (Sue 2017, 2). The “model minority” stereotype (Tuan 1998) in particular, amplifies their need to *cover*, which masks and negates their individual, non-monolithic experiences (Yoshino 2001). The repercussions of the model minority myth are multi-layered: (a) it perpetuates further *othering* through rivaling and disparaging those who are also people of color; (b) it creates unviable expectations, where depending on the outcome, Asians are either deemed as “honorary Whites” or failures/anomalies; and (c) to varying degrees, it detaches Asians’ sense of self and identity, where attaining the “true American” status in the eyes of arbiters become an interminable test that has no right answers.

The term *covering* was coined by Erving Goffman (1969), an American sociologist best known for his work in self-perception. He argued that people's actions were ultimately social performances in which they choose and maintain their preferred impressions in the eyes of others. He defined the manifestation of these behaviors (i.e., social performances) as *covering*—a way in which people modify and adjust their identities to feel acknowledged and accepted by the greater society (Goffman 1956). For example, “front stage” behavior is how people act when they are aware that others are watching them; this includes people's behaviors at their workplaces or more public and formal venues such as churches or hospitals (Goffman 1963). “Backstage” behavior, on the other hand, describes how people act when no one is watching; they are free to engage as their “true” selves without any social expectations (Goffman 1956, 53).

For marginalized communities, covering is an unspoken rule for assimilation (Yoshino 2001). Yoshino, who is the Chief Justice Earl Warren professor at NYU, shared an example of his covering when he refused to hold his partner's hand at the hospital to avoid being viewed as overly “flaunting” his sexuality, despite being openly gay. On another occasion, a colleague of Yoshino recommended that he strive to be a “professional homosexual” rather than a “homosexual professional” if he wanted to get tenure at the college—suggesting that Yoshino's orientation should be more of an “extracurricular activity” rather than him being “*the* gay rights guy” if he wanted to advance in his academic career (Brown 2017). A common example concerning Asians and Asian Americans includes work/school environments wherein they are strongly encouraged to adopt easier to pronounce Anglicized names, thereby covering their names of origin.

Types of Covering

Covering can be further categorized into the following four axes: (a) *Appearance-based*, (b) *Affiliation-based*, (c) *Advocacy-based*, and (d) *Association-based* (Yoshino 2001). *Appearance-based covering* describes when people modify their outward presentation of themselves (e.g., wearing certain attires, taking on specific mannerisms, hiding their accents, hiding their disabilities/illnesses). A 1989 court case between Price Waterhouse and Ann B. Hopkins provides a good example: Hopkins was a female employee at Price Waterhouse who was criticized for being too “macho” and “aggressive.” As a result, she was told to “walk more femininely, talk more femininely, wear makeup and jewelry [and] to have her hair styled”

(Defendant's Exhibit 27). Her seniors recommended she "take a course at charm school" (Defendant's Exhibit 27). Yet when she did downplay her "aggressiveness," she was not promoted; when she did display it, it was deemed unacceptable. In the end, the court ruled in her favor, citing: "An employer who objects to aggressiveness in women, but whose positions require this trait places women in an intolerable and impermissible catch 22: out of a job if they behave aggressively, and out of a job if they do not" (Price Waterhouse v. Hopkins 1989, 251). Another scenario can include the following: suppose a recent college graduate is interviewing for a new elementary teaching position, and they have many piercings and tattoos. This candidate may choose to dress more formally than needed, to (a) avoid potential complaints from parents and administrators or, (b) to negate certain perceptions associated with having many tattoos/piercings through appearance-based covering.

The second axis of covering is *affiliation-based*—it is when people avoid behaviors widely associated with their group identity. Here is a scenario: depending on the culture of the work environment, male employees may feel pressured to take shorter paternity leaves irrespective of their company policies. This may be, in part, due to the historical and societal gender norms expected of working men (Leire, Sánchez-Vidal and Cegarra-Leiva 2018; Miyajima and Yamaguchi 2017; Petts, Knoester and Waldfogel 2020). By covering their role as a new parent, male employees might minimize the perception that they are not fully committed to their jobs. Another example concerning Asians and Asian Americans includes scenarios in which they downplay distasteful racial jokes to avoid being seen as overly sensitive, prudish, or lacking social deftness (e.g., "It's just a joke!").

Next, the third axis of covering is *advocacy-based*; this concerns situations where people avoid sticking up for their group. For example, contingent upon a company's stance on the COVID vaccine, employees may feel uneasy about sharing their vaccine status—in either direction—as not to offend anyone. By covering, employees can avoid being ostracized and, in some cases, keep from losing their jobs. In a different scenario, Asian employees may refrain from speaking up about the rampant anti-Asian crimes to avoid the perception that they are *exclusively* sticking up for their group. Similarly, religious employees with conservative viewpoints may choose not to share their opinions at work meetings with others for fear that it might negatively impact their careers.

Last but not least, the *Association-based* axis of covering emerges when people actively avoid members of their group. For example, Asian employees may refrain from sharing lunch or hanging out with other Asian coworkers altogether to dodge the perception that they only socialize with other Asians. A different scenario might include a female executive refraining from joining the women's network at her company or mentoring female employees to avoid the perception that she only cares for her biological gender.

My Covering

Covering in the pandemic has been literal and metaphorical for Asian communities in the United States; I was no different. Since the Atlanta shooting and recurrent incidents of anti-Asian violence, I navigated my days as normally as possible. For my husband and I, who are both Asian, we waited for—perhaps even anticipated—*some* form of acknowledgment from our groups of friends concerning the anti-Asian attacks. To our surprise and dismay, the absence of texts, calls, and emails other than from our immediate family members, was sobering, tragic, and felt to our dignity like a “death by a thousand cuts” (Sue 2021). I questioned the depth and authenticity of our friendships, and it wasn't long until it became necessary to wear masks and hats to cover our Asian features. When the science behind wearing masks eventually turned into all-out political warfare, we felt boxed into a lose-lose situation, where both masking and unmasking posed high levels of threat to our well-being. We were the modern-day “yellow peril,” and covering was now a precondition to get by.

Music and Covering

Multiculturalism and its impact on the United States have been integral in many ways, particularly its contribution to “[the United States'] richness and diversity” (Gold, Grant, and Rivlin 1977, 18). It explores numerous dimensions of diverse cultures, and when introduced early on to students, it can be vital to minimizing *covering* and *othering*. Multicultural education at its core is an all-inclusive educational ideology with a fundamental purpose to learn and explore worlds that are outside of our own; the irony, however, lies in that multicultural education in the United States first emerged as a result of America's struggle in its history of racism and exclusion (Banks 2017).

In music education, failure to introduce and teach proper cultural contexts for what is taught (e.g., performing traditional Korean folk songs, such as “Arirang” during a Chinese New Year concert), will continue to reproduce the “same status quo” (Bradley 2006, 10–11). Bradley (2006) argues that the concept of multiculturalism is unnaturally and ineffectively enforced, as music curricula in schools “produce and reproduce [further] racialized understandings of the music of the world” (10). Topics of race and discussions of multiculturalism are conveyed softly through terms like “culture” and “ethnicity” to fulfill the implicit requirements of having had official discourses relating to multicultural music education. Through the lens of critical race theory and anti-racist education, Bradley (2006, 2007) underscores the significance of contextualizing cross-cultural and intercultural awareness in music, which allows teachers to move past the ideas of basic multiculturalism.

Multicultural music outside the Western art canon have been historically and invariably *othered* (Hess 2015). It is vital to recognize that while teaching and playing without contexts may help to evade the discomfort of having had direct conversations about race, it will guarantee the further perpetuation of racialized understandings of “Other” music (Small 1998). The omission of cultural contexts for students in music education is a substantial distortion of what constitutes multicultural education. But there is hope. More and more schools across the United States are being asked to be accountable for what they do and “[to] rethink their relevance in today’s world” (Boyer 1990, 76). The path to change is never a straight line; sometimes it requires moving a few steps backward to make bigger steps forward. In music education, we must un-cover and move forward more directly.

When Preference is not Really a Preference

Western music and music-making have long been regarded as the universal benchmark to teach and learn music (Belz 2006; Becker 1986). In the current digital era, even popular audio workstations, such as Logic and Ableton, are primarily built to accommodate music-making in the Western mode. Perceptions of consonance and dissonance, and peoples’ liking (i.e., perceived pleasantness) of certain chords across styles of classical, jazz, and avant-garde music, have shown to be significantly associated with their musical backgrounds (e.g., level of education) and expertise. Furthermore, the participants in the study did not correlate consonance with their perceived “pleasantness” (Popescu et al. 2019, 2).

A different study led by MIT and Brandeis University revealed that peoples' preferences for certain chords/timbre were irrelevant to Western music's often presumed superior features (Jacoby et al. 2019). In two sets of studies conducted in 2011 and 2015, McDermott et al. (2016) compared the tonal preferences between adult Americans and the Indigenous Amazonian tribe known as the Tsimane. The study revealed that despite the tribe members successfully isolating consonance and dissonance, they did not express any preference for one over the other; however, participants' general preference/liking for consonance did increase exponentially depending on how close their villages were to cities/urban centers (McDermott et al. 2016). McDermott et al. (2016) concluded that peoples' amount of exposure to Western music dictated their harmonic/consonance preferences rather than biological factors.

However, Bowling et al. (2017) strongly refuted McDermott et al.'s (2016) methodology and findings, highlighting numerous missing components in McDermott et al.'s (2016) study. Bowling et al. (2017) emphasized McDermott et al.'s (2016) failure to include the most consonant interval (i.e., the octave) in their research. Bowling and his team (2017) contended that while there was indeed a connection between peoples' level of exposure and chord preference, their consonance perception still rested on "firm biological foundations,"² and denying this fact would "do so at their peril" (119). There are also other elements to consider. Previous research suggests that there is no simple one-to-one relationship between peoples' perceived emotion and felt emotion (i.e., evoked emotion) when listening to music (Zentner, Grandjean, and Scherer 2008). This implies that music's ability to evoke emotions in *some* cases does not determine that it would do so in all cases (Juslin and Sloboda 2010). While the notion of consonance preference is likely linked to one's experience and exposure, sensory consonance and dissonance are a separate cognitive focus (Popescu et al. 2019). A wealth of older literature specifically examines emotional properties, such as the works of Becker (2004, 2010) and Krumhansl (1990, 1997, 2002). These researchers explore the listening emotion and the cognitive foundations of musical emotions, which are outside the focus of this paper.

The Other Music

Musics of Asia are frequently perceived as "complex" (Kasilag 1967, 71) and more "noise" than sound (Moon 2005, 238). In the 1800s, an anonymous critic for a

weekly newspaper described their first Chinese music performance in New York as “amusing...there are two gongs, four-stringed instruments, and several vocalists, a sort of Dumb Orchestra” (Spirit of the Times 1853, 612). Despite being born in the US, Chinese American musicians’ ability to sing Western songs that were “more sophisticated” were also doubted (Moon 2005, 238). Lee Tung Foo, a second-generation Chinese American vaudeville performer in the 19th century, was the first Asian American artist to combine operatic and popular songs in his shows. Foo deliberately put on acts as “yellowface” at the start to play to his audiences’ stereotypes of “inferior” Chinese men and would later impeccably perform operatic and popular songs to dismantle the negative depictions of Asians and Asian Americans (Galella 2018, 67). A Chinese “yellowface” singing popular American songs was perceived as bizarre, exotic, and highly entertaining, and his “yellowface” acts quickly became a novelty (Moon 2005). With patronizing fandom, Foo’s shows became a wild success. His critics praised him for “excellent voice, he uses with such intelligence that one almost forgets his race, but he sings and speaks fluently in English and with [an] evident sense of humor that is surprising” (*News Democrat* 1907 as cited in Moon 2005).

According to Feagin (2020), the constant repetition of actions centered around the “white racial frame” will perpetuate any and all racial stereotypes, including “[certain] ideologies, images, interpretations and narratives, emotions, and reactions to language accents, as well as racialized inclinations to discriminate” (11). Like the imagery of the “model minority” which Asians and Asian Americans did not create, their narratives continue to be shared through the lens of the “white racial frame” (Feagin 2020, 11). By uncovering and exposing exoticism, Orientalism, and the East-West binary, Everett (2021) expresses the need for Asian counter-framing and suggests challenging this binarism to develop purposeful intercultural strategies. Locke (2012) has long supported this stance, citing inadequacy in musical representation, particularly between Western approaches and those in the East. The duality between the “American Creed” (Page 1921) and perpetuation of othering and covering of Asians and Asian Americans demand strong countervailing actions as well as continuous commitment from all allies. Over 100 years have passed since Lee Tung Foo’s musical debut in the US. Yet the nation’s consciously endorsed egalitarian values continue to co-exist with its prejudiced traditions.

While fully acknowledging that advocacy is not reserved solely for Asians and Asian Americans, my aim in this paper is to bring Asians' socio-racial positionality to the forefront. The discursive shift from "coolies" to "model minorities" and back to "yellow peril" in the 21st century demands further understanding of the dynamics that underlie the current racialization of Asians and Asian Americans (Junn 2007, 356). In encouraging readers to consider their positionalities individually and collectively and in supporting our Asian and Asian American colleagues, I propose seven ways in which we can empower them as allies.

A Call to Action: Empowering Asian Educators in the Time of Crisis

1. Acknowledge them—the people and the events.

Ladson-Billings once wrote of her identity as an African American scholar: "It is not an either/or proposition. Rather, it is both/and" (Ladson-Billings 1997, 67). Within music education, colleagues and allies of Asian educators must also recognize the heterogeneity of their Asian colleagues' cultural experiences. That is, significant efforts and practices must be made to see beyond the everyday static images associated with what characterizes Asian and Asian-ness in their minds. For this to occur, it necessitates environments in which the narratives and perspectives of Asians and Asian American educators are frequently shared with encouragement and support from their colleagues and school leaders. Stereotypes and prejudiced beliefs only operate successfully when internalized by the greater community (Asher 2007). To echo the famous MTA daily announcements that can be heard around New York City transit stations: "If you see something, say something" (Metropolitan Transportation Agency 2016). This also applies to actions and inactions that one sees as a colleague of Asian educators, particularly in the time of the pandemic. It starts with acknowledging the unacknowledged.

2. Unlearn to relearn. I recall years ago when a school leader requested that I put together a concert on the theme of an "Asian New Year." When I asked for clarification, I was met with "Play some Chinese/Korean/Asian traditional songs and *spruce it up!*" The Asian population is non-monolithic and represents more than 30 different nationalities and ethnic groups across the United States; the term, *Asian*, does not only refer to East Asians. To borrow from Banaji and Greenwald (1994), to make the "unconscious, conscious," environments and opportunities where Asian educators can comfortably share their collective experiences must be

encouraged. Such platforms are critical given the collective trauma Asian communities face. Without such space, I question how schools can adequately address Asian educators' multiplicities of cultures and identities. Without acknowledgment and support from their colleagues and school leaders, empowering and cultivating support for Asian educators will always remain temporary. Unlearning is the most difficult. Similar to teaching students, developing the "knowledge base" of our Asian colleagues and their varied experiences (e.g., traditions, cultural values, cultural experiences) is vital (Shaw 2015, 209). Having contextual knowledge to enhance our awareness of the many cultural incongruities of Asian educators is most imperative.

3. Intent always matters. But own your impact. One of the biggest lessons I learned in adulthood was accepting that common sense occurs rather uncommonly. Comments like: "I have an Asian neighbor"; "My friend's fiancé is Asian"; "I had a Hmong coworker once"; "Do you know [so-and-so] in the I.T. department? He's also Chinese," are generally innocuous in intent. Sexualizing/fetishizing comments (e.g., "Asian girls are the hottest! I have yellow fever"; "I only date Asian girls/guys"), however, are never innocuous and are universally unwelcome. As a Korean woman, I take most of the comments I receive related to my Asian-ness as a friendly banter; this means I believe most people are well-intentioned. That said, I also believe that most Asian colleagues do not actively *seek* for arbitrary reasons to be offended. In the end, Asian colleagues do not owe anyone any answers concerning the origin of their Asian-ness, especially if the setting does not call for it (e.g., "What are you?"; "Where are you really from?"; "What is your real name?"; "When did you learn English?"; "Are you adopted?"; "Are you Chinese?"; "Have you eaten dogs/cats/monkeys?"). If unsure, I would briefly consider the questions and comments above, but flip them and try to hear them from the perspective of a non-Asian colleague: "I have a White neighbor"; "My cousin's fiancé is Black," "I had a White coworker once"; "Do you know [so-and-so] from H.R.? She's White." If they sound like unnecessary irrelevant comments, it is likely that they are and may come across as insensitive to an Asian colleague.

4. It takes a community effort. With increasing diversity in students from so many backgrounds, educators now have the opportunity to extend their subject-matter knowledge to "civic dimensions" by "building bridges across [multiple] disciplines;" in this respect, it is critical that as music educators, we lead students to

live “lives of dignity and purpose” through a wider lens and music of the world (Boyer 1990, 77). This notion, however, is not limited to only students. Asian educators’ lived experiences must continue to be illuminated. It is essential to acknowledge and amplify the current trends/music/artists (e.g., BTS, Straykids, Blackpink, IU, NCT) that positively focus on facets of Asian cultures that are less known; incorporating these elements is a small but crucial step towards establishing what anti-racism looks and feels like in classrooms.

5. Small or large, microaggressions cut. Paper cuts are always painful, yet barely noticeable. These microscopic cuts can ruin your simplest daily functions (e.g., washing hands, sanitizing hands, opening doors, a cheerful high-five, bending your finger/knuckle), and all it took was a sliver of feeble paper. The effects of racial microaggressions are similar, but the wounds are not as minor. To help our allies better understand the nine types of microaggressions that Asian colleagues commonly experience, I present a scenario for each (Sue et al. 2007, 2017): a) Alien in their Own Land (e.g., a third generation Korean teacher who has never been to Korea is asked to speak about their “culture” during a diversity-focused staff meeting); (b) Ascription of Intelligence (e.g., an Indian teacher is asked to fill-in as a substitute for a STEM class irrespective of their subject-matter knowledge); (c) Denial of Racial Reality (e.g., an Asian teacher is told that the current situation is “not that bad,” and they have it the “best” among all other minorities); (d) Exotification of Asian American Women (e.g., “Asian women make the best wives”; “I only date Asian girls”; “Asian girls are so exotic”); (e) Invalidation of Interethnic Differences (e.g., asking a Japanese teacher to translate for an incoming Hmong student); (f) Pathologizing Cultural Values/Communication Styles (e.g., telling an Asian teacher that they need to “speak up” because they are “too quiet” in meetings); (g) Second Class Citizenship (e.g., a principal does not address nor acknowledge the recent surge of anti-Asian violence in weekly staff meetings. However, issues relating to other social justice are quickly addressed, discussed, and publicized); (h) Invisibility (e.g., Diversity and Inclusion training comprising scenarios of Latinx, Black, Native Americans, and White ethnic groups, such as Irish Americans and Jewish Americans, but omitting Asians and Asian Americans); and last, but not least (i) Undeveloped Incident or Responses (e.g., “You are so outspoken for an Asian girl”; “That guy is good-looking for an Asian”).

6. Embrace the discomfort. During the height of the Black Lives Matter movement, I went back and forth on whether I should reach out to my Black friends. I detested the thought of coming across as virtue signaling out of the blue, and I felt awkward just visualizing the scenario. I had a million reasons to reach out and a million not to. I didn't want my actions to be misunderstood or appear as though I knew what my friends were going through. In the end, I did reach out. It was uncomfortable at first, and there was truly no "natural" way to get into the conversation. I also realized the discomfort I was avoiding was primarily based on my feelings—what "I" did not want to feel and how "I" would feel afterward. There is no perfect way to start such a conversation, but I did notice that people always appreciate good food. Reach out to your Asian friends and colleagues during this time—call/email/text hello and mention how nice or dreary the weather is and if they would like to share some good food. It's hard to be frustrated when there is good food and good company who reaches out in a time of need.

7. Empathy over sympathy. Empathy feels with the person, and sympathy feels without. When we see someone struggling with misfortune, we feel bad for that person. This is, however, a surface-level understanding/feeling of what we *think* we know about the person's struggles. Depending on the situation, we may even feel inclined to give them some sort of direction and suggestion—while certainly with good intent—without understanding the depth of what the person is going through. An example of sympathy might be: an Asian colleague was verbally harassed on their way to work and was told to "Go back to China!" They are feeling upset, angry, and disappointed. To help them feel better, you say: "I'm so sorry. But at least you didn't get [physically] hurt, right? You're lucky!" Empathy, on the other hand, feels with the person. Recognizing that we cannot feel or relate to everything that others are experiencing, being empathetic means we are there for *them*—without unsolicited advice/recommendation, without attempts to lighten the mood, and without everything being a reaction/response. While simple, perhaps empathy can look more like this: "I'm sorry that you're going through this right now. I'm here for you." Generosity (e.g., I'm here to support you, and you're not alone.) over curiosity: (e.g., "What happened? How did it happen? What did the person say? What did you say? Tell me more!") and checking in from time to time can do wonders for the soul when complemented with empathy. Empathy can lead to compassion and hopefully, guide into action.

Concluding Thoughts

Music's role is vital, as it lends itself to the study of various beliefs, philosophies, and cultures. This past year, I was reminded of "Hongik-Ingan" (홍익인간; 弘益人間), a concept my grandfather taught me in grade school; it loosely translates to one's devotion to the welfare of humankind. Above all, it embodies transcending the "self" by acknowledging and considering the welfare of others and one's neighbors. Being an ally does not suggest one should feel burdened by their privilege; rather, it invites harnessing that privilege to lift up and support those regarded as the Other. While privilege does not always correlate with invulnerability, it does attest to a myriad of unmerited advantages. The biggest challenge is how we critically self-reflect and examine our own notions about race in a seemingly nonracial context and environment. The pandemic has highlighted Asian peoples' narratives unlike before. It is time we cultivate a similar spirit to embrace and empower the multiplicities of Asian music educators' identities as allies rather than as bystanders. Through a constant state of striving, course-correcting, and uncovering, there is light at the end of the tunnel. Socially-just education in the presence of allyship will continue to move forward—not just for Asians and Asian Americans, but for all.

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Clara Haneul Yoon, a native of Bundang, South Korea, is a violinist and music educator based in Toronto. She received her Bachelor's (B.M.) and Master of Music (M.M.) in violin performance from the Juilliard School. Clara is currently a doctoral candidate, a doctoral liaison for the Music and Music Education program, an instructor of applied lessons, and an IRB (Institutional Review Board) project lead/intern at Teachers College, Columbia University. Her primary research interest examines the perceptions/stereotypes of college music majors and Asian-American faculty identities.

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Notes

¹ A cultural stereotype that characterizes Asians and Asian Americans as infallibly achieving higher levels of success (e.g., academically and financially) due to their consistent hard work thus, rising above any prejudice and discrimination; the model minority myth portrays the Asian demographic as being without troubles and problem-free.

² It is possible that these studies may have been built on assumptions about biological determinism.