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An Intersectional and Transnational Feminist Perspective: Reflections on Loving Sister's Coverage of anti-Asian Racism and Thoughts on How to Address it

Yafang Shi

Yafang Shi is a Chinese settler who lives and creates in Aurora, part of the treaty lands of the Mississaugas and Chippewas, recognized through Treaty #13 and the Williams Treaties of 1923. As a journalist, artist and poet, her work considers gender, race, class, censorship, body, and identity from a decolonial, intersectional and transnational feminist perspective. She worked for various media organizations including CBC's Radio Canada International and is the founder and editor of www.lovingsister.com. Her works have been exhibited at art galleries, universities, public libraries, and other public spaces. She has a MSc in sociology from the LSE.

Introduction

Since the COVID-19 pandemic started, the persisting but usually inconspicuous anti-Asian racism has become salient and Asians in North America have been subjected to aggressions from racial slurs to violent physical attacks, some of which were fatal. Loving Sister (www.lovingsister.com), a mission-driven, independent, not-for-profit news and commentary website, which aims to help build an equitable and inclusive world since its foundation in 2012, has paid close attention to this troubling social phenomenon and its root cause. Loving Sister's coverage draws upon an intersectional and transnational feminist perspective. Particularly, Loving Sister's editorial interest and content have been shaped by the lived experiences of women of color, especially those who are members of the Chinese diaspora.

My own lived experiences show that, as a Chinese Canadian journalist and feminist of color, I have faced barriers and challenges in Canada. Also, as a member of the Chinese diaspora I have suffered from and resisted censorship imposed by the Chinese authority. During the COVID-19 pandemic, these experiences have continued and even worsened. For example, after I was contacted by a frontline health worker in the community about their concern over unsafe working conditions, my first challenge was to fight for access to the Government of Ontario's virtual press conference to voice their concern and to hold the government accountable. On the other hand, Loving Sister has been censored by the Chinese authority since 2017 after it published a series of articles on issues of human rights and censorship in China.

Informed by intersectional and transnational experiences of oppression, Loving Sister aims to produce journalistic work that exposes these various forms of oppression and

contributes to raising the public's awareness of these issues in hopes of effecting changes. This article aims to reflect on Loving Sister's coverage of anti-Asian racism and discuss how the insights from the reflections can help address anti-Asian racism. The following discussions highlight Loving Sister's work during the pandemic around three main foci: intersectional analysis, resistance to transnational oppression, and a commitment to solidarity.

Intersectional Analysis

Loving Sister employs an intersectional feminist perspective to cover social and political issues, especially issues related to gender, race and class. When anti-Asian racism became rampant like the spread of COVID-19 virus, Loving Sister covered the issue from an intersectional perspective and therefore paid attention to race and intersectional issues of gender and class.

For example, Loving Sister covered the rally against anti-Asian racism organized by the Chinese Canadian National Council Toronto Chapter and other organizations in Toronto in March 2021 in the aftermath of the Atlanta Shootings. Loving Sister published another article on a vigil that community groups in Ottawa organized to mourn the Atlanta Shootings victims from an intersectional perspective of race and gender. As an editor, I also pay attention to the factor of class that intersects with race, particularly workers' rights. Loving Sister published a series of narratives of Chinese Canadian frontline workers on their working conditions, anti-Asian racism they have encountered and their resistance to it during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to reportage of anti-Asian racism, Loving Sister shared scholarly articles on anti-Asian racism, anti-Asian racism intersected with gender and class, and anti-Asian racism as systemic racism rooted in white supremacy. Loving Sister also published an interview with a scholar on resources with regard to the history of anti-Asian racism and Asians' resistance to it, and resources to address anti-Asian racism in contemporary society and everyday life.

Resistance to Transnational Oppression

When talking about anti-Asian racism, many people tend to consider it as an issue within national boundaries. In reality, anti-Asian racism not only intersects with other factors like gender and class, but it also intersects with oppression across borders. Loving Sister covers the transnational activism of the Chinese diaspora feminists in North America.

Chinese feminists in the USA experience similar challenges faced by Chinese feminists in Canada. As Asian women, they are subject to racism in the USA and have to fight against it. Meanwhile, Chinese diasporic feminists have also been attacked by nationalist trolls and censored in China because they support feminists and their activism in China.



Top and above: Chinese diasporic feminist activists in the USA hold the exhibition “#MeToo in China” at the Access Theater Gallery in New York in October 2019. (Yafang Shi/Loving Sister)

Chinese diasporic feminists in North America have been supporting feminist causes such as the #MeToo movement in China. After exhibitions on the #MeToo movement in China were censored in China, Chinese diasporic feminists in the USA held an exhibition “#MeToo in China” in New York. Loving Sister covered the exhibition and also published a series of interviews with Chinese diasporic feminist activists in New York



Organizers and supporters held signs to show their support for #MeToo movement in China in front of the gallery (Yafang Shi/Loving Sister).

on the current status of feminist movements in China, how Chinese feminist activists outside of China could support the feminist movement in China, how to overcome the challenges of censorship, and their visions of the feminist movement in China.

In 2021, after feminist Xiao Meili in China was attacked by some Chinese nationalists, she and her fellow activists' feminist products were banned by Taobao (the flagship business of Alibaba Group listed on the New York Stock Exchange); Loving Sister published an interview with Xiao to raise the public's awareness of the issue. After Chinese tennis player Peng Shuai made a sexual assault allegation against former vice premier Zhang Gaoli, Loving Sister published a number of articles including the comments her supporters outside of China wrote on a virtual Feminist Wall. After Xuzhou 'Chained Woman' story had emerged, Loving Sister covered the Chinese diasporic women's petition for a thorough investigation of the matter.

Informed by my observations of local and global feminist movements and activism, and my own lived experiences, my 2022 photography exhibition "Women's Voices, Censorship and Resistance" was presented as part of the Aurora Public Library's "One Book One Aurora" program where my poem "Sister Flowers", a tribute to the #MeToo Movement", won the first prize of the writing contest a year earlier. This exhibition, which was also showcased at the CONTACT Photography Festival, sought to bring awareness to the censorship that authoritarian states impose on women's voices, as well as the institutional barriers that women, especially those of colour or immigrant women, face when they try to make their voices heard in Western democratic societies.



On May 3, 2024, to protest the Aurora Public Library's censorship and erasure of her feminist work and discrimination and reprisal against her as a racialized woman artist, Yafang Shi and her collaborator Susan Wu display their socially engaged installation and performance artwork "Screaming Red Lanterns" (Asian Heritage Month Edition) with two big red lanterns installed with Yafang's documentary photographs of the rally protesting anti-Asian racism in Toronto in 2021 (Susan Wu).

Ironically, in March 2023, the Aurora Public Library censored my exhibition on social movements for women's rights and social justice at the library and I have been fighting against its continued censorship, erasure, discrimination, and reprisal. The library deleted the very word "anti-Asian racism" in my artist statement for the exhibition. To protest the public institutions' censorship and erasure of my feminist works, I have collaborated with Susan Wu and displayed a socially engaged installation and performance artwork, "Screaming Red Lanterns" in front of the Ontario Provincial Legislative Building on International Women's Day and during the Asian Heritage Month, at the Kensington-Chinatown Local Immigration Partnership Network's Asian Heritage Month event "Art, Life and Love @Chinatown" themed "Celebration of Resistance", and at an exhibition by Women's Art Association of Canada.

Solidarity with other Racialized Communities

Since racism against various racialized communities operates in a system rooted in a mechanism of white supremacy, anti-Asian racism is not an isolated issue. Therefore,

Loving Sister covers not only anti-Asian racism but also racism against other racialized groups such as anti-Black racism, anti-Indigenous racism, and anti-Muslim racism.

During the pandemic, Loving Sister covered Black Lives Matter movement and the campaign organized by the Chinese feminists in New York and other cities to support the Black Lives Matter movement. Loving Sister has also spotlighted anti-Muslim racism, anti-Indigenous racism, and the legacy of the residential schools. Regarding Indigenous issues, Loving Sister has been sharing articles on colonialism and settler colonialism, Indigenous rights and the "long and complex history of Indigenous-Chinese relations". These articles are intended to help Chinese Canadian readers learn about the Indigenous people's history and rights, foster solidarity with Indigenous people and fight together against racism.

Discussion: A Transnational Human rights-based and anti-Oppression Approach

To address anti-Asian racism, we need to capture all forms of oppression that Asians in Canada and the USA, especially those of Chinese descent, have been facing and suffering from.

The history of imperialism and colonialism and a contemporary geopolitical context demonstrate how Chinese Canadians and Chinese Americans have suffered from scape-goating and Sinophobia in Western countries. However, the analyses of imperialism and colonialism do not fully capture the contemporary state and nature of changing state powers. Nitasha Kaul argues that the historical West and East divide of the colonizer and the colonized cannot reflect the colonial power of contemporary rising non-Western countries like China and India (Kaul, 2021). Tomasz Kamusella posits that China has evolved into a state power with a new communism by "combining authoritarianism with capitalism" (Kamusella, 2021) China, the world's second economic powerhouse, is anticipated to overtake the American economy in 2028 (Guardian, 2020). Vincent Wong argues that state relations between China and the USA are competitive but also collaborative (Wong, 2021). He criticizes the campism of the Canadian left for being silent or even having advocated for the state and capitalists of China, a case in point being progressive NDP MP Niki Ashton's advocacy for Meng Wan Zhou. He also points out that the Chinese Communist Party "deliberately conflates legitimate critiques of Chinese state policies with Sinophobia". While we hold governments in the West accountable, we should critically examine state powers in other parts of the world including China.

To disentangle the complexity of all forms of oppression here and in other parts of the world including China, I argue that we need to bring a transnational human rights-based and anti-oppression approach into the conversation. This approach means that oppression from all sources is recognized and named and human rights are defined by grassroots activists and groups who seek human rights such as racial justice, gender equity, labour rights and democracy, rather than by states. While Chinese feminists



“Fire”, a collage of documentary photographs of Women’s Marches in Toronto in 2017 and 2018, Women’s March in Washington D.C. in 2019, the rally “Speaking to Power” in London, UK in 2020, and the rally against anti-Asian racism in Toronto in 2021, paired with a poem, has been showcased at the Art Gallery of Ontario’s online group exhibition “Portraits of Resilience” and won the York Region Arts Council’s “Resiliency Award”. (Yafang Shi)

have been deemed as “a foreign hostile force” by the state, Chinese feminist activist Lü Pin who currently lives in the USA after the Feminist Five incident (Wang, 2015) raises razor-sharp questions: “Do universal women’s right standards and corresponding values that can test China’s societal, legal and political systems exist? Or, between the opposing ideologies of the PRC and USA and the West, are women’s human rights only manipulated as attacking tools from different sides? Isn’t this situation excluding the legitimacy of women’s lived experiences?” (Lü, 2021) On a more optimistic note, Women’s Marches against sexism, racism, and xenophobia of then-new president Donald Trump have revived a global feminist movement and promoted women’s rights as human rights (Estévez, 2017). As a journalist I have documented the Women’s Marches in three cities of three countries in four consecutive years and observed the movement’s intersectionality: how women fought for gender equity along with other causes like racial justice, labour rights and democracy. (Shi, 2020) . My collage of documentary photographs “Fire” on Women’s Marches and a rally against anti-Asian racism that has been showcased at the Art Gallery of Ontario’s online group exhibition “Portraits of Resilience” and won the York Region Arts Council’s “Resiliency Award”, further explores the intersection of women’s rights with anti-Asian racism.

With a transnational human rights-based and anti-oppression approach, the lived experiences of the oppressed are recognized and respected and the demand for human rights becomes a source for solidarity among grassroots groups for different causes.

Conclusion

In summary, to address anti-Asian racism, we need an intersectional perspective to examine it by paying attention to intersectional factors like gender and class. To fight against anti-Asian racism, we need to recognize multiple forms of oppression that Asian women and Asian working-class people face and stand in solidarity with other racialized communities. We also need a transnational human rights-based and anti-oppression approach that allows us to disentangle, unpack, discern, articulate and address all forms of oppression and to align ourselves with those who are oppressed locally and globally including those in China. This approach can help strengthen our moral standing and legitimacy to speak and also foster solidarity with those oppressed locally and in other parts of the world when we articulate and address anti-Asian racism here.

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