

“Kung Flu” Fighters: Illuminating Resilience & Solidarities Among the Chinese Diaspora

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OVERVIEW: The Chinese diaspora is bonded by shared phenotype and some sense of a faraway homeland—an arbitrary designation in some ways, but one rendered especially fraught by the pandemic. The pandemic has most obviously wreaked havoc on world’s health and brought about reports of racist hate crimes for the Chinese diaspora in particular, but it has also inspired burgeoning movements for solidarity and social change. The viral hashtag #IAmNotAVirus, for example, has found success in translation in Spanish-speaking and French-speaking countries around the world. In South Africa, Chinatown communities have participated in [successful mutual aid efforts](#) to support local businesses impacted by lockdown and xenophobic avoidance. For all their differences, many Chinese diasporic communities are finding new or renewed connections in the midst of the pandemic. This raises the question: how might both the diaspora’s diverse experiences and emergent solidarities create more understanding and empathy in an increasingly divided world?

In order to highlight resiliencies across distinct global communities, I propose to create a podcast: an auditory collection of personal histories as told by members of the Chinese diaspora, who have very different upbringings, but who face a pandemic that has flattened their ethnic identities into “dirty bat eater.” Traveling to Chinese diasporic communities in Spain and South Africa, I will explore how the pandemic has affected identity and resilience across the Chinese diaspora—by not only collecting these stories, but also participating in the community work that sustains these networks and recording my own experiences. By rendering these experiences visible on a globally accessible platform, I hope to connect disparate communities and movements. Rather than positioning myself as an American who will fix the problems of a foreign community, I will amplify and connect the lived experiences of the podcast contributors. Ultimately, the project will not only bridge members of the Chinese diaspora across diverse backgrounds and national borders, but also serve as a peace-building model for other communities.

RESEARCH/DEMONSTRATED NEED: A simple Google search brings up endless reports of racist abuse against members of the Chinese diaspora since the start of the pandemic; reporting center [Stop AAPI Hate](#) has collected almost 3,000 anti-Asian incidents in the US since March 2020. My project is informed by David Eng and Shinhee Han’s seminal work¹ on racial melancholia among Asian Americans. They describe immigration, assimilation, and racialization as “conflicted and unresolved processes of mourning and melancholia,” with significant negative impact on mental health. However, they also propose that “the reparation of these unresolved processes requires a public language...a public space in which these conflicts can be acknowledged and negotiated.” In other words, a “holding environment” where individuals can publicly grapple with their fragmented identities. My project will therefore create a *digital* holding environment: a space that not only bridges the communities I interview, but also engages a global audience that can hear from and be in conversation with these Chinese diasporic individuals.

RELEVANT EXPERIENCE: Sharing stories on digital platforms—and facilitating empowerment and understanding through these stories—has been a core part of my academic and personal journey. This project is a culmination of several initiatives that I have been a part of over the last four years. During my sophomore spring, I took a research colloquium in which I co-produced [a podcast](#) on the ongoing Harvard affirmative action case and its implications for the Asian American community. [My own episode](#) investigated how first-generation Chinese Americans used WeChat—a powerful Chinese social media app—to discuss and organize around affirmative action. My decision to explore this topic was colored by conversations I’d had with my Chinese mother, who is staunchly against affirmative action. (When I asked her where she was getting her affirmative action news from, her answer was almost always WeChat.)

I have been drawn to the idea of a “holding environment” ever since I first encountered Eng and Han’s work my junior fall—for a class final project, we created our own holding environment. Building off of a panel series I’d founded as the chair of Amherst’s Asian American Studies Working Group, we organized a panel that centered the experiences of Amherst’s Asian American Studies women scholars, who shared

¹ David L. Eng Ph.D. & Shinhee Han C.S.W. (2000) A Dialogue on Racial Melancholia, *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 10:4, 667-700.

insights about their own journeys with identity. Best of all, however, was the audience feedback: students told us that they felt empowered to take up space, to be better allies towards their Asian American peers. This past summer, amidst the global reckoning with Black Lives Matter, I wondered again where someone like me could fit into the movement for broader solidarity. I saw the outpouring of support for Black Lives Matter from many second-generation Chinese Americans, which often took the form of an open letter addressed to older Chinese immigrants perceived to be ignorant and racist. I saw how poorly these letters were received by their first-generation parents. "Had you guys lived at the time of the Chinese Cultural Revolution," one commenter [wrote](#), "I am pretty sure you would be one of those Red Guards who betrayed their parents and sent their parents to jail." In an effort to facilitate communication between generations of Chinese Americans siloed by language barriers, political beliefs, and migration traumas, I co-founded [the WeChat Project](#), an initiative that publishes progressive narratives on the famously right-leaning platform. In the process, I met other second-generation Chinese Americans across the country wrestling with identity and intergenerational difference, all of whom have become treasured sisters, brothers, and friends. I read comments from first-generation Chinese Americans who sometimes disagreed with us, but appreciated hearing from perspectives that they had never engaged with. My Project for Peace will similarly wield digital storytelling to combat xenophobia in global contexts.

IMPLEMENTATION: SPRING 2021 - PREPARATION: Conduct background research on Chinese diaspora in my proposed destinations, develop interview questions tailored to each group of interviewees, and launch social media accounts, which will be updated at least 2-3 times per week. **MAY/JUNE:** At the end of May, interview at least 5 members of the WeChat Project to provide a Chinese American perspective. In June, travel to Barcelona and connect with Cristina Zhang, founder of [Catarsia](#), a collective that centers Asian diasporic experiences in Spain. Spend 2 weeks connecting with Catarsia members and assisting with English content creation, and the third week recording at least 5 interviews. Short trip to Valencia to interview Paloma Chen, journalist and co-founder of Tusanaje, a collective that connects the Spanish-speaking Chinese diaspora. During the last week of June, travel to Madrid to interview Catarsia's Madrid collaborators and explore Usera, the neighborhood with the largest concentration of Chinese people in Spain. **JULY:** Travel to South Africa, where Chinese people occupy a liminal position in the post-apartheid racial landscape. Explore how conversations on anti-Asian xenophobia are complicated by China's xenophobic response to its African residents, who are perceived as the source of the second wave of the pandemic in China. For the first 2 weeks, volunteer with [The Chinese Association \(TCA\)](#). During the third week, interview TCA's chairman Erwin Pon and at least 4 other TCA members. Spend the last week of July in Capetown and conduct at least 3 interviews with Chinese organizations. **AUGUST:** Return to US to finalize podcast title, number of episodes, episode descriptions/length, cover design, soundtracks, release schedule, etc. Complete writing, editing, and recording (which will also be ongoing work throughout). Develop social media marketing plan and timeline for final assessments. The podcast will be completed in August and scheduled for release in fall 2021.

Note: If the pandemic prevents me from meeting my collaborators in person, I will adapt my project to be remote-only. I have kept in touch with my collaborators over the internet and have previously conducted Zoom interviews for qualitative research, so I could easily shift my interviews online.

ASSESSMENT: After each interview, I will evaluate depth of response and adjust questions as necessary. Successful interviews should elicit thoughtful, personal responses that go beyond simple self-introduction. Throughout the summer, I will also evaluate social media engagement on the basis of every possible metric (stats on visitors, comments, likes, retweets, type of feedback, expanding reach, repeat engagement, etc.) and adjust accordingly. Immediately after releasing the podcast, I will conduct a final assessment. How many people did I engage with throughout the summer on social media? Two weeks after release, how many listens/downloads do I have? Ideally, listeners should not just be from my American social circle. Are people continuing to engage with my social media accounts? Beyond quantitative metrics, what conversations has my podcast inspired and how might its reach be expanded?