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# Asian Minorities in Europe and in North America. A Transatlantic Dialogue on Memories, Representations and Recognition

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## *Asian Minorities in Europe and in North America:*

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### *A Transatlantic Dialogue on Memories, Representations and Recognition*

#### *International conference report*

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The conference was held on June 12, 2023 at Sciences Po Paris.

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The conference gathered leading and emerging researchers in race, ethnicity, immigration, and the Asian experience in North America and in Europe: [Diane WONG](#) (Rutgers University), [Diana YEH](#) (City, University of London), [Khatharya UM](#) (University of California, Berkeley), [Kien Nghi HA](#) (T ubigen University), [Irene MASDEU TORRUELLA](#) (Autonomous University of Barcelona) and [Ya-Han CHUANG](#) (Sciences Po Paris). The panels were chaired by [Russell JEUNG](#) (San Francisco State University) and [H el ene LE BAIL](#) (CNRS, CERI Sciences Po Paris).

**Since the Covid-19, the surge of the anti-Asian bigotry has aroused a general awareness about the prejudices against Asian populations. However, its causes, patterns and responses remain little explored. This international conference brought together researchers and activists from Europe and North America to compare the memories, representations and recognition of Asian populations in different national contexts. Two central questions are addressed: first, how do groups and individuals with Asian heritage appropriate collective memories to fight for a fairer representation in Europe and in North America? Secondly, how do different regimes of diversity in multicultural democratic countries determine anti-racist politics and the recognition of Asian minorities in the public space?**

These two questions stem from the recent development of Asian populations' collective action for justice in Western countries. In the US, hate crimes against Asian populations have increased by 339% in 2021. The Atlanta murder of 8 Asian women in March 2021 prompted massive mobilization claiming "Stop Asian Hate". As a result, the AAPI populations in the US have retraced the history of hostility and exclusion in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and they denounce the downside of the "model minority myth" (Li and

Nicholson 2021). In Canada, Angus Reid Institute released a poll commissioned by the University of British Columbia which found Canadians of Asian descent aged from 18 to 34 most likely have experienced and been affected by anti-Asian racism during the pandemic. The University of British Columbia organized a national forum on anti-Asian racism in June 2021 and published a report. In Europe, although the scale of violence seems minor compared to that in the US, the Covid-related aggressions also pushed researchers and activists to revisit the anti-Asian incidents in the past such as the Rostock neo-Nazi attacks in Germany in 1992 (Ha 2022), or the production of the “yellow peril” stigma in France (Chuang 2021). Despite the differences of migration patterns and histories, a pan-Asian consciousness is emerging on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, challenging the invisibility of anti-Asian bias.

### Theoretical foundations and existing literature

The Asian minorities’ emerging claims of recognition are not only a crucial issue of human rights, but also touch the core debate of contemporary democracy. Throughout the 1990s, liberal and communitarian philosophers in the US and Canada debated the limit of national interference or tolerance of cultural difference (Kymlicka 1995). The affirmative action, a political intervention to reduce ethnic-racial inequality, is thus justified to recognize structural inequality related to racial or ethnic position (Sanders 2003). In contrast to these two settler societies, the debate on justice in the old European continent tends to frame policies in terms of “justice of redistribution” rather than “justice of recognition” (Honneth 1996; Fraser 1995). In practice, this stance translates into institutional color-blindness, marked by a greater reluctance to implement ethnic-based statistics (Simon 2015) and anti-discrimination laws (Möschel 2020). However, the seeming return of the assimilation (especially in France and in Germany) does not prevent the concept to transform into a more organic, intransitive, multi-generational and multi-dimensional process (Brubaker 2001). Alba and Foner (2014) even suggest that the grand narrative does not play a larger role in immigrants’ adaptation and integration compared to migrants’ intrinsic characteristics and host societies’ respective mechanism of social distancing. Michèle Lamont (2022) thus proposes examining the shifting symbolic boundaries within the national cultural repertoires to diminish the recognition gap and reduce inequalities.

While these debates on inequalities and discriminations focus on economically disadvantaged groups, the Asian minorities’ anti-racism actions provide a salient case to shift our perspective on the recognition gap in contemporary democracies. Across North America and Europe, Asian minorities are often perceived as hyper-selected, “model minority” due to their social attainment (Lee and Zhou 2015). Not only do Asian Americans exhibit higher levels of education and income compared to other minority groups, but they also surpass US-born whites on both dimensions (Lee and Zhou 2015; Tran et al. 2019). We find similar levels of socioeconomic attainment among Asians in France (Ichou 2014; Safi 2016). Their high socioeconomic attainment has not, however, shielded them from bias, xenophobia, and racism. Long before the Covid-19 outbreak, Chinese migrants and their descendants have been involved in various mobilizations against racism in the media (Le Bail and Chuang 2020; Le Bail 2021) and urban violence in deprived immigrant neighborhoods (Trémon 2013; Chuang and Merle 2020). By studying media coverage and anti-Covid campaign posters, Chan and Strabucchi (2020) contend that dominant political and cultural anti-Asian discourses in Chile have reproduced the old dichotomy of “Occident” versus “Orient”, portraying China as an uncivilized Oriental other. Attané, Chuang, Santos and Wang (2021) find that the practice of wearing face masks in France

has drawn a symbolic boundary between those who wear a mask and those who do not, a pattern also noted in the United States by Ren and Feagin (2021). In territories governed by far-right politicians, the fear of contagion strengthens the otherization, as found by Dipoppa, Grossman, and Zonszein (2022) in Italy.

Recognizing the historical and structural roots of anti-Asian bias, Asian American community organizations, business leaders, faculty, and students have mobilized to address this issue. Besides legal aid for victims of violence, collective memories and representation have played a prominent role in actions across societies. In a series of editorials and articles, Jennifer Lee (2021) has underscored that in order to understand the present, we cannot divorce it from the past. Linking the past to the present, Lee shows how the current moment of anti-Asian bigotry in the United States stems from an overlooked legacy of anti-Asian violence, misogyny, and exclusion that dates back more than 150 years (see also Lew-Williams 2018). Analyzing East Germany's relationship with Vietnam, Kien Nghi Ha pointed out that the ties between the former German Democratic Republic and Vietnam were shaped by an asymmetrical power relation similar to the colonial relation (Ha 2022). Facing the double invisibility of Asian minorities and Asian history, better representation and recognition became the foremost claims of actors. In France, a series of cultural activism have emerged to challenge the essentialization of Asians as fragile and obedient (Le Bail 2021, Um and Le Bail 2023).

Despite the difference of migration history and multicultural policy in the old and new continents, strikingly, the Asian minorities on both sides of the Atlantic have made similar claims: better recognition and fairer representation of Asian minorities in the public space. However, no research has addressed the question from a comparative perspective so far. Therefore, our conference was a pioneer transatlantic dialogue that has highlighted how the weight of national culture repertoires and policy differences produce the (in)equality of minority representation.

## 1. Collective Memories and New Categories for a Fairer Representation

*How do groups and individuals with Asian heritage in Europe and in North America appropriate collective memories to fight for a fairer representation? How do they mobilize and transform the categories they are assigned to?*

[Khatharya UM](#) (University of California, Berkeley) in her presentation called "**Asians in the US. Racialized Violence and Resistance**" retraced Asian American racism in a historical perspective and drew the light on future challenges and opportunities for the Asian American community and for future academic research.

In the US, anti-Asian violence, discrimination and racism have long historical roots, tracing as far back as the early years of immigration. These are not just individual acts, but institutionalized and codified in policies, laws and practices. Khatharya Um gave the example of the Hmongs and the recognition of the status of veteran:

"The Southeast Asian American communities, which I'm most familiar with, communities from Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, are being torn between the focus on the ancestral homeland and an increasing need to think about their place and rights in the United States. But even in terms of the first generation,

when they're thinking about homeland, it's also thinking about US accountability to those communities. [For instance,] for the Hmong refugees in the United States, one of the things they were fighting for was veterans rights (see e.g. Vang 2012). They were actually saying, look, we fought as part of the secret wars, the US secret wars, and yet we're not considered as veterans. We don't have the benefits of the veterans. So in that sense, they were basically following the Filipinos whose status as veterans were long contested. When benefits were finally extended to them, many of that generation had long disappeared. And so here you're talking about a veteran's right for the Hmong in that sense, pushing for accountability. [...] It was really about saying that, [US has] made a commitment to freedom and democracy in those parts of the world.”

Khatharya Um also underlined the importance of intergenerational transmission regarding the heritage of injustice and the recognition of the US responsibility in their history:

“So, you know, one of the biggest protests right after the resettlement of refugees from Southeast Asia was [this protest in Southern California and Westminster around the posting of a Ho Chi Minh poster on one of the video stores](#). What was so significant was not just a protest, it was actually the multi-generational nature of the protest. [...] Many of the second generation were doing this in support and in solidarity with their parents' pain. And so it's in honor of their parents' pain. It wasn't so much their own connections to it, but their connections to their parents' history and their honoring of the parents' history.”

The second and following generations inherited their “parent’s pain”, but also inherited collective memory of violence targeting all Asians in the US (see Um 2019). These generations of Southeast Asian American youth, thus developed a great deal of mobilizations on multiple fronts, including the question of anti-Asian violence. When it comes to violence, Asians are all lumped together as it is well illustrated by the well known case of Vincent Chin’s murder in the 1980s (Darden and Thomas 2013):

“It's really that all Asians look alike. And violence tends to be very arbitrary in that sense. And so, for instance, people are constantly referring to the killing of Vincent Chin in 1982. And Vincent Chin was killed. He was a Chinese American. He was killed during the height of the trade wars between the United States and Japan. His perpetrators were looking for a Japanese, whom they blamed for the loss of their jobs. Vincent Chin just happened to be there coming out of a bar after having his bachelor party. But the point was that the perpetrators got something like a 3-year probation and \$3,000 and \$780 of court costs. It shows that there's a reluctance to actually look at hate crime.”

[Diana YEH](#) (City, University of London) presented a paper on **“Collective Histories in the Making: Nascent East and Southeast Asian Activisms in Britain and the Crafting of New Futures”**.

Diana Yeh pointed out that Asians represented 9.3% of the UK population in 2021, which is far less compared to the US. Among these 9.3%, the Chinese are the fourth group of nationality, arriving after larger communities of Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis.

The UK research on ethnic communities' activism focuses on South Asian and Black communities because of the colonial legacy.

“In the UK by comparison to the US there is a far smaller population, and this partly accounts for the lack of scholarship on [East and South-east] Asians in the UK, and it often focuses exclusively on the Chinese. It is a consequence of colonial legacies which also underpins the racial landscape and the specific dynamics of racism in Britain, and so both its diversity regimes and the way in which East and Southeast Asians seek recognition.

Most of the activism in the UK has been around the categories of Black and Asian, Asian meaning South Asian exclusively. So the very mobilisation of East and Southeast Asians is a contestation of these state categories and specifically responds to the way in which Asian, unlike in the US and Europe, is referred to exclusively South Asians from the Indian subcontinent. This is a colonial perspective.”

More recently, academic work and state reports have started to document the rise of Asian hate - meaning racist speech and acts targeting East and Southeast Asians - over the years. It contributed to the emergence of a clunky category: the ESEA, East and Southeast Asians which contests state categorisation and enables pan-Asian collective mobilisations.

“I want to talk about how East and Southeast Asians in the UK are, I guess, not so much appropriating collective memories, largely in the absence of publicly recognised memories, but kind of crafting these collective memories in the present moment, right now, for the future.

[...] People are mobilising under this kind of really clunky category of East and Southeast Asians, but nonetheless, so we call it ESEA activism, ESEA people. They not only contest state categorisation significantly, through community building processes. And then I also want to give some space to considering the serious challenges of community activism in times of explicit racial violence by considering how the state delimits and co-ops community energies. But also want to hope that I can end on a cautiously optimistic note that highlights the truly significant mobilisations of pan-Asian collectivities in Britain at the present moment in sort of presaging these new futures.”

[Kien Nghi HA](#) (Tübingen University) presented his paper on **“Historical Roots, Anti-Asian Racism Violence and the Emerging of Asian German Perspectives”**.

The history of Asian immigration and communities in Germany is much less known than in the US, the UK or even in France. Even in Germany it is “a kind of hidden history that is trying to get attention, that is trying to create its own discourses and its own public sphere.” Kien Nghi Ha presented the histories of several Asian groups in Germany.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Germany was a destination for early Chinese immigration in relation to the colonial presence of Germany in China (Tsingdao). The Chinese were seamen in Hamburg and students in Berlin. During the Second World War, an Indian troupe came to Europe to fight against the allied forces for the Nazi government. Kien Nghi Ha underlines the contradiction of a pro-independent Indian movement that fought for a racist regime. In the 1970s, among the many [gastarbeiters](#) (temporary guest workers), some arrived from South Korea following the signature of a bilateral agreement between Germany and South Korea. Temporary migrants moved to Germany to seek work, often in precarious conditions. 8,000 Koreans were recruited for a 3-years contract.



They were invisibilized in the history of the “guest workers”, but South Korean miners and nurses contributed to the struggles for their rights and the possibility to choose to stay in Germany.

Finally, Germany welcomed Vietnamese migrants on both sides of the frontiers (since the country was not reunified yet.) West Germany welcomed Vietnamese Boat people (see Ha 2021). For Kien Nghi Ha, they were mainly accepted to improve Germany’s image in the context of the Cold War. On the East side, the German Democratic Republic signed an agreement with the Socialist Republic of Vietnam for enterprises to provide industrial training to Vietnamese people. East Germany perceived this agreement as an opportunity for developing their economic growth. Vietnamese mainly arrived in East Berlin where the community was the target of violent racist attacks in the 1990s, as it will be described below.

Germany’s unknown history with South-East Asian and South Korean migrants is nowadays the source of an ongoing struggle for cultural remembrance. The communities now try to create their own discourses and their own public sphere.

[Irene MASDEU TORRUELLA](#) (Autonomous University of Barcelona) in her introduction to her presentation called **“Contesting images and representations of Chinese migration in Spain. How? Who? Where? Artistic production of Chinese migrants’ descendants”** reminded us that Asian immigration is very recent in Spain compared to all the other countries tackled during the conference.

“Spain started to be an immigration country at the end of the 20th century in the 1980s. When Spain finished with the dictatorship of Franco and we passed from being an immigration country to be an immigration country. The first generation of these migrant descendant artists [the topic of her presentation], were most of them born in China in the late 1970s, mainly in Wenzhou or in Zhejiang provinces.”

Finally, [Ya-Han CHUANG](#) (CERI Sciences Po Paris) discussed the case of France with her presentation: **“Asian Minority’s Antiracist Mobilizations in France”**. She emphasized the diversity of “Asians” in France which remains under-explored. Her data is mainly based on the experience of Chinese migrants, composed of a majority of Wenzhou entrepreneurs suffering from the stereotypes of “being rich”. Their paradoxical social representation, caught between the model minority stereotype and ethnic enclave poorly integrated entrepreneurs, shaped the racialization process of all Asian individuals as well as certain strategies within Asian antiracist politics (see Chuang 2020).

## 2. Old and New Racial Violences, Claims and Means of Action

*How do different regimes of diversity in multicultural democratic countries determine anti-racist politics and the recognition of Asian minorities in public space?*

[Diane WONG](#) (Rutgers University) presented a paper called **“Asian American Abolitionist Counterstories for Black Liberation”**.

Her presentation started with reminding the different forms violence takes: for instance, refugees of the Vietnam War faced detention and deportation under resurgent nativist policies; also, Asian Americans in urban hubs in New York, Philadelphia, Los Angeles are experiencing collective trauma from anti-Asian racism and xenophobia.

“In preparing these remarks, I've been thinking a lot about how so many of the spaces that we've been part of in these recent years begin with loss and remembering the dead. And I think just a day before the [Atlanta spa shootings](#), we witnessed [33 Vietnamese community members being deported from Texas to Vietnam](#). And then one month later, we mourn [the Sikh workers who were killed in a mass shooting at a FedEx facility in Indianapolis](#). And so through all of this, we've seen the continued judicial killings of black people by the police and the devastation that these murders have had on communities far and wide. I think for me in thinking through these, thinking about how we're thinking about violence, right, in the US context, mass shootings, police violence, and militarism are incredibly intertwined forms of violence. And in the last several years, I think it's made all of this ever more apparent.”

After reminding us of the cyclical violence targeting Asians in the US, Diane Wong elaborated on how, in such context, capacious notions of community care emerged in the form of coalitional alignments and the redistribution of resources, expertise, and new spaces for resistance and contestation.

“We've also seen the formation of coast-to-coast solidarity networks, intergenerational connections, and also the growth of mutual aid networks across the country. So from meal delivery services to child care collectives to legal aid to skill shares to eviction defense, we've seen a lot of this emerge in the last three years, not as new networks, but growth of already existing formations. In the last decade alone, we've seen a plethora of such moments of community resistance that I do think bear questions that require us to expand how we're thinking about Asian American activism, politics, and also interracial solidarity and organizing in the 21st century. There are plenty of lessons to be learned from these contemporary movements that help us to envision a kind of Asian American activism that is not only reactive to existing systems of power, but for us to see this work as fugitive, interstitial, and visionary in the sense that they're forging new spaces for activation and contesting the terrain of the political itself.”

Once the reality of violence targeting Asians was established, she then criticized “the liberal appeals of punishment” and the “reformist impulse of carceral feminism” for their contribution to the continued growth and the sustaining of state sanctioned violence.

“Where I live in New York City, recent responses to the increase of anti-Asian violence have led to the formation of more hate crimes legislation and increase in reliance on law enforcement, as evidenced by the recent formation of the NYPD hate crimes task force. And so for those of us working, within and alongside the academy, I think another issue to grapple with is to think about how hate crimes data is often used and can be used to bolster the credibility of criminal legal systems.

As Naomi Murakawa has argued, the liberal appeals of punishment and reformist impulse of carceral feminism has contributed to the continued growth and the sustaining of state sanctioned violence. So in the last decade, we've seen the emergence of a new iteration of abolitionist Asian American politics really challenging us to think much more expansively about anti-Asian



violence or around this question of violence. [It is important] to move beyond episodic narratives and reactive rhythms of urgency and towards understanding the conditions in which violence is rendered legible and visible to addressing slower everyday forms of violence for long-term organizing and for movement building.”

She underlines Asian Americans’ engagement within abolitionist movements in solidarity with Black communities (see Wong 2022; Fu et al. 2019):

“We've seen Asian Americans organized in solidarity with black communities and the formation of Asians for Black Lives Matter. In cities across the country, Asian American youth are at the forefront in this black-led movement for police abolition. Survey data reveals that majorities of Asian American youth actually support putting entire police department budgets towards other areas like healthcare, housing, or education. Asian American youth support putting the entire police budget towards social services. So we're seeing different iterations of the struggle take place across the country where Asian American youth are really expanding conversations around anti-Asian violence to include abolitionist struggles. Several years ago, [Freedom Youth Squad](#) mobilized hundreds of youth in Madison after [the murder of Tony Robinson](#) at the hands of Madison police and fought to stop a new jail being built, right, in their county. More recently, Black and Southeast Asian youth members have led the successful police-free schools campaign advocating for not only the removal of police from the Madison metropolitan school district before a fundamental shift in decision-making power from youth to youth and communities that are most impacted by institutionalized carceral violence.”

Finally, Diane Wong mentioned a new initiative in New York City, an initiative of documenting Covid-19 related racism by photo archive. She presented the project “[Archive as memorial](#)” which she took part in.

For **Khatharya Um**, racialized violence emanates from misperceived threats. She deconstructed the idea of the model minority to describe how it either hides or even produces violence and discrimination. For instance, the model minority contributes to picture Asians as the perpetual foreigners whose loyalty is always put into question (Li and Nicholson 2021). The model minority is not about meritocracy but strategically used as a tool for the state to deny other groups (Geisser 2023).

“There is two kinds of things that feed into this. The model minority. So simultaneous to all of these kinds of negative images of Asians in the US, you also have the myth of the model minority that produced both resentment on one hand, on the other hand, also neglect of Asian American concerns. So there is this notion that all Asian groups and all Asians in the US are doing really well. But that sort of mask, the serious concerns and challenges that persist and that in these different pockets of the Asian American population, from poverty to deterred education or lack of educational attainment, the bamboo ceiling.”

She gave another example that illustrates how the myth of the model minority hides unequal treatments. She took the case of wages on the University of California Berkeley campus:

“In Berkeley, a recent survey of faculty salary has shown that Asian American, particularly Asian American women, are among the lowest paid on campus. And yet the myth of the model minority leads to assume that everybody is successful. The stereotype essentially excludes Asian Americans from accessing many of these opportunities, the resources and the support. In fact, it essentially excludes Asian American from the discourse on diversity, equity, and inclusion. There are many of these scholarship programs that are extremely important for higher education in the United States, which are expensive, are not necessarily accessible to Asians, because they are targeting what is considered underrepresented minority groups.”

Today, Asians are the fastest growing population in the US. There is a critical mass of Asians in key sectors of US society and an increased recognition of the importance of activism especially among the youths. Since 1965, there has been an increase in number and in complexity with internal diversity and with disparity within and among ethnic groups, leading to a more challenging research agenda. Further, Asian Americans are still excluded from diversity and inclusion speeches but the bamboo ceiling challenges the model minority model: for example, Asian Americans are working in Silicon Valley but they do not occupy leading positions and are paid less than others.

**Diana Yeh** analyzed the evolution of the situation in the UK, where the racist violences almost tripled from January to March 2020. The recent figures by the anti-racist grassroots campaign group suggest that hate crimes against East and Southeast Asians were increased by 27% between 2019 and 2020. The academic work also confirms this rise. Despite this, the surge in anti-Asian racial violence was not addressed at all in the UK's national responses to Covid. She then explained [how the collective End the Virus of Racism wrote a letter to Home Secretary Preeti Patel](#), urging to take action against anti-Asian racism. However, Patel's response emphasized on the punitive logic of justice, overlooking the structural and institutional roots of racism:

“This is what sparked the first demand for recognition when a group of East and Southeast Asian activists gathered collectively under the name End the Virus of Racism, and with cross-party political backing and celebrity support to write a letter to the then Home Secretary, Preeti Patel, calling for an independent inquiry into the rise of racial violence; and to the MP Sarah Owen, who has East and Southeast Asian heritage. So Patel's response, focusing on a perpetrator of the crime, was that the government would ensure criminals face justice. The hate crime framework works to individualize and trivialize racism, constructing it as this kind of expression of interpersonal hatreds of individual racists or bigots, and thereby separates it from state and institutional racism and the kind of broader mainstreaming of the far-right that we've seen across Europe. So I think this has important implications in how we conceptualize anti-Asian racial violence as such, rather than merely as hate, prejudice or bigotry, as we've kind of heard earlier. This is something that is only just beginning to be recognized amongst the grassroots organizations themselves in the UK.”

Although community engagement against anti-Asian racism is supported by government fundings, these also neutralize the work of the organizations by shifting the focus away from the structural causes of racial violence, Diana Yeh explained:

“So community engagement in hate crime work is also stimulated through specific funding, most notably last year saw the launch of [On Your Side](#), which is a government-funded project bringing together 15 Eastern Southeast Asian organizations to create a hate crime reporting tool. And this vividly demonstrates how the state seeks to co-opt and neutralize the work of anti-racist community organizations, diverting attention and resources away from the structural dimensions of racial violence.”

Diana Yeh underlined a few initiatives against Asian hate that propose an alternative to the state response. She mentioned [Kanlungan](#), a charity composed of several community organizations which work together for empowering Filipino migrants and repairing the emotional harm done by the Covid-19 pandemic. Many Filipino migrants have lost their lives working at the front line; and the [Hackney Chinese Community Services](#), a charity organization to help meet specific needs and support the welfare of the local community.

She pinpointed that these organizations existed prior to the Covid-19 pandemic but new associations are now emerging, especially among young activists who intend to address Asian invisibility and to frame racism in a decolonial and anti-capitalist perspective (see e.g. the initiative [Becoming Forest](#)).

“So before Covid, there has been East and Southeast Asian activism in the UK, especially amongst Chinese activists, as well as more recent pan-Asian mobilizations. But these have been especially around invisibility and misrepresentation in the cultural sector (see Yeh 2018; 2021). Since the rise of Covid racial violence, the level activity has been unprecedented and has led to a range of actions, not only providing community services, but also lobbying the government and the media and raising awareness in wider society. [...] The widespread lack of historical narratives, both of Asian histories but also anti-Asian racism in the UK, has impacted upon the way activists today seek recognition.”

These new initiatives contribute to creating new narratives and space of togetherness, however fragile.

**Kien Nghi Ha** explained the various forms of violences against Asians in Germany which occurred in several waves. Before the reunification of East and West Germany, the first documented racist murder after 1945 in West Germany was the killing of two Vietnamese boat people in 1980 by the NSU (National Socialist Underground) on racist motives, a case that was completely silenced and rediscovered 30 years later. “After the reunification, [a pogrom happened in Rostock-Lichtenhagen](#), former East Germany, in 1992. It was not the first one but it is perceived as the biggest, as the largest organized racist attack since 1945. The whole political circumstances and the media discourse lead into this racist violence legal proceedings that more or less didn't really prosecute the racist attackers. It can be also considered as a case of internalized racism because this internalized framework enabled the circumstances and opened up the opportunities for this kind of racist program” (see Ha 2024).

“In Germany, the work to remember the Rostock pogrom has just begun. Since 2017 after 25 years, there has been a kind of public commemoration in terms of cultural marks in Rostock in different places and one of the things we can discuss is how this process happened, what kind of remembrance are built in these public spaces, how the Vietnamese community were involved or not

involved in this process. What is the meaning of these cultural remembrances?  
The sculpture is too obscure to be the pogrom in Rostock-Lichtenhagen.”

He continued on the participation of [Diên Hồng](#), a local Vietnamese-German community organization in the 25th commemoration of Rostock-Lichtenhagen and highlighted a major shift in the positions of Vietnamese organizations within public discourses on remembrance:

“In 2022 the same organization participated for the first time in a leftist anti-racist demonstration and they also delivered a speech in the demonstration which, of course, was very critical of the official institution and therefore I think it's a very significant shift. How these local Vietnamese organizations and also how the Vietnamese communities are positioning themselves within this public discourse about the commemoration of the program in Rostock-Lichtenhagen.”

Kien Nghi Ha also described the circulation of Asian antiracist claims from the Anglo-Saxon world to Germany. According to him, the Asian German anti-racist activists' perspective to the UK is similar to how UK activists view the dynamics of Asian-American antiracist politics in the US.

“Diana Yeh was mentioning how scholars and activists in the UK look up to the US, the metropolis of Asian diaspora throughout the world because they have this legacy of the Asian American movement. They have the institution of Asian American studies, which is quite well established, which has its own academic networks, the Asian American studies association, and so this is for us a dream, you know, like coming true. And then, okay, because the US is so far, we look up to Britain and say, okay, they're not the US. And maybe they are not that far in terms of research and organization and all other stuff. But at least there's this kind of discourse, there's this kind of political movement in the 1970s, when the Black liberation movement also moved to the UK in terms of the Black power movement, which also affected Asian communities, and there was this term of political blackness, which also included Asians and South Asian and other Asian communities.

It's really important to think about these kind of relationships, and also maybe power relationship, that is also within our own discourses, because we are looking for role models, we are looking for people and discourses where we can orient ourselves towards how we can learn from, and learning is always something ambivalent, because it can be eye-opening and empowering, but it also can be that you're adapting ideas, discourses, that is meant for different societies, for different historical contexts, and then you put it into your local, national context, which might be different, so there's always this, so yeah, we have to be cautious, because I think the Asian diaspora is different.”

**Irene Masdeu Torruella** presented the representations of China in Spain in the fields of art, literature, and music.

“Two main variables existed: first of all, the representation of the culture made by Spanish writers, artists without any Asian background; second, how Chinese people living in Spain developed their artistic works. So it's a kind of a [database](#) [China Cult.es] that looks a lot about representations of Chinese and migration and in this big background I will focus on migrants descendants.

By looking at these works, we found that Chinese descendants have contested their Chineseness in their works.”

She mentioned several examples, the first one was the photographer [Xiqi Yuwang](#):

“This is the idea of him fighting his orientalism, representation, essentialization of Chineseness and also another idea, he plays himself as the head of the mafia, the big cooker and the head of the mafia, contesting this other idea. We have the idea of China, orientalized, essentialized and we have the idea of the Chinese migration, yes, the peril, the mafia, all these representations. So by mixing these two men stereotypes, the essentialized and orientalized idea of the monks, the spiritualization of China and the mafia, the peril, this violence thing, he tried to impact on Spanish people’s perception of Chinese and Chineseness.”

After introducing the pioneer artists, she presented the new generation, which is more aware of racism and works more collectively. She mentioned the experimental and avant-gardist poet and playwright [Minke Wang Tang](#) whose play *Idiomia proprio* (2018) tackles the narratives of migration and identity through language. Minke Wang Tang “reflects a lot about the transformation of the Chinese people in Spain”, pointing out a “generational gap” where young people are more aware of racism, whereas the first-generation migrants tend to normalize it. Irene Masdeu Torruella agreed with this perspective, arguing that both generations were raised in a very different social context:

“First-generation migrants tend to normalize [racism]. There is this normalization of racism or even invisibilize. [...] Now young people, young generation, young artists, they have like the cultural capital and they have been raised in another very different society background that gives them the strength and these collective memories to break with this normalization of racism or this invisibility of racism. And here we can find this new generation of migrant descendants which were already born in Spain in the late 1920s.”

Torruella referred to other artists, including [Quan Zhou](#), a comic drawer, whose work raises awareness towards anti-Chinese racism through the lens of her individual experience. In her comic *Gazpacho agridulce* - a pun with “gazpacho”, a Spanish soup, and “agridulce” meaning sweet sour - she delves into themes of identity and cultural representations. The work of the novelist, poet, performer and producer [Paloma Chen](#) was also brought to attention. Her documentary *Crecer en ‘un chino’* (translating as growing in a Chinese) is, according to Torruella, “one of the most important works” that articulates for the very first time the idea of what it means to be Chinese in Spain:

“[This puts in perspective] this idea of an identity that before was totally unarticulated. Through these art projects and art associations, we are seeing now how some identities are being articulated and more importantly, how they share and they put in common their own experiences as being Chinese and make Chinese socialized in Spain.”

Irene Masdeu Torruella emphasized that these dynamics were existing prior to Covid-19 but were amplified by the pandemic. According to her, what characterizes this new generation of artists is their collective synergies as they often collaborate in group projects:

“One of the things that I consider more important about these young artists is that there is a lot of synergies between them of not just individual projects as we saw in the first generation, but they do a lot of collective projects. Through collective art projects they contest representations. [...] Through the synergies

of individual artists, they are also doing a lot of collective projects that are ending up with new forms of political participation. They are organizing the network of the Chinese diaspora in Spain.”

**Ya-Han Chuang** analyzed the evolution of East Asian activists in France since 2010. She presented an evolution, outlining three distinct phases characterized by various actors, claims and objectives:

From 2010 to 2016, the first phase is characterized by mutual hostilities and sentiments of relative deprivation between East Asians and Arab/Black communities. This is instrumentalized by the right-wing’s political discourses to foster a selected immigration and to reduce the problem to ethnic war between the Blacks and the Asians. These hostilities were caused by individual safety problems and microaggressions in Chinese business or residents’ neighborhoods. To bring these issues to the fore, Asian communities demonstrated and met with French authorities (Chuang and Merle 2021):

“The first generation of Chinese entrepreneurs tried to interpret such a neighborhood problem as a question of need for more police and, for example, for more cameras as well. [...] We see similar modes of action in different neighborhoods all over Paris, trying to call for the solidarity and unity of Chinese, but also to highlight a social problem in order to get the attention of the public authority to understand such a problem. [...] It actually kind of limits the subject into the claim of security. It also gives space for the far-right party to instrumentalize such a form of demonstration [...] they may reduce the problem as an ethnic war between Asian and other minorities.”

From 2016 to 2020, the second phase is marked by a struggle for recognition. Asian communities initiated legal actions against hate crimes and created media for the community. The legal recognition of “robbery = racist violence” has created a larger coalition with classical anti-racist organizations (Chuang and Le Bail 2021). In parallel, other young Asian actors in the cultural industry (journalism, cinema, literature, etc.) also produced works on the subject to raise awareness on the everyday racism targeting Asians in France (Le Bail and Chuang 2020). The phenomenon of violence was thus embedded in a systemic framework that began to win legitimacy.

“[Moving away from the ‘Chinese are rich’ stereotype], the activist discourses succeed to bring up this stereotype into other stereotypes, more historically rooted, culturally rooted stereotypes. And I think another very interesting new development during this period was also the liberation of speech by cultural production. So it was during this period, we witnessed the emergence of more community-oriented media.”

Since 2020, this last phase is characterized by the acknowledgment of similar destinies between communities, namely their invisibility and their negative representations. Provoked by the Covid-19 pandemic, Asian communities demand their equal representation in every sphere of society, with online petitions, community organization and cultural production.

“The second generation of Asians, young people who recognize themselves as French Asian, has used social media to speak of their experiences and to communicate. The Covid has succeeded to incorporate more people who were dispersed and who get to know each other, who seek to communicate and share experience via social media. And by talking, by sharing the experience, this act



actually succeeded in politicizing what wasn't considered as political before” (Le Bail 2021).

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