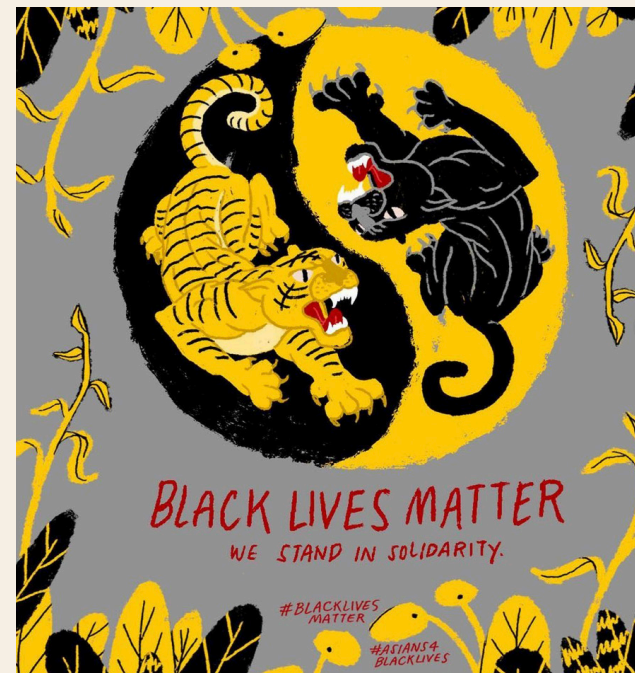# Anti-Blackness Uplifts Asian Americans

by Alexander Hwang

Over the summer of 2020, the slogan 'Yellow Peril Supports Black Power' re-emerged as people took to the streets to protest the state-sanctioned murders of Black people and the institution of police in general. The phrase first popped up in the 1960s during the UC Berkeley and SF State protests calling for a Third World Liberation Front to unite racialized peoples. In one viral image by Monyee Chau, a Seattle-based artist, the slogan is placed below an illustration of a yellow panther and a black panther positioned within the yin and yang symbol. Though perhaps well-intentioned and in the pursuit of building solidarity, the slogan de-centers Black people and their experiences while also implying a false equivalency between Asian and Black peoples' histories. Chau later issued a statement speaking to her ignorance of the problem with using the phrase. Considering how the yin yang symbolizes a complementary relationship, how does this representation hold up when looking at the history and present of the two identities?

As Professor Claire Kim stated in her online presentation 'Asians in an Anti-Black World,' a lecture co-organized by the Wattis Institute's Land to Light On series and the VCS Forum, white supremacy must be considered within the context of anti-Blackness. Though the two forces overlap, Asian Americans find themselves in between them. Pushed down by white supremacy, Asian Americans are also uplifted by anti-Blackness. One poignant example Professor Kim brought to our attention was the difference between the Covid-19 Hate Crimes Act and the Emmett Till Antilynching Act of 2019. While the first passed through the legislative process and became law quite quickly, the latter is still being deliberated. It is hard not to see the racialized aspect of each bill. When Asians are the targets of hate crimes, the U.S. government seems to be quite ac-

A screenshot of Monyee Chau's protest poster from the artist's Instagram

commodating, whereas the same can not be said when Black people are the victims of hate crimes.

Another prominent case of anti-Blackness within the Asian American community is the lawsuit against Harvard's consideration of race as one factor in their admissions process. Several conservative Chinese American groups believe affirmative action prioritizes other racial groups above them in the college admissions process. Yet, according to Harvard's website, the admitted class of 2025 consists of 25.9% Asian Americans though they only make up 5.9% of the total U.S. population. Compared to Black Americans, who make up 13.4% of the U.S. population and 14.9% of the admitted class of 2025, Asian Americans are overrepresented in these statistics. Why the focus on affirmative action? Why not criticize the prioritization of legacy students? Instead, certain Asian Americans have chosen to punch down and antagonize their Black and brown peers.

Much of the resistance to affirmative action is based on the idea of merit: institutions should judge people on their achievements and abilities without considering any other factors. Certain Asian Americans believe their high SAT scores and good grades are equally attainable for all students. Following this logic, it would seem that Asian American students are somehow naturally better at academics than Black or other racial groups. If the argument is that Asian American students are simply smarter from their Asian-ness, then it is clear that such an argument is rooted in racism.

What might account for these differences in academic achievement, then? Again, I want to emphasize the reductive nature of the term 'Asian American.' Many Asian Americans were brought here as

a result of war, colonialism, and political unrest. This is to say there are many different reasons why Asian people have immigrated to the U.S. I don't want to dismiss the trauma many of our elders have experienced in their lives. Yet, I also think it is equally important to recognize that many east Asian Americans immigrate to the U.S. already having advanced degrees. Do Asian Americans face discrimination? Absolutely. However, acknowledging the structural forces that have given many Asian Americans a step up in economic and financial terms is key if we want to accurately think about racism against Asians in the U.S. This is why Claire Kim critiqued the critique of the model minority myth. Though the model minority myth serves to bolster and 'prove' anti-Black sentiment, its critique also contains components that serve anti-Blackness. One critique is that Asian Americans also face discrimination and the model minority myth serves to erase this fact. However, this critique almost implies a false equivalency between Asian Americans and other racial minorities. As I touched on above, the social and economic forces that brought Asian people to the U.S. are different from those that brought Black people to the U.S. This false equivalency is one that the aforementioned conservative Chinese American groups use to criticize affirmative action. Since they feel that other racial groups are being prioritized, they are frustrated because they see themselves as victims of racism. But, what they don't recognize is the falsehood in believing Chinese and Black Americans have the same 'starting line.'

All of this is to say that anti-Blackness is not exclusive to European Americans. A common phrase I have seen in response to the model minority myth is: We (Asian Americans) will not be used to push your agenda! This framing of Asian Americans as pawns of the white man is ahistorical. As Claire Kim point-

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ed out, there are many instances of Asian Americans as agents of anti-Blackness. This brings me to one point Dr. Kim made that I thought was especially important: the shifting racial demographics of this country can not be expected to somehow magically erase racism. As the U.S. heads towards a majority non-white population, Asian Americans must still be wary of discrimination and anti-Blackness within our communities.

As Asian American voices, scholarship, and representation continue to develop, I believe we must approach it with a critical lens. Though Asians and Asian Americans have recently started to 'trend' (i.e., Crazy Rich Asians, Squid Game, the Shang Chi Marvel Movie), I think Asian Americans should be asking themselves who and what these representations are serving. Are they simply in service of the status quo? Is it enough that white America has begun to embrace Asian American faces, even if only for profit? How can we as Asian Americans try to further develop a critical political consciousness?

WE ARE NOT A VIRUS!
#STOP ASIAN HATE
#LOVE OUR PEOPLE LIKE YOU LOVE OUR FOOD!!

WE ARE NOT SILENT BUT ARE YOU LISTENING

#HATE IS A VIRUS

PROTECT ASIAN WOMEN
#Stopasianhate

#STOP ASIAN HATE

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ASIAN AMERICANS for BLACK ♡ LIVES

*As an aspiring writer, **Alex Hwang** thinks about writing every day and sometimes even achieves this goal. He loves hanging out in the east bay, where he grew up, skating around, reading, and listening to podcasts about mental health. His cat, Bianco, inspires him to keep pushing through it all.*