From 'Illmatic' to 'Kung Flu': Black and Asian Solidarity, Activism, and Pedagogies in the Covid-19 Era

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Abstract

Trending social media has indicated that there are currently two pandemics: Covid-19 and racism. While this typology and terminology can be critiqued, it is rather clear that the virus and white supremacy are key concerns of social movements in various parts of the world, particularly in nation-states that experienced European colonisation and imperialism. The wake of Covid-19 has perhaps brought greater attention and support to #BlackLivesMatter-oriented protest movements, including by those labelled people of colour (POC) or 'minorities' in the North American context, such as Latinx and Asian communities. But with the amplified protest movement have come deeper calls for systemic change, from policy to ideology to everyday practice. Some of these critiques have been directed at the privilege, positionality, and participation of Asian communities not only with #BLM-oriented activism, but in education and general society as well. This paper seeks to contribute to this critical discourse through a brief discussion of historical solidarity between Black and Asian activists and social movements, and how these practices might help inform activism within North America as well as other protest movements. Going beyond one-dimensional 'but we experience racism too' discourse of Asian communities that has recently increased due to anti-Asian hate crimes and scapegoating regarding 'The Chinese Flu,' this paper explores some of the ways that historical Black-Asian solidarity can inform more intersectional and transnational analyses and pedagogies of Asian students, educators and activists.

Keywords

Afro-Asian solidarity social justice education transnationalism hip-hop Asian martial arts social movement organising

Introductions

It has been noted that the large-scale shuttering of commerce and neoliberal society, even for a brief time, has facilitated new and diverse dialogue, research, and reorientations of family, work, and community (Jandrić 2020). In these ways, the universal stay-at-home, masking, and social distancing measures have catalysed disparate groups to see themselves in a different light, bringing attention to shared inequities and dysfunctions in areas like schooling, healthcare, labour, social services, and environmental protections (Khan, Ratele, and Arendse 2020; McLaren 2020; Rapanta, et al. 2020). Collectively the pandemic has made systemic injustices more apparent, connected groups of people that perhaps were not as connected before, and spurred them on to activism, often through their own self-education and sites or accounts they follow on-line. While there is a diversity of analyses, strategies, and goals, there is a clear call for systemic change, such as through abolishing the police state, establishing reparations for peoples who have undergone genocide, radically democratising the official political system, and redistributing the wealth of the elite and the systems that keep them in power. Although there are significant points of unity being pursued by different minoritised groups, there are also disconnects and tensions between some of those groups, such as those racialised as people of colour (POC). Among these tensions are those between Black communities (typically framed as the least privileged minority and lowest on the racial hierarchy, but the most engaged in activism), and Asian communities (typically framed as the most privileged minority and second in the racial hierarchy closest to whiteness, but the least engaged in activism) (Coloma 2006; Hwang 2011; Jung 2014). These tensions may include anti-Black racism in workplaces, bullying of Asian secondary students, commodification of Black cultural and linguistic practices (e.g., Black English, music, fashion), and silencing or co-optation of work by Black activists, scholars, and organisations within POC or interracial social justice spaces. While not a treatise on Asian-Black race relations, this paper seeks to contribute to critical discourse on the current pandemic concerning contexts of education and social movements, with a brief discussion of Black-Asian histories of solidarity and activism, and implications for transformative pedagogies of current protest movements.

At the heart of this paper is the notion that the interests and inequities of communities racialised as Black or Asian are not mutually exclusive. Indeed there are real disparities between our communities which have often been pitted against each other historically, such as Indian labourers in British colonial Africa, African American soldiers in the Vietnam War, Korean shopkeepers in Black neighbourhoods during the 1992 Los Angeles Uprising, Asian-led lawsuits against Affirmative Action for Black students, and Chinese employers in modern-day Zambia. However, there is also a rich history of Black-Asian recognition, solidarity, and collaboration in various parts of the world that disrupt racialised hierarchies, white supremacy, labour exploitation, and old coloniser tactics of divide-and-conquer (B. Chang 2015; Prashad 2002). It is this history of social justice work and their pedagogies that informs this paper. What also informs this paper is this writer's experiences in doing multiracial social justice work in the US and Asia from minoritised and majoritised positionalities, which are briefly mentioned below to contextualise the paper.

In trying to be mindful of 'when and where I enter' social change work as an educatorresearcher, I am informed by Black womanist traditions in teaching and organizing (Giddings 1984; Jain and Turner 2011; Ladson-Billings 1996), indigenous approaches to social science methodology (Grande 2015; Smith 2012), and legacies of other diasporic and 'insider-outsider' activist-scholarship in cultural studies (Anzaldúa 1999; Chow 1998; Hall 2019). These legacies are important to keep in mind when discussing Black and Asian activism, particularly for me as a 'Chinese' or 'Asian American,' which are social locations that have historically occupied majoritised status in Asia, minoritised status in North America, and an increasingly preferred-minority status as part of East Asian/'Confucian Heritage Culture' populations around the globe (B. Chang 2021; B. Chang and McLaren 2018). My own family's roots are those of migrants from Northern and Southern China, who fled civil war and navigated through Japanese, British, French and US imperialism in Hong Kong, Vietnam, and Taiwan, before arriving in the US prior to the 1965 Immigration Act. Growing up during the era of Reaganomics, 'gang wars,' the 1992 L.A. Uprising, and conscious hip-hop, I experienced discrimination as a POC (person/people of colour), child of immigrants, and 'English Language Learner.' This ranged from the typical 'Go back to your country!' from working-class white men, to more complicated 'What gang are you from?' interrogations while under a chokehold by a Black policeman's nightstick. Yet at the same time, I experienced privilege as an able-bodied cisgender male who had parents with some tertiary education, and grew up in suburban schools and areas with Black, Brown and white neighbours. In addition to these experiences of privilege and marginalisation, being racialised as both a 'Model' and 'Oppressed' minority, and being from the dominant Chinese sub-group under the Asian American racial umbrella (B. Chang 2017), has helped nuance and inform my social change efforts as a I took on different roles (e.g., hip-hop artist, innercity school teacher, NGO staff, and academic) in different geographic locations (e.g., California, New York, North Carolina). In other words despite being in the same country, notions of race, privilege, and equity played out very differently and required on-going adjustments of theory to practice in order to be more inclusive and sustainable.

I have had the good fortune to improve my praxis through diverse roles and locations in US social justice work, with some of the most generative experiences including efforts as a majoritised activist in minoritised community spaces (and vice versa), as an educator in schools where credentialled POC were teaching POC but were highly oppressive (even to their own 'race'), and as a member in pan-Asian, pan-immigrant, and/or pan-'minority' social justice organisations and coalitions which were typically led by Black, Latinx, 'mixed race,' and LGBTQI+ peoples. These learning opportunities were further nuanced in 'going back to the motherland' of Hong Kong as a Chinese American with elite credentials, which immediately positioned me within the dominant 'race.' Nuances emerged from this majoritised positionality when advocating for equity with 'ethnic minorities' and other marginalised groups in a region where white supremacy ideology persists, where Han Chineseness is increasingly akin to whiteness in numerous ways (Gutiérrez 2006; K. M. Lee and Law 2016), and the 'new coloniser' can be considered Chinese (B. Chang 2019; Chen 2010). A general example of this concerns how Chinese diaspora or 'returnees' to Greater China (China, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan), who typically grew up as minoritised peoples abroad (e.g., North America, UK, Australia), come to work in the region's schools, NGOs, and

universities. Within many Asian countries there is a somewhat familiar history of white colonisation (e.g. Hong Kong, Malaysia, Philippines) where they are able to apply theories and pedagogies they were trained in abroad like problem-posing education, funds of knowledge, and community cultural wealth (hooks 1994; Yosso 2005). They are subsequently able to make some contributions, particularly with racially-minoritised communities, working-class youth, and women. However when it comes to the hegemony of mainland China and/or Han Chinese peoples in the region, and their own privilege and participation in oppression, they may be far less conscientious and end up repeating some of the aggressions they would normally attribute to white people back home.

In traversing schooling and community spaces back-and-forth across North America and the Asia-Pacific, and trying to engage in social justice-oriented education, organizing, and scholarship, over the years I have been made more aware of the tentative nature of the positionalities of Asian communities that can be markedly different from other groups categorised as minorities in various regions of the globe: it cannot be explained solely by 'But we experience racism too' discourse. When considering how Asians can more transformatively participate in social justice-oriented pedagogies within education and activism, it is important to not frame Asian communities as just 'Model' or 'Oppressed' minorities, a la 'cut-and-paste' analyses borrowed from essentialised models of Blackness/Brownness or proximity to whiteness (Lei 2003; Leonardo 2012). Instead there is utility in applying intersectional and transnational lenses to Asian communities, as they require optics that go beyond static notions of race and the US context, to address privilege and multiple interlocking oppressions that shift and migrate depending on the histories of the many communities that fall under the Asian umbrella category (B. Chang 2017). With Asians comprising the fastest growing minority populations in numerous countries including those of the Global North (e.g., Canada, Australia), and mainland China continuing to grow as the world's second largest economic power and a challenge to US hegemony, it becomes increasingly important for educators, researchers and activists to more dynamically understand the roles that Asians can play in social justice efforts traditionally informed by Black experiences and leadership. In discussing some historical examples of Black-Asian solidarity and activism, this paper hopes to contribute to more dynamic understandings of how racialised communities can come together to advance social justice struggles on both sides of the Pacific.

Foundations in Approach

As alluded to in the Introduction, this paper draws from a foundation of critical, womanist, and decolonising lenses within education, community organising, and cultural studies scholarship (Asher 2007; hooks 1994; Omatsu 2010), for its discussion of Black-Asian solidarity and activism amidst the pandemic. In this paper's considerations of POC activism within and towards building social movements, we draw from bodies of scholarship that address how transformative pedagogies can be developed with minoritised groups, which includes questioning, challenging, and leading, instead of just reacting to violence and oppression, or following existing movement leaders. Here, critical pedagogy theories might suggest utilising existing social movements (i.e. those

related to current #BlackLivesMatter or Hong Kong protests) as an urgent and immediate backdrop for development across the process of conscientisation, moving learners from outrage and random acts of resistance, to developing a critical consciousness and transformative modes of inquiry, agency and activism (Ginwright, Noguera, and Cammarota 2006; Solorzano and Bernal 2001). A specific example of this might be drawn from Freire's literacy work with low-income Brazilian communities (Freire 1993), which has also been applied in other Latin American and decolonising, postcolonial settings.

In many ways, Freire's work is highly-connected to popular education and participatory action research (PAR), which have taken roots from South Africa to Australia, but also draw inspiration from US Black organising traditions, such as with Ella Baker, the Highlander School, and the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s-1960s (Horton and Freire 1990; Payne 1995), as well as the Black Panther Party for Self-Defence (BPP), Ethnic Studies, and Power Movements of the 1960s-1970s (E. Brown 1992; Okihiro 2016). While diverse in theory and methodology, these approaches commonly focused on the oppressed, utilised the neighbourhoods, fields or factories as 'classrooms,' and sought to access and honour the dignity, histories, and cultural practices of the communities while 're-learning' on a path towards a more just society. Within education, these pedagogies have been further refined via feminist and indigenous lenses, including through intersectional praxes of care, reflexivity, and the interrogations of the positionality and privilege of the teacher, scholar, and activist (Ladson-Billings 1996; Luke and Luke 1999; Smith 2012). These refinements, and the general application of critical, decolonising, and womanist lenses to Asian communities in education (Asher 2007; B. Chang 2019; Coloma 2006), help provide a helpful foundation through which to examine the complicated positionalities of Asian communities amidst predominantly Black and POC activist spaces. This foundation also helps illuminate the significance of Asian/Asian American histories and pedagogies of activism towards more dynamic, inclusive, and equitable efforts in popular education, protest, and organising.

A final note about the foundations of this paper lies within a tension regarding the racialised essentialisation of US social change movements. Within popular discourses ranging from classroom history textbooks to Hollywood films, there has been a tendency to portray uprisings and social movements as carried out by singular racialised groups, or even by one organisation or person, typically a man, of that racialised group (Kochiyama, Huggins, and Kao 2009; Menkart, Murray, and View 2004). This portrayal's problematic implications include the depicting of racialised minorities as acting only to serve 'their own agenda' (often 'to the detriment' of other races), and the flattening of diversity within a racialised minority to make it seem 'they' are all the same (e.g., Latinx = Mexican, Asian = Chinese, Black = African American only). Another problematic implication is the erasing of histories of minoritised and majoritised communities coming together, beyond just racialised boundaries, with praxes that seek to challenge racism in schooling, worker exploitation, homophobia, and other forms of oppression (Kelley 1999; M. Louie 2001; Nguyen and Quinn 2016). These essentialisations are perhaps most prominent regarding the Civil Rights Movement, such as in their portrayals of education organising being done strictly by African Americans (and perhaps some progressive whites) vis-à-vis the Brown vs. Board of Education (1954) court case, and overlooking social justice efforts by Asian and Latinx communities such as in the landmark schooling cases of Mendez vs. Westminster

(1947) and *Lau vs. Nichols* (1974). Additional examples of how interracial organising and social movements become essentialised are within depictions of the United Farm Workers movement as Latino-only (excluding Asian workers), hip-hop as solely African American (excluding Latinx and Black diaspora youth), and the East Los Angeles Blowouts as strictly Chicano (excluding Pilipinx and Armenian leadership) (Bernal 1998; Pulido 2006; Scharlin and Villanueva 2000), to say nothing of any 'mixed race' individuals and families and their pivotal roles. While these essentialisations are more commonly challenged in American and Ethnic Studies (Hope 2019; Lowe 1996; Viesca 2000), they are not as common with critical education scholarship. Thus this paper seeks to disrupt this tendency towards essentialisation in the next section's exploration of interracial solidarity and collaboration between Asian and Black activists.

Afro-Asian Solidarity Towards Social Justice

With regards to research on social change work amidst the pandemic, one area that has not been discussed as much is Black-Asian activism in North America and around the globe. Often labelled 'Afro-Asian solidarity' (Hope 2019), many of these traditions have developed over the past century across regions resisting colonisation, capitalism, and imperialism. These traditions can offer generative pedagogies forward as we consider the historical moment. This is particularly significant given gaps in participation and leadership with Brown and Black communities amongst Asianmajority protest movements (i.e. Hong Kong), and the US's fractured notion of 'POC' solidarity given the disproportionate privilege, anti-Black racism, and co-participation in the killing of Black peoples (e.g., Officer Peter Liang in New York, Officer Tou Thao in Minnesota) amongst some Asian groups (Onishi 2020). On-line, thousands of Asian American blogs and social media accounts publicly grapple with how to support the Movement for Black Lives, given their 'Model Minority' and preferred minority status (Pham 2020; Vang 2020). These reflexive struggles can be juxtaposed with the highly-conservative politics of some Asians, particularly those coming from elite backgrounds, or refugees and immigrants who equate social justice stances with the 'backwards Communist' countries they left. Within the current hotspot of Hong Kong's racialised hierarchy, its widely-covered protest movement unfortunately includes factions who have engaged in xenophobic and racist practices (e.g., Mainland Chinese, Black and Brown Hongkongers), as well as peaceful protesters making bizarre pleas to Trump and Republican officials to help liberate the region (K. Lee and Law 2016; Yam 2020). Across these variants of activism in North America and Asia, critically examining the histories and approaches of Black-Asian solidarity can help provide more equitable ways forward. I briefly outline a few below for further discussion.

Shared Histories of Activism & Social Movements

"...the Problem of the Color Line in America instead of being the closing chapter of past history is the opening page of a new era. All over the world the diversified

races are coming into close and closer contact...We are nearer China today than we were to San Francisco yesterday.'

-- W.E.B. Du Bois (1914) 'The World Problem of the Color Line'

On Twitter and Instagram if one searches the hashtag #yellowperilforblackpower, images may surface which reference the 1960s-1970s Power Movements of Black, Latinx, American Indian, and Asian American groups (although the hashtag seemingly excludes 'Brown' Asians). These images typically include iconic photos of Asian men and children holding signs that support the release of Huey Newton, the incarcerated leader of the BPP which was then seen by many as the vanguard of US revolution. Beyond these inspirational images and phrases, common discourse amongst these feeds may discuss how Asians are in debt to African Americans due to the rights that all POC have via the Civil Rights Movement, and how Black peoples have continued to speak up for the rights of POC, including after 9/11 and during this 'Kung Flu' pandemic with substantial increases in anti-Asian hate crimes (Dutt-Ballerstadt 2020; Onishi 2020). While flash news and social media discourse are important, there is a longer, deeper, and bi-directional history of dialogue and support to draw from. For one, the BPP itself was highly-informed by the Chinese Communist Revolution and Maoism (Newton 1973), as were many of the Power Movements and social justice organisations around the US like the Young Lords, Brown Berets, I Wor Kuen, and Weather Underground (Kelley, 2002; Pulido, 2006). Prior to awareness of the Cultural Revolution's full legacy, and long before the 1989 Tiananmen Massacre, the Chinese revolution was viewed as the world's vanguard revolution by POC, such as in theory, structure, and strategy in building cadre and community support. The Chinese revolution was commonly linked with anti-war/imperialism activism during the Vietnam conflict, and supporting the fight of working-class Southeast Asians by removing the US military industrial complex (Ho 2000; Liu, Geron, and Lai 2008). Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, and Muhammad Ali, perhaps the 20th Century's three most visible African American political figures, all publicly spoke out about the related plights of Vietnamese, Black peoples, the colonised, and poor peoples of every 'race,' and had their careers or lives ended after promoting such ideas.

Histories of BPP members and other social justice organisations in the 1960s-1970s not only include shared intellectual foundations (Fanon 1961; Mao 1966), but also delegations and exchanges with revolutionary POC leadership across the US and in other countries such as China, Vietnam, and Cuba. But these were not isolated incidents, and had been occurring for some time between African American activists, and those in the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia. Within Asian American Studies, perhaps the two most celebrated activists are Yuri Kochiyama and Grace Lee Boggs. A prisoner inside the World War 2 Japanese American internment camps, Kochiyama was a lifelong supporter of Black, POC, and American Indian liberation, cultivating relationships and work with Malcolm X, the Young Lords, political prisoners, and many other revolutionaries while living in Harlem and then Oakland (Kochiyama et al. 2009). Boggs was one of the first Asian American women to receive a Ph.D., who was also an

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¹ Trump's use of this term is reminiscent of others like 'Yellow Peril' and 'The Sick Man of Asia' which were historically weaponised by US/European powers to demonise Chinese/Asian peoples, and drum up popular support for violence and the political scapegoating of Chinese/Asians domestically and abroad.

organiser and theorist. She is known for her part in the Johnson-Forest Tendency revolutionary group along with Russian immigrant Raya Dunayevskaya and Black Trinidadian C.L.R. James, and her lifelong organising in Detroit with husband Jimmy Boggs towards the liberation of workers, African Americans, and Third World peoples (Boggs and Boggs 1974; James, Dunayevskaya, and Boggs 1986). Although a Chinese American, Boggs was transnational in her scope of work, which engaged the Caribbean, UK, and African nations like Ghana. While Kochiyama and Boggs presented major contributions through scholarship and movement-building, they also provided tacit guidance through their personal pedagogies in working with multiple generations of Black and 'biracial' activists, which included their spouses and family members, into their 90s (Boggs 1998; Kochiyama 2004).

Boggs and Kochiyama also had African American contemporaries and predecessors who worked to build Black-Asian solidarity and social movements. These included the virtuoso Paul Robeson, son of an escaped slave and a lawyer-by-training, who turned to the arts due to discrimination and became a household name in theatre, music, and acting. Coming to prominence during the 1920s-1940s when African Americans were hardly given serious acting roles, Robeson was an internationally-renowned artist and outspoken symbol of anti-fascism, socialism, and antiracism with support and solidarity from the Chinese revolution and Black peoples arounds the world (Robinson 2006). One of Robeson's most popular songs was March On (a.k.a March of the Volunteers, the national anthem of the People's Republic of China or PRC) which he sang in English and Chinese. A friend of Robeson was W.E.B. Du Bois, who is typically mentioned in US history textbooks as co-founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP). But aside from the NAACP's anti-lynching and legal work that led to winning the 1954 Brown vs. Board of Education school desegregation case, Du Bois was also a Pan-Africanist, one of the US's first and finest sociologists, and an ardent supporter of Black-Asian social movements (Du Bois 1940). In addition to scholarship, exchanges, and extended visits with revolutionaries in Asia (Mullen and Watson 2005), Du Bois wrote fiction with his favourite novel being Dark Princess where his main characters were an African American and Indian couple who become political leaders promoting social justice in an early version of transnational Afro-Asian futurism (1928). Perhaps a partially-realised dream of Du Bois's was the 1955 Bandung Conference in Indonesia. This historic meeting was attended by 29 nations (e.g., Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Japan, Liberia, Pakistan, Philippines, Saudi Arabia), representing some 1.5 billion people, or about 50% of the world's population at the time. Largely coordinated by India, Indonesia, and the PRC, Bandung emphasised the solidarity of African and Asian nations, many of which were emerging from wars of liberation with their European colonisers (Zhou 2019). The conference sought to develop and advocate for the interests of these nations 'of colour' beyond the decrees of the US and the Soviet Union, in what became NAM, the Non-Aligned Movement (Prashad 2007). Although some goals of the conference were not fully realised over subsequent years, the international 'Spirit of Bandung' continues to be a popular subject for Black and Asian scholars, activists, educators and artists around the globe who are interesting in exploring alternatives to our present structures and institutions (Kelley 2002; X 1965b).

Asian Martial Arts & Black Liberation

'They say karate mean empty-hand, so it's perfect for the poor man' -- Dead Prez (2000) 'Psychology' from the album 'Let's Get Free'

Although international organisations and leaders can be inspiring and provide theories and strategies for social movements, they are not always as helpful with everyday pedagogies and life practices like self-care, which are more commonly prioritised within today's activist and social justice education agendas (Ginwright 2016; Sosa-Provencio et al. 2018). Here, Asian healing and martial arts have been a practical source of insight and pedagogy for Black-Asian social justice movements. Japanese karate was influential in the US, and kali/arnis/eskrima in the Philippines has a long history of fighting Spanish and US imperialism, but here I focus on Chinese kung fu due to its great influence during the 1960s-1970s Power Movements and afterwards. Despite pop culture portrayals of violence, many of the hundreds of Chinese kung fu styles are rooted in peace-building practices of Buddhism and Taoism. Most of these styles have traditionally emphasised knowledge and cultivation of self, connection with nature, discipline, health, and a reverence for all life and the wisdom of elders (B. Lee 2015). More specifically, kung fu has been based on thousands of years of 'indigenous' Chinese knowledge of medicine and healing which includes concepts of energy, meridians, and flow, and holistic cultivation practices like diet, meditation, internal and external kung fu, acupuncture, and herbalism (Yin and Shuai 1992). Furthermore, kung fu practitioners and organisations (e.g., the hybrid Southern Shaolin style of Choy Lee Fut, the Muslim spear style of Kaiping Qiangfa) have resisted government oppression for hundreds of years, including via collusion with European colonisers in the 1800s (Board 1984; Ye 2019). Given this 'alternative' ontology and epistemology, along with low-cost but disciplined pedagogies of health, self-defence, and healing, it is not surprising that Asian martial and healing arts were embraced by Black and Third World Liberation activists around North America looking for counter-hegemonic ways of being. Examples included BPP and Young Lords members learning acupuncture to heal drug addicts (Alba and Porzig 2013), and Malcolm X's Fruit of Islam cadre training in Asian martial arts (X 1965a).

African Americans were early proponents of Asian medicine and martial arts in part because of exposure in the military (e.g., Korea, Vietnam) and the opening of schools in working-class neighbourhoods by former servicemen (Aziz 2016). However the most widely-recognised catalyst of Chinese martial arts with Black communities has been kung fu films of the 1970s-1980s. Categorised as low-class entertainment, kung fu movies were in heavy rotation at cineplexes in working-class POC neighbourhoods, sometimes referred to as grindhouse theatres (Burr and Chen 2012). These films included those by the Shaw Brothers studio in Hong Kong, and their competitor Golden Harvest, which banked on the rising star of Bruce Lee who was returning to his childhood home of Hong Kong due to discrimination and whitewashing of his work in Hollywood (K. Louie 2002). Although Japanese karate was originally more popular and well-known, Chinese kung fu films touched a nerve amongst Black and working-class communities through their common portrayal of working-class kung fu stalwarts

rising up against corrupt government, white colonisers, and Japanese imperialist oppression (Yang 2009). Additional connections were made through themes of empowered women kung fu masters, struggles against European colonisers during the Opium Wars (i.e. 'the original white dope dealer' pushing drugs into POC communities), and Bruce Lee's works which made it a point to include Black Power politics (i.e. anti-police brutality), African American martial arts (i.e., Steve Muhammad), and star Black athletes (e.g., Jim Kelly, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar) (Maeda 2017). While Chinese kung fu films did not originate African American martial arts, they helped popularise and spread the study of Asian martial arts along with notions of decolonisation, militant resistance, spiritual healing, and social uplift. In stepping back to consider the brutal suppression of social justice activists and organisations from Greater China to the US which has included police brutality, torture, years-long prosecutions, and assassinations (E. Brown 1992; F. Lee 2019), it is understandable that marginalised groups would look to Asian medicine, self-defence, and spirituality for pedagogical guidance in healing and sustainability for protracted struggle.

Hip-Hop Community Building from the US to Asia and Back Again

'Like the Afro-centric Asian, half-man, half amazin'

-- Nas (1994) 'It Ain't Hard to Tell,' from the album 'Illmatic'

Hip-hop has been the most dominant musical genre of the past generation in North America, and continues to top its pop music charts. Known for its origins in New York's working-class POC neighbourhoods of the 1970s (J. Chang 2005), hip-hop's historical elements were brought together as a culture by youth of colour with diasporic and mixed racialised roots from Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin America. Hip-hop emerged during the post-Vietnam period of economic recession, white flight from cities, subsequent urban decay, drug epidemics, and gutted 'desegregated' schools. Under these conditions the Black and Latinx youth who largely formed hip-hop communities found themselves in a disillusioned era where radical organisations that had made a difference in local and national contexts (e.g., Young Lords, American Indian Movement) had been brutally undermined by US law enforcement and the non-profit industrial complex (E. Brown 1992; Ho 2000). As gang involvement continued, young POC developed alternatives through engaging in hip-hop cultural practices that re-appropriated their limited resources, encapsulated their collective energy, creativity, and disillusionment, and remixed it as a full-on engagement of 'wild-style' sight, sound, and movement. Given the period, hip-hop's emergence overlapped with the popularity of Asian martial arts and kung fu cinema in the inner-city. As such, hip-hop was informed by both phenomena, which is evident in its pedagogy of masters passing on their skills to students through disciplined study of its elements, the honouring of one's teacher and their teachers through nomenclature like Master and Grandmaster (e.g., MC Grandmaster Caz, DJ Grandmaster Roc Raida), and cultivating one's self development and greater peace through battling, or the testing of one's skills through heated competition (Au 2005).

While hip-hop's role in easing New York's gang violence has been debated, it did become a social movement for many young POC in the US during the 1980s-1990s. This movement may have been spatially and pedagogically influenced by Asian martial arts, but those two elements, along with hip-hop's philosophical, spiritual, and ontological influences, drew far more heavily from other 'Eastern' sources including those oriented with Islam. These sources and spaces including Sunni Islam, the Nation of Islam, the Nation of Gods and Earths (a.k.a. the 5% Nation), and the legacy of Malcolm X (Daulatzai 2012). Drawing from such influences which included emphases on decolonisation, knowledge of self, and nation-building, in a pedagogical sense many hip-hop practitioners saw themselves as not only artists or having fun, but as part of something bigger. This included roles as educators and leaders of minoritised communities, which were manifested through bringing attention to injustices (Public Enemy called it 'The Black CNN'), teaching youth about themselves and their peoples (e.g., 'each one teach one,' poor righteous teachers), creating community campaigns and organisations (e.g., 'The Teacha' KRS-1's Stop the Violence Movement, the Los Angeles Radiotron youth centre), and inspiring pride, positivity, and style based on knowledge of self (i.e. Queen Latifah and the Native Tongues Collective) (R. Brown and Kwakye 2012; Navarro 2016). These themes and pedagogies connected with minoritised youth around the US, particularly in the 1990s during hip-hop's 'Golden Era' or 'Conscious Era,' where many popular artists addressed issues of racial justice.

Along with my circles of friends, I can be included amongst the many minoritised youth inspired by hip-hop's Conscious Era. Growing up in a multi-racial, majority minority L.A., hip-hop was a confluence of ethnic groups with heavy participation and notoriety of Chicanx, Pilipinx, Samoan, Japanese American, and 'mixed race' crews and artists, many of whom had ties to gangs (B. Chang 2014; Lam 2015; Viesca 2000). Similar to how kung fu influenced young Black youth, hip-hop has influenced Asian Americans to participate and create at almost every level. While debates continue about cultural appropriation of Black culture (Wang 2006), in 2020 Asian hip-hop artists are no longer a novelty when it comes to pop music (e.g., Black Eyed Peas, Far East Movement), domination of DJ/dance/rap battle competitions (e.g., Beat Junkies, Jabbawockeez, Dumbfoundead), and chart-topping artists of mixed Black-Asian heritage (e.g., Tyga, H.E.R., Anderson .Paak). But beyond hip-hop's commercial side, many Asian Americans have gone on to make music, teach, and organise around 'woke' hip-hop's themes like decolonisation, feminism, pro-Blackness, and social justice movements with artists like Ruby Ibarra, Magnetic North, Native Guns, Skim, Blue Scholars and Himalayan Project (Villanueva 2020; Viola 2006; Wang 2006). In a final through-line of Afro-Asian solidarity, culture, and activism from Greater China to the US and back, for over 20 years Hong Kong artists like LMF have embraced hip-hop's messages of antiauthoritarianism and working-class rebellion (Lin 2008), with their music resurfacing as theme songs of the 2014 and current protest movements. From more individualised visual representations (e.g., dress, murals, protest signage), to community spaces looking to mobilise membership and other resources (e.g., open mic nights, dance/MC battle fundraisers), to pedagogies promoting conscientisation (e.g., graffiti black book sessions, spoken word workshops, 'each-1-teach-1' youth organising), as we look towards 21st-century models of social justice activism and education, it appears that hip-hop will continue to be a major influence on Black and minoritised Asian communities.

Intersectional & Transnational Steps Forward

'Ghettos are the same all over the world, they stink.'
-- Jim Kelly in 'Enter the Dragon' (1973)

In this brief exploration I have discussed some of the more prominent histories of solidarity and activism between Black and Asian communities, whose larger collaborations and legacies are often muddled amidst simplified Black/White or Black-Brown/White binary narratives, and essentialisations of Asians as the preferred and good minority within ideologies of Orientalism and white supremacy (Ang 2001; Chow 1993; Said 1978). Building upon traditions of cultural studies and social justice education scholarship that apply critical, womanist, and decolonising lenses, I have presented some historical activist praxes in organising, martial arts, and hip-hop as potential sources of inspiration and pedagogy, especially given their approaches that looked beyond just race and class, or just the US, Sub-Saharan Africa, or East/Southeast Asia. While there remain significant disparities between communities racialised as Asian and Black, and as essentialised notions of POC and ethnic minorities remain problematic, perhaps some of these tensions can be addressed by delving deeper into the pedagogies for social change that have been histories presented here.

As Covid-19 has exacerbated and exposed inequities for poor and working families, particularly those of colour, the rise of authoritarian strongmen (e.g., China, Philippines, US) have used the pandemic as an opportunity to further their agendas through policies of fear, scapegoating, hate, division, and exploitation, which is ironic given that those same countries engaged in revolutions against their colonisers for similar strategies. While the pandemic has deepened the burdens of minoritised communities, it has also afforded opportunities to see shared struggles across communities, do research on why things are the way they are, and connect and mobilise with one another in a world that experiences great isolation and alienation despite being digitally superconnected. Out of these opportunities, it seems clear that our analyses, methodologies, and pedagogies should challenge false binaries and other essentialisations of race and society (i.e. Black vs. Asian) which lend themselves so well to projects like worker exploitation, patriarchy, heteronormativity, and white or Han Chinese supremacy. We have much to learn from historical Black-Asian activism in the 19th and 20th centuries, including its struggles and tensions. But perhaps their most generative lessons were those that spoke to futures that applied transnational and intersectional perspectives to be more inclusive and sustainable, and not a standalone 'Black Power,' 'Yellow Peril,' or 'Hip-Hop' movement that hurts its efforts through only considering local/domestic contexts of the US or Anglophone nations, and by privileging the praxes of cisgender men over trans and gender non-conforming folx, university credentials over popular education, light-skinned Black and Asian peoples over darker complexions, Judeo-Christian organised religion over Ifá and Daoist spiritualism, and so on (Ho 2000; Isoke 2012; Pham 2020; Ramkellawan-Arteaga 2020). There remains a great deal of work to do in these challenging times, and hopefully the discussion here can help stimulate further dialogue, creativity, and praxes on social justice education in this era of the Covid-19 pandemic.

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