

**“TAUGHT TO BE PALATABLE”: TRACING THE CONTOURS OF DIASPORIC  
CHINESE POLITICAL MOBILIZATION IN VANCOUVER, B.C.**

by

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“Taught to be Palatable”: Tracing the Contours of Diasporic Chinese Political Mobilization in Vancouver, B.C.

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the degree of Master of Arts  
in Sociology

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## **Abstract**

Past and present forms of Chinese political mobilization in Canada are characterized by their “epistemic erasure” in both popular and academic settings. This erasure – which suppresses the legitimacy of diasporic Chinese activists – is aided by the racial meanings and corollaries of the model minority stereotype. As the dominant paradigm of racial meaning for Asian people in North America, the stereotype prescribes a configuration of racial positioning where Asian achievement upholds systems of white supremacy and capitalism. In addition to the gap in documentation left by this epistemic erasure, scholarly accounts of current Asian North American activism have not examined how the structural implications of the model minority stereotype manifest within mobilization. Using interviews conducted with 10 Chinese youth living in Vancouver, I show how their mobilization contrasts racial expectations of insulation from or disinterest in social injustice. My findings also allow me to theorize that model minority racialization within post-mobilization processes discourages participation in mainstream activism. Instead, this racialization has led activists to develop broader understandings of structural oppression in their pursuit of organizations and opportunities that see Chinese communities as meaningful participants in coalitional work for change.

## **Lay Summary**

Despite histories of activism, Chinese communities in Canada are still often seen in society as “model minorities.” This stereotype portrays Asian people in North America as hardworking and high-achieving enough to bypass racial barriers. In reality, Asian people are affected by the same systems of oppression. The model minority stereotype is harmful because it disempowers past, present, and future activism undertaken by Asian people – for both racial and non-racial justice movements. Current research has not investigated how being seen as a “model minority” influences motivation for and participation in activism. The stereotype has also led to a lack of research on Chinese activism in Canada. I use interviews with 10 Chinese activists in Vancouver to show how their experiences contrast the model minority stereotype, how the stereotype discourages their participation in mainstream activism, and how that discouragement has led these activists to develop new understandings and opportunities for change.

## **Preface**

This thesis is the original, unpublished, independent work of the author, Caitlin Chong. No Generative Artificial Intelligence tools were used in the development or writing of this thesis. The research constitutive of this thesis was covered by UBC Ethics Certificate number H22-01800.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

**CRT**            Critical Race Theory

**SMO**            Social Movement Organizations

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*To Craig,*

*Our life together has made this possible.*

## Foreword

It feels difficult to justify the importance of theoretical and documentary work in the context of multiple ongoing global public health crises and in the face of genocidal destructions of life. Throughout my progression in completing this degree, multiple state and public responses to colonial terror, COVID-19, toxic drugs, and climate disaster have severely shifted my perception of societal cohesion and the efficacy or urgency of neoliberal academia within late-stage capitalism. Despite this, my personal and research interests in local politics allowed me the opportunity to foster networks within this city and be witness to the innovative and life-saving forms of organizing, theorizing, and community care provided directly to and by those most marginalized by the regime of various profit-driven levels of government. Throughout this time of despondence, being engaged in community politics has instilled in me the exciting potentials that might be achieved. I have also witnessed what we stand to lose if navel-gazing and despair overpower counter-hegemonic determination and strategy.

In 2025, two of Canada's largest cities are led by Chinese Canadian mayors. I see how their achievement as successful delegates of Chinese communities are used as rhetorical shields while they uphold policies of social neglect and intensify carceral structures. At a Lunar New Year parade, which purports to celebrate cultural tradition, I observe as Chinese Canadian families proudly receive and are received into the ranks of various armed forces organizations. Within local municipal chambers, I listen to Chinese Canadian parents repeatedly attribute their disdain and disrespect for people who use drugs as an extension of cultural values. Then I watch as conservative actors continue to use Chinese voices and communities as scapegoats for their incitement of moral panic.

In these separate yet interconnected instances, Chinese Canadians are recruited, encouraged, and rewarded for their part in strengthening the power of this colonial nation. In multicultural Canada where diversity is treated as a series of easily achievable checkmarks and racial representation is uncritically lauded, upper-middle class Chinese Canadians fulfil a destiny of model minority-hood when they lend their “visible minority” status to the state’s campaign for self-legitimization. These instances are a clear and assertive reminder that resisting cooptation is more necessary than ever, and that the work to document and broadcast this resistance is valuable.

In moments of doubt, I also find myself turning to the words of my interlocutors and our interviews for affirmation. At the end of each interview, I asked a question: “What has been the moment, process, or accomplishment you are most proud of in your efforts to create change?” I tried to end each interview on a positive note and by creating space for my interlocutors to highlight their work. Answers included examples of campaigns or achievements that had been hard fought and won. Some of my interlocutors also emphasized emotions and relationships that emerged out of organizing work, a sense of satisfaction and new or renewed camaraderie. In a way I could not have foreseen during these interviews, answers that acknowledged the bleak or mundane aspects of organizing work have been most encouraging to me during this time. I have been reminded that failures are inevitable components of seeking justice through systems unwilling to acquiesce. And so, despite the negativity that continues to weigh on me, despite the ever-present and ever-growing intersections of climate, health, and political dangers to life, I hope to share their knowledge in a way that honours their work and can inspire future aspirations for justice. With the knowledge that disappointment can help pave the way for reformulating plans of action, I try to reconcile my emotions with the current state of local and global affairs.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In some years' time, there will be a nine-storey building on the northeast corner of the intersection where Columbia and Quebec Street meet at Keefer Street in Vancouver's Chinatown neighbourhood, on the lot referred to as "105 Keefer." The façade of this building might be decorated to match the aesthetics of its surroundings, but physically absent will be any commemoration of the rich history of community organizing in spite of which it was constructed. Throughout the 2010s, residents and organizers opposed to 105 Keefer worked assiduously to rally intergenerational and multilingual crowds for the purposes of planning, consultation, and protest. Though the campaign fought and won their battle against the developer in 2017, the decision was reversed in 2023 through a challenge in provincial court and subsequently the city's permitting authority. The community mobilization was aimed at what many considered a gentrifying force that would seriously disrupt the lives of low-income residents and the Chinatown neighbourhood itself.

During the 1960s and 1970s in Vancouver, a similar community mobilization took place against plans for urban renewal that would have seen the Chinatown-adjacent Strathcona neighbourhood razed for the construction of inner-city freeways. This campaign was significantly shaped by strategies enacted by the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural residents of the community (J.-A. Lee, 2007). In the campaign against urban renewal, the Strathcona residents were successful. However, the success of this campaign – the absence of urban renewal and its associated effects from the downtown Vancouver landscape – has lent itself to a similar invisibilization of the community organizing thanks to which the community was preserved.

While both campaigns were not explicitly "Chinese" causes, the mobilization for space inhabited by Chinese communities weaves their actions with the history of Vancouver's

Chinatown and Chinese communities. The invisibilization of both campaigns, despite ultimately different outcomes, perpetuates a common assumption about Asian communities in North America lacking a desire for or history of political activism – derived from the model minority stereotype that Asian people living North America are high-achieving enough to forgo political struggle. There are factors at play (like the spatially-absent evidence of both campaigns’ success) which have prevented two local instances of activism and organizing by Chinese communities from attracting greater attention, yet broader national campaigns undertaken by Chinese communities have also failed to change this perception.

The history of activism and organizing by Chinese communities in Canada includes the movement to repeal Chinese immigration restrictions within Canada during the late 1940s (Bangarth, 2003), cultural forms of resistance and identity-making throughout the 1970s to 2000s (X. Li, 2007), the movement for Chinese head tax redress from the 1980s to 2006 (L. Cho, 2002), activism against xenophobic media representations between the 2000s and 2010s (Coloma, 2013; Goossen, 2019), and various waves of transnational organizing concerning “homeland” politics in China (X. Li, 2015). These examples, which do not encompass the totality of activism and organizing undertaken by Chinese communities in Canada, highlight many instances of Chinese communities mobilizing for change. Despite these histories of political mobilization, the model minority stereotype still affects the racial perception of Chinese communities in Canada (Padgett et al., 2020).

Within the Canadian context of racialization, the regime of multiculturalism has since its inception in the 1970s shrouded racial relations with a blanket of tolerant and liberal democracy (Cui, 2011; E. Lee & Johnstone, 2021; Mawani, 2004). Multiculturalism has allowed Canadian society to shirk its responsibility to further aspirations for racial justice, specifying a “post-

racial” era where strong mobilization against intolerance is unnecessary (Bannerji, 1996).

Unsurprisingly, multiculturalism did not prevent the distressing resurgence of widespread anti-Asian sentiment in North America from affecting Asian people in Canada during the initial phases of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2022, a large proportion of Chinese Canadians reported experiencing racism and xenophobia since the start of the pandemic (Lou et al., 2021). With its significant population of Chinese inhabitants, Vancouver was even named the “Anti-Asian Hate Crime Capital of North America” by Bloomberg News. Mobilization against racism brought on by the pandemic, while notable, is also unlikely to change the racial perception of Chinese communities in Canada as model minorities.

The racialization and political mobilization of Asian communities within Canada are both topics of study that have been intimately connected with the emergence of Asian Canadian studies as a discipline (X. Li, 2007). Though there exists some scholarly inquiry into Asian Canadian history and politics, the same policies of multiculturalism that have minimized racial inequity and the social impulse for racial activism in Canada have also hampered the development of academic disciplines dedicated to “ethnic studies” (Goellnicht, 2013). Given this suppression, the research about the racialization and mobilization of Asian people in Canada, and subsequently Chinese people in Canada, is underdeveloped.

The mobilization of Chinese people in Canada defies perceptions of political apathy associated with their stereotyping as model minorities, as well as perceptions of multicultural racial equity. The historical formation of Vancouver as a migratory destination shaped by many Chinese communities, dating back to the origins of Chinese migration to Canada, has resulted in a rich history and present of Chinese activism and organizing. In this present study, I aim to explore gaps in knowledge about Chinese racialization in Canada by analyzing Chinese



mobilization in Vancouver. I do this by showcasing the perspectives of 10 Chinese activists and organizers living in Vancouver. Their motivations to begin this work and their participation within activism and organizing spaces indicate how they are assigned racial meaning as Chinese people living in Vancouver. This project is guided by the following research question: How does racialization influence Chinese activists and organizers in Vancouver?

### ***1.1 Racialization for Asians in North America***

My interlocutors self-identify as “Chinese” people. This identification is an ethnic category that holds significance for cultural processes like kinship, but also a racial one that holds socially-constructed meaning for structural processes of differentiation. To study the way their experiences as Chinese activists and organizers are perceived, I use racial formation theory and a structural view of racialization. Omi and Winant’s (2015) theory of racial formation sees how different categories of people have been ascribed difference through the concept of “race,” and that race is socially constructed in ways that represent varying conflicts and interests. The process through which people’s phenotypical differences are assigned symbolic meanings is what they term “racialization” (Omi & Winant, 2015). In this project I view racialization as a framework, which allows for an analysis of the ways in which racial meaning is reproduced at a structural level and informed by sociohistorical changes (Bonilla-Silva, 1997). This view of racialization enables me to see how different meanings are assigned to my interlocutors and to their participation in activism and organizing.

The model minority stereotype is fundamental to understanding how Asian people are assigned racial meaning in North America. The origin of the stereotype in popular culture is often mistakenly attributed within academic literature. Widespread and deliberate references to

East Asian people as “model minorities” – politically passive and self-sufficient middle-class achievers – can be traced to early sociological inquiry. Some sociologists recognized a relative lack of juvenile delinquency among Chinese and Japanese Americans, a discourse that was bolstered by New Right political figures who sought to contrast Asian American “civility” with African American social movements (Omatsu, 1994). Deeper historical interrogation reveals how the racialization of Asians as model minorities emerged as a deliberate and coordinated project of “race-making” through American domestic policy at the close of World War II, then throughout the Cold War, as a method of bolstering the global reputation and power of the United States (E. D. Wu, 2016). It was through a context of politically-driven convenience that American efforts began to assimilate Asian Americans and transform their reputation from “yellow peril” into an idealized stereotype of white-adjacent socioeconomic success; proof that racial inequity could be eliminated.

That Asian Americans, especially East Asians with light skin, were propped up as an idealized non-white population, meant Black Americans were further subjected to explicit and implicit denigration. This historical racialization is further clarified through Claire Jean Kim’s (1999) theory of “racial triangulation,” wherein the racialization of different racial groups occurs through co-constitutive and simultaneous trajectories and attributes privilege through multiple scales of difference. Kim uses the concepts of “relative valorization” to explain how Asian Americans are positioned as superior to Black Americans, and “civic ostracism” to explain how white supremacy keeps Asian Americans at distance by excluding them from civic membership through notions of “foreignness.” By reviewing historical developments like Asian Americans’ opposition to affirmative action policies (relative valorization of Asian Americans over Black Americans) and the xenophobia that many US-born Asian Americans continue to face (civic

ostracism of Asian Americans), Kim's racial triangulation theory shows how the racialization of Asian Americans is ultimately a tool of racial management in the upkeep of white supremacy.

The racialization of Asian Americans relies on historically-constructed meaning. Reviewing the origins of the model minority stereotype and Kim's theory of racial triangulation clarifies how these meanings – perceptions of Asian Americans as economically and educationally successful yet still located outside the national consciousness – continue to serve the ability of white supremacy to quell internal questions of racial inequity, while safeguarding the dominance of whiteness in American society. Triangulation helps clarify the relationship between the twin meanings of exceptionalism and foreignness. Although appearing oppositional, they stem from common rationale – the protection of white supremacy.

Analysis of the model minority stereotype in the Asian Canadian context reveals how exceptionalism and foreignness are linked as racial meanings that uphold white supremacy. As in the US context, Asian Canadians are often perceived as “good minorities” because of their supposed economic and academic prowess. Notable racist media representations throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century have explicitly postured Asian students as inherently intelligent and therefore a less-deserving population which “overwhelms” student bodies at Canadian universities (Coloma, 2013; Ho, 2014). This contempt for a perceived excess of Asian students demonstrates how both exceptionalism and foreignness are assigned to Asian people in Canada. Though their educational success reflects well upon the supposed meritocracy of Canadian society, the conditional acceptance of Asianness is revoked and located outside of the national consciousness when it becomes a threat to the “more-deserving” white student body. One notable difference in racialization between the American and Canadian contexts is the added effect of multiculturalism. In the environment of Canadian multiculturalism, the model minority

stereotype uphold beliefs in liberal meritocracy and helps to confound the realities of white supremacy (Pon, 2000). In many of the same ways, the model minority stereotype shapes Asian Canadian racialization like it does Asian American racialization, but it can aid and be aided by multiculturalism's denial of racial inequity.

Given the primacy of capitalism and colonialism to the development of North American society, another theory of racialization has been put forth to understand how the settler economy has constructed racial meaning for Asian North Americans. Iyko Day (2016) views Asian racialization through the theory of racial capitalism, first put forth by Cedric J. Robinson. Robinson's theory traces the historical development of capitalism through the logic of domination and exploitation that was solidified through the management of racial difference; that the concept of categorizing people into positions of inferiority made the proliferation of capitalism possible (Kelley, 2023). Day uses the theory of racial capitalism to discuss how the history of Asian migration in response to the labour needs of the US and Canada has led to the assignment of racial meaning characterized by "economic efficiency," which in turn serves as the basis for their exclusion or assimilation (Day, 2016, p. 7). This association with efficiency is evident in the primary messaging of the model minority stereotype which promotes Asian achievement. In determining the context within which racial meaning is assigned to Chinese people in Canada, I similarly emphasize the development of the Canadian settler economy in reviewing the history of Chinese migration

## ***1.2 Chinese Migration to Canada and Settlement in Vancouver***

The historical context of Chinese migration to Canada is important to understanding the racialization of diasporic Chinese communities in Vancouver. As a historic landing point for

Chinese migrants, Vancouver has seen its composition of Chinese communities shift in accordance with trends in Chinese migration to Canada. From recruitment as labour for early industry to current programs aimed at business and investor immigration, Canada's demands for human capital have indisputably governed Chinese immigration flows. In Vancouver especially, the political interplay resulting from this economic demand has affected the social character and settlement patterns of Chinese communities which come to inform the context of their racialization.

The beginnings of mass Chinese migration to Canada are traced to 1859 when the Chinese first came as gold miners from California, then directly from China as laborers for railway construction and other industries on the west coast (P. S. Li, 2009). Chinese wage labour was used in sawmills, canneries, and coal mines throughout BC, where workers were paid a proportion of what was paid to white labourers, and the work was long hours and unsteady due to seasonal availability (K. J. Anderson, 1988). Because of their willingness to engage in precarious work practices, Chinese labour was coveted and praised as "docile and industrious" (K. J. Anderson, 1988, p. 132). In BC, unions of white workers perceiving Chinese labour as a threat to their livelihood actively advocated for the colonial government's legislative exclusion of the Chinese from voting, owning Crown land, working on provincial public works, or entering most professions (K. J. Anderson, 1988).

On multiple occasions, this fear of replacement led to white riots and destruction of Chinese residences in Vancouver. Therefore, not only did social and economic ties to community encourage concentrated Chinese settlement in ethnic enclaves like Chinatown, so too did the constraints of legislation and threats of white violence. As the need for Chinese labour waned during the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the state became increasingly hostile, curtailing further

immigration first through head tax legislation and then restricting entry via the Chinese Exclusion Act (K. J. Anderson, 1987; P. Li, 1998). Thus, the early permissibility, settlement, and social cohesion of Chinese migrants in Vancouver was directly tied to capitalist industry and colonial expansion throughout the west coast.

It was not until the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that the Chinese population in Canada was supplemented by considerable levels of immigration. Following the repeal of the Chinese Immigration Act during the postwar period, flows of Chinese migration to Canada began to increase slowly; however, it was later changes to immigration regulations, between 1960 and 1985, that permitted growing numbers of Chinese immigrants – a majority of whom originated from Hong Kong – to settle in Canada (P. Li, 1998). The advent of Canada's point system for prospective immigrants, as well as the business immigration program, worked to attract educated, skilled, and entrepreneurial migrants from Hong Kong, China, and Taiwan (Guo & DeVoretz, 2007; Wang & Lo, 2005; L. L. Wong & Ng, 2002). The diverse character and sheer magnitude of immigration as result of these changes fundamentally altered established communities of Chinese Canadians (Edgington et al., 2006; P. Li, 1998). In Vancouver, the influx of Hong Kong migrants from the 1980s to 1990s was especially notable for the way it supplemented existing Chinese communities with a population that held many social and cultural differences.

The introduction of Canada's Business Immigration Program in 1978 began to facilitate entry for entrepreneur immigrants and was expanded in 1986 to include investor immigrants. As previously suggested, Hong Kong was the largest supplier of Chinese immigration to Canada during this time, also leading as the largest source of Chinese economic and business immigrants (Wang & Lo, 2005). In congruence with political changes and the rapid growth of China's

economy, those from mainland<sup>1</sup> China have become the largest proportion of Chinese immigrants to Canada. The proportion of mainland Chinese investor immigrants rose from 3.5% to 26% within a decade, overtaking Hong Kong as the leading source of Chinese immigration (Wang & Lo, 2005; L. Yu, 2008).

Since 2000, Vancouver has developed as part of an intricate network for trans-Pacific real estate (Ley, 2017; Moos & Skaburskis, 2010). Though foreign investment – the purchase of houses, as investments and not as primary residences – likely contributed in some degree to rising housing prices, misleading anecdotes and negative media coverage from 2008 to 2018, which targeted Chinese immigrants as the driving force of the unaffordability of housing obscured other factors like a lack of social and low-income housing and rent control, which only increased anti-Chinese sentiment (Wallstam, 2019).

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, one of the most predominant narratives attached to Chinese communities in Vancouver is the stereotyping of mainland Chinese migrants as foreign buyers of real estate. The pervasive stereotype draws enduring prejudice against new immigrants from mainland China, which has only intensified as the city’s housing crisis continues to worsen. The emergence of this stereotype illustrates the way Canada’s economic immigration policies have influenced the racial meanings associated with Chinese communities.

Social stigma and perceived levels of wealth attached to mainland Chinese immigrants have generated bias from fellow Chinese immigrants. Wealth has become a way of delineating sub-ethnicity among Chinese communities (Yan et al., 2019). However, researchers contend that economic survival remains a vital concern for new Chinese immigrants and the majority continue to arrive as middle class (Guo & DeVoretz, 2006; L. Yu, 2008). Recent data from the

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<sup>1</sup> “Mainland” distinguishes Chinese migrants originating from the People’s Republic of China.

2016 Census shows that mainland Chinese immigrants report lower mean incomes than both Hong Kong immigrants and Canadian born Chinese (Fong & Man, 2023). An overemphasis on wealth and capitalist motives discredits many Chinese immigrants who migrate for family or educational opportunities (Costigan et al., 2016). The prevalence of inter-group bias among Chinese immigrants reveals the power of historically-constructed racial meaning in shaping the perception of Chinese communities, even amongst themselves.

Reviewing the history of Chinese migration to Canada, and specifically Vancouver, through the lens of the settler economy frames the context of racial meaning assigned to Chinese people in Vancouver. Early permittance and restriction of Chinese migration in service of colonial industry emphasized Chinese labour as efficient and therefore threatening to the white workforce. Though several analyses imply that the stereotype has been imported from the American context of Asian racialization, Law (2018) shows that the attribution of model minority as well as yellow peril discourses to Chinese Canadians has been ongoing since the beginning of Chinese immigration to Canada. That the origins of Chinese migration to Canada are founded on “economic efficiency,” as named by Day (2016), privileges this racial meaning in the historical memory of the nation, setting the basis on which Chinese racialization is built. In Vancouver, economic immigration policies have continued to racialize Chinese immigrants as a threat to the white populace, now often expressed through the language of housing.

The history of Chinese migration to Canada is also the history of Chinese exclusion and Chinese resistance against these varied forms of exclusion. From post-war immigration restrictions to racist media representations and even ongoing anti-Chinese sentiment stirred by the pandemic, Chinese communities have mobilized against exclusion in varied ways. Reviewing the history of Chinese migration to Canada through the lens of racial capitalism demonstrates



how this exclusion is motivated by perceived economic efficiency and the threat it poses to the white nation and their livelihood. In tandem with Kim's racial triangulation theory, these framings of Chinese racialization as an extension of white supremacy and capitalism allow us to comprehend how civic ostracism – the designation of Chinese people as separate from the national consciousness – is inherent to the model minority stereotype of exceptionalism. Foreignness has always been the co-requisite of so-called Chinese exceptionalism.

The historically-constructed meanings assigned to Chinese people in Canada – the dialectic of foreignness and exceptionalism – are important to current understandings of political mobilization in two ways. First, mobilization against racial perceptions of foreignness, such as that against COVID-19 xenophobia, often asserts political belonging without recognizing this dialectic of racial meaning, thus reifying the dialectic itself (Day, 2021; J. Wong & Liu, 2022). Second, this dialectic of racial meaning misconstrues the possibility and necessity of mobilization (Yi & Todd, 2024). Foreignness and civic ostracism place Chinese people outside the national consciousness, limiting political potency. Exceptionalism obscures the true nature of racial capitalist hierarchy that structures society, removing the urgency for Chinese mobilization. Ultimately, these functions of the dialectic result in reinforcement of these racial meanings, as well as their ability to protect and uphold the myth of meritocracy under white supremacy and capitalism. Both the motivations and participation of Chinese activists and organizers require closer examination to interrogate how these racial meanings continue to influence the presence and absence of Chinese mobilization.

### ***1.3 Political Mobilization and Racialization***

The study of social movements within sociology and other disciplines has resulted in a vast body of literature and theory about what motivates and sustains peoples' participation in social movements. Within this project, I interrogate the experiences of my interlocutors as Chinese activists and organizers across a wide variety of movements, social movement organizations, and forms of activism and organizing. In my research, I am interested in how racial meaning is assigned to my interlocutors in ways that influence their political socialization and experiences within activism and organizing. To explore this, I use theoretical concepts from the study of social movements.

In this project, I define activism as, “action that movements undertake in order to challenge some existing element of the social or political system and so help fulfill movements' aims.” (Saunders, 2013, p. 1). In this view, activism encapsulates a wide variety of action with varying forms targeting a range of change-making bodies such as the general public, private corporations, or state entities. Additionally, I understand “organizing” as the tradition of engaged community mobilization towards campaigns of change, based on the mid-century American formulation by Saul Alinsky (Schutz & Sandy, 2011). I am not concerned with scrutinizing and qualifying the individual actions of interlocutors in this project. Rather, I hope to show the circumstances and meaning that surrounds their participation in forms of activism and organizing.

Though sociologists and other social scientists have developed several approaches to the study of social movements – all with their individual paradigms of political action – Diani (1992) maintains that these approaches hold underlying similarities. I abide by Diani's (1992) comprehensive definition of social movements as, “networks of informal interactions between a

plurality of individuals, groups and/or organizations, engaged in political or cultural conflicts, on the basis of shared collective identities” (p. 1). In accordance with this definition, “social movements” are distinguished differently from “activism” as more aggregated, concretized, and collaborative networks of action, whereas “activism” is used to describe those actions which fuel movements.

In understanding how my interlocutors view causes for social change and become committed to activism and organizing, I make use of the process of mobilization, and understandings of collective identity. Mobilization, the process of becoming a participant in social movements, is understood as having various steps through which a participant’s motivation to participate can be encouraged or discouraged (Klandermans & Oegema, 1987). Throughout my results, I identify how my interlocutors and their communities are racialized in ways that affect these steps to mobilization.

Chinese activists and organizers are not all mobilized for racial movements, but the mobilization of all Chinese activists and organizers is racialized because of the historically-constructed meanings they are assigned as Chinese people. To recognize this distinction, I review the literature on race as an influence in the process of mobilization.

How does racialization influence mobilization processes? How does being perceived as Chinese influence activists and organizers’ motivations? Identity is a foundational concept through which people understand themselves and their relation to others (Jenkins, 2014; Simon et al., 1998; Tajfel & Turner, 2000; Tilly, 1997). In the context of social movements, research shows how there is an interplay between participation in social movements and identity development; identity both motivates and becomes developed through participation (Drury & Reicher, 2000; Keeton et al., 2021; Morris, 2000). This is especially the case for the concept of

“collective identity,” which entails the perception of self and relation to others through a similar category (Polletta & Jasper, 2001). This mechanism of collective identity has been identified consistently as inclination for mobilization; the more one identifies with a certain group, the more they feel inclined to act for that group (De Weerd & Klandermans, 1999; Mummendey et al., 1999; Simon et al., 1998; Simon & Klandermans, 2001). Such is the case for identification around social categories of gender, sexuality, race, and beyond.

Racial identity formation, towards the process of mobilization, is complicated for Asian people in North America who must understand their racialization through layered concepts like the model minority stereotype. Research demonstrates that Asian Americans face internalized racism which impedes positive affirmation of their racial identity and thus a desire to mobilize on behalf of their racial identity (Trieu & Lee, 2018). Scholars also show that strong identification with the model minority stereotype hinders Asian American participation in activism and is associated with attitudes of racial colour-blindness like anti-Blackness and opposition to affirmative action policies (Tran & Curtin, 2017; Yi & Todd, 2021).

Exposure to processes that challenge and deconstruct these forms of self-racialization are important to reaching a point of critical consciousness for Asian Americans (H. Lee et al., 2022; Lin, 2020). Researchers observed or recommended exposure to these processes in community organizations and schools. Among high school students, it was recommended that students be allowed spaces for introspection and discussion of their experiences living as racial minorities, in partnership with the chance to connect those experiences to both inter-community issues like anti-Black racism in Asian communities and intra-community issues like anti-Asian racism (H. Lee et al., 2022). This process of layered reinforcement has also proven effective among Asian American college students. Museus (2021) found that although some Asian American students’

commitment to social justice developed through experiencing distressing racial discrimination on a personal or societal level, their commitment to social justice often strengthened with education or knowledge about social injustice and the availability of role models in activating their experiences and knowledge into action.

How does racialization continue to influence post-mobilization processes? How are Chinese activists and organizers treated once they begin their work? Distinct within the networks composing social movements are a set of demarcated groups of people dedicated to committing action within the broader movement – social movement organizations (SMOs). As I refer to them throughout this project, I use the definition from McCarthy and Zald (1973): an SMO is a “complex, or formal organization which identifies its preferences with a social movement or a counter-movement and attempts to implement these goals” (p. 1218). SMOs are therefore an integral type of unit within the framework of social movements working collaboratively to achieve change. For racialized activists, SMOs are an institutional context within which they experience racialization.

The issue of racial difference within the organizational context of SMOs is one which has been heavily documented among feminist organizations throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Black feminists and other racialized feminists have detailed the insufficient understandings of race within mainstream feminism and feminist organizations (Hill Collins, 2000; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2022; “The Combahee River Collective Statement,” 2001). In the current “post-racial” era where racial ideology is maintained through subtler mechanisms (Bonilla-Silva, 2013), navigating racial difference continues to be an issue for all SMOs, but especially those who embrace a colourblind approach to race. This evasion of race within organizations results in a lack of structure to address racial conflict, and often the disengagement of racialized members

(Beeman, 2015; Dorion, 2024; Labelle, 2019; Scott, 2005). The theory of racialized activism put forth by Rojas et al. (2023) which embraces Ray's (2019) theory of racialized organizations, sees SMOs as a "white space" (E. Anderson, 2015) to better comprehend how racial inequalities are reified within SMOs. In this view, Chinese activists and organizers – as racialized members of SMOs – continue to experience racialization post-mobilization.

The assignment of racial meaning to Asian people in North America influences their mobilization and participation as activists and organizers. Racialized perceptions and self-perceptions moderate racial identity formation and understandings of the role Asian people can fulfil in movements for social justice. Given the evident impact of racialization on Asian mobilization and the fact that racialized participants in social movements continue to experience racialization within SMOs, there is still little understanding about how specific racial meaning like the model minority stereotype manifest within Asian mobilization and post-mobilization.

Although many studies have interrogated the effects of the model minority stereotype on Asian Americans (Assalone & Fann, 2017; Kawai, 2005; Thompson et al., 2016; Walton & Truong, 2022), and many studies of Asian American activism note the enduring power of the stereotype (Museus, 2022; Museus et al., 2021; Omatsu, 1994; Suyemoto et al., 2015; Tao et al., 2022), few have used qualitative methods to account for the specific ways that the stereotype manifests as racialization of activists and organizers. One recent study from Yi and Todd (2024) in the field of psychology contends through grounded theory that the model minority stereotype is necessary to understanding Asian American activism, specifically in the ways that activists feel their actions reinforce or challenge status quo racial expectations. While important for understanding Asian American activists' relationship with the model minority stereotype, Yi and Todd's (2024) study does not interrogate the racialization of Asian activists as model minorities

within larger structures. Missing from the literature on Asian mobilization is an examination of how racial meanings assigned to activists are positioned within structures of white supremacy and capitalism.

#### *1.4 The Present Study*

This project responds to calls for mobilization scholarship across disciplines which interrupts and critiques Asian racial positioning within neoliberal multiculturalism (Fujino & Rodriguez, 2019), and recognizes the knowledge production inherent within movements (Brissette & King, 2023). There has been work that responds to these calls in the Asian American context, with attention paid directly to the experiences of Asian American activists within movements using a critical framing of race, but findings are not addressed towards broader contexts (Chopra et al., 2024; Filler, 2018). Additionally, this critical documentation has yet to be undertaken in the Canadian context.

In the epilogue of one of few major works on the Asian Canadian movement that emerged out of the 1960s, the author, Xiaoping Li, laments that, “the idea of a ‘movement’ is not shared by the younger generation, who grew up within the postmodern and ‘multicultural’ milieu,” (2007, p. 273) and that this disconnect also reflects lack of “historical knowledge.” In other words, the underdevelopment of both Asian Canadian activisms and their study can be owed to “epistemic erasures” (Thomas, 2020; M. Yu et al., 2024) of Asian racialization in the decades since. In the Canadian context of multiculturalism, the racial meanings assigned to Chinese people have certainly blurred the presence and absence of Chinese mobilization. This project seeks to remedy this apparent erasure through exploratory documentation and analysis of how Chinese activists and organizers are influenced by racial meanings in their mobilization.

### *1.5 Analytical Framework*

My analytical approach synthesizes Museus and Iftikar's (2013) AsianCrit framework, with Kim's (1999) theory of racial triangulation, and the theory of racial capitalism (Au, 2022; Day, 2016; Kelley, 2023; Robinson, 2000) to document how Chinese activists and organizers are influenced by racial meanings assigned to their mobilization, and analyze how these meanings are positioned within structures of white supremacy and capitalism. AsianCrit is a conceptual outlook which builds on the existing tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Museus & Iftikar, 2013). Much like other offshoots of CRT that aim to specify analyses of different racialized groups, Museus and Iftikar (2013) contend that AsianCrit should not replace CRT, but use its existing tenets and knowledge about Asian American history and experience to further critical research about the ways Asian Americans are racialized.

There are seven tenets specified within AsianCrit: 1) "Asianization," recognition that Asian Americans are racialized in stereotypical and oppressive ways as model minorities and forever foreigners; 2) "transnational contexts," prioritizing the historical and contemporary contexts of social, political, and economic processes within and outside American borders that affect Asian racialization; 3) "(re)constructive history," emphasizing the analytical importance of (re)constructing narratives of Asian American history which privilege Asian voices, for purposes of accurate documentation and informing future development; 4) "strategic (anti)essentialism,"<sup>2</sup> embracing the socially-constructed and fluctuating nature of racial categorization, such that Asian Americans are capable of strategic actions that tend to internal diversity yet also towards greater possibilities of unity; 5) "intersectionality," (Crenshaw, 1989) acknowledging the reality

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<sup>2</sup> AsianCrit synthesizes the Critical Race Theory tenet of "anti-essentialism" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2013) and Spivak's (2012) "strategic essentialism."



that multiple systems of oppression, including race, intersect in influencing the lives of Asian Americans; 6) “story, theory, and praxis,” highlighting the value of Asian voices in the production of counterstories, theoretical work, and practice which aid in analysis and advocacy for Asian American communities; and 7) commitment to social justice, the importance of critical theory being instrumental to material efforts of anti-oppression (Museus & Iftikar, 2013).

Originally conceived within education studies, AsianCrit has been embraced for its conceptual use in illustrating the experiences of Asian Americans (An, 2016; T. Kim et al., 2024; Kolano, 2016; Qin et al., 2024; Saito et al., 2022; 吴林 Lin Wu, 2024; M. Yu et al., 2024).

I employ all seven tenets of AsianCrit along with the theories of racial triangulation and racial capitalism in my analysis. The “Asianization” tenet of AsianCrit is a core part of my overall analytical framework, which recognizes the nuances of Asian racialization within Canada and the significance of Chinese activist and organizers in defying racial expectations. As discussed earlier, Kim’s (1999) theory of racial triangulation is an important foundation for understanding the relationality between Asian Americans and other racialized groups within the structure of white supremacy. Racial triangulation informs a considerable amount of research on the model minority stereotype. However, the theory has also been criticized for its lack of class analysis (Cheung-Miaw, 2021). Because the racial positioning specified by racial triangulation (relative valorization) and AsianCrit (the model minority stereotype) begins with Asian economic and educational exceptionalism, my framework for Asian racialization also relies on understandings of racial capitalism.

Day (2016) argues that it is the economic efficiency attributed to Asians in North America which serves as the historical basis for both exclusion and assimilation. These historically-constructed meanings around efficiency hold credence for the racialization of

Chinese activist and organizers as supposed model minorities within a system of racial capitalism. Awareness of class structure and the racial development of capitalism is needed to understand why the model minority stereotype is used to discourage Asian activism and uphold white supremacy and capitalism. Through a lens of Asianization enhanced by theories of racial triangulation and racial capitalism, I arrive analytically with a multi-faceted conception of the racial meanings through which to contrast and anticipate racial expectations for my interlocutors. As shorthand, I call this conceptualization of racialization informed by racial triangulation and racial capitalism the “model minority paradigm.”

The tenet of “story, theory, and praxis” informs the construction of my analysis, where I pose the model minority paradigm as a “narrative” by which experiences are understood within and against. As discussed in the earlier review, my conception of the model minority paradigm integrates a dialectical understanding of the model minority and forever foreigner stereotypes, the theory of racial triangulation, and a recognition of racial capitalism. This conception of the model minority paradigm anticipates the way Asian people in North America are viewed in static terms. In my analysis, I use my interlocutors’ experiences to explore how those static expectations, which may be false, continue to maintain power in shaping perceptions about diasporic Chinese activism and organizing. The tenets of intersectionality and transnational contexts are also employed to address the narrow expectations set by the model minority paradigm.

My analysis follows the deconstruction of the model minority paradigm with a construction of an alternate paradigm for understanding active and meaningful diasporic Chinese activism and organizing. The tenet of strategic (anti)essentialism informs my choice to focus on diasporic Chinese activists and organizers, given the historical formation of Chinese identities

and communities within Vancouver and the legacies of racial capitalism that structure local perceptions of Chinese mobilization. Finally, the (re)constructive history and commitment to social justice tenets are embraced within the epistemological structure and purpose of this study as one which demonstrates both the historical trends and contemporary iterations of diasporic Chinese activism and organizing.

## 2. METHODS

### *2.1 Research Overview and Analytical Approach*

This thesis draws on semi-structured interviews conducted with 10 self-identifying Chinese youth living in Vancouver to explore how racialization influences their political mobilization. As I discuss earlier, Vancouver is a historically significant location for Chinese communities, which is one of the reasons why I chose to interview participants residing here. My interlocutors in this project represent multiple social movements, political organizations, and modes of involvement. This qualitative study is a preliminary evaluation of Chinese activists and organizers in Vancouver. It uses the specificity of an AsianCrit perspective to make analytical claims across a diversity of identities and experiences present among my interlocutors.

My thesis focuses on youth who are involved in activism and organizing rather than a general survey of the entirety of the Chinese diaspora in Canada for a number of reasons. First, among studies of Chinese activism in Canada, the voice of youth has been relatively obscured. Second, I am interested in my interlocutors' knowledge, which they gained directly through experiences within political engagement. Diasporic Chinese political participation, much like diasporic Chinese subjectivity itself, is fragmented (Shi, 2005). As well, the common racial framing of Asian people in North America as model minorities or forever foreigners can inhibit political participation (Lin, 2020; Tran & Curtin, 2017; Yi & Todd, 2021, 2024). That my interlocutors have undertaken forms of participation distinguishes them as having bypassed this inhibition. Third, I am interested in the kind of knowledge my interlocutors have gained through experiences within their work. Participation in activism and organizing work in itself – taking action to oppose systems of oppression – signifies knowledge of those systems which oppress (Freire, 2000; Mathews et al., 2020; Watts et al., 2003). My interlocutors possess a self-

awareness about their place within and against systems of power. Accordingly, interviewing is an appropriate method through which to document this rich, experiential, and self-reflective knowledge.

## ***2.2 On Language***

At first glance, several choices in language use may seem overly wordy or unnecessary, but my choices are intentional. During the process of recruitment, I specified identification as either “activist” or “organizer” as inclusion criteria. Within my interviews with my interlocutors, we discussed their perceptions of these identity labels and their preference. There is a large body of research on activist identity and conceptual difference between different forms of political change-seeking that is too vast for this project (Chalhoub et al., 2017; Luke et al., 2018; Maher et al., 2020). To avoid ascribing contentious identifications to my interlocutors’ work, I use their preferred label wherever possible. When discussing my interlocutors in general, I use both labels. When I talk about the concept of seeking political change more generally, I use the “activism” label.

Additionally, during the recruiting process I specified “Chinese-Canadian” or “diasporic Chinese” identifications as inclusion criteria. During our interviews, I also asked my interlocutors about their perception of these ethnoracial identities and their preferences. Again, a discussion of these distinctions is too vast for this project, but I acknowledge the importance of ethnoracial labels to identity formation and the process of political socialization (Yim & Kang, 2024). Given that a majority of my interlocutors felt comfortable identifying as “diasporic Chinese,” I use this label throughout. I also contend that within the context of discussions about race, migration, and class that break from stereotypical expectations which serve nationalistic

structures of white supremacy, the flexible implications of “diasporic Chinese” and its dis-attachment from the state strengthen its use in critical analysis (Ang, 1994).

Finally, I use “interlocutor” in place of the typical term, “participant.” This choice reflects my positionality as a diasporic Chinese organizer (discussed more in-depth in the following section), how that positionality impacts my relationship to my interlocutors, and a recognition of the importance of their knowledge in this project. I take inspiration from Bhardwaj (2022) in using the term “interlocutor.” My interlocutors and I have identities and experiences in common, but they are ultimately the guiding force of knowledge production in this project. I believe this language choice shows an understanding of this relationship.

These choices in language represent the limited capacity of this project as one focused on the nuances of Chinese racialization within the context of activist and organizing environments, but also a desire to respect the specificity of identity labels, present conceptual accuracy, and recognize the knowledge production inherent to interview methodology with understudied groups.

### **2.3 *Recruitment Methods***

To seek interlocutors, I employed sampling strategies targeting those who fit within my specified inclusion criteria: self-identifying diasporic Chinese youth between ages 18-30 who have lived in Vancouver and have done work as “activists” or “organizers.” Because the focus of this research is elective participation, undertaken in a certain location by a specific group, random sampling from the population was not ideal, or even possible. During a three-month period from August to October 2022, I sought interlocutors for interviews through convenience sampling, social media advertisements, as well as institutional networks at a university in Vancouver. To recruit through

convenience in my social networks, I circulated the study's recruitment poster (see Appendix A) via personal email and social media accounts. I also asked each interlocutor I interviewed to pass along the study information to eligible people they knew.

I used Twitter and Instagram to create advertisements corresponding to the study's inclusion criteria with each platform's respective audience targeting capabilities. I narrowed the audience for the Twitter advertisement to those within the Greater Vancouver area between ages 18-34 (Twitter's youngest pre-set age range). I narrowed the audience for the Instagram advertisement to those within the Greater Vancouver area, between ages 18-30, with interests in activism, social change, social movement, community issues, empowerment, volunteering, charity and causes, charitable organization, non-profit organization, or Chinese culture (Instagram's pre-determined categories, selected for relevance to the research topic).

Advertisements on both sites consisted of the study's recruitment poster. I contacted select institutional groups at the Vancouver university (clubs, advocacy groups, centres for research, academic departments) as well as Vancouver-based community organizations related to Chinese identities and communities to distribute the study's recruitment poster. The recruitment poster specified the nature of the research project, inclusion criteria for interlocutors, remuneration, and contact details of the researchers.

#### ***2.4 Study Details and Analytic Strategy***

My interlocutors were ages 19-28, with an average age of approximately 24 years (see Table 1). I obtained a signed consent form for an interview from each interlocutor via email (see Appendix B). While most interlocutors opted for a pseudonym to protect their identity, some elected to include their real names so their knowledge would be attributed to them. I conducted all

interviews via online videoconferencing software.<sup>3</sup> Interviews ranged in length from 45 to 90 minutes. The interview guide (see Appendix C) consisted of questions related to activism and organizing work that my interlocutors had undertaken, their motivations for starting or continuing this work, and aspects of their identities which informed their work and motivations. Each interlocutor received \$25 through electronic payment methods as remuneration.

**Table 1**  
**Characteristics of Participants**

| <b>Name</b>      | <b>Age</b> | <b>Pronouns</b>                     | <b>Type(s) of Activism/Organizing Mentioned</b>   |
|------------------|------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Brandon</b>   | 28         | he/him                              | anti-imperialism; opposing anti-Asian violence  |
| <b>Mary</b>      | 25         | she/her                             | mental health advocacy; housing justice and anti-gentrification; mutual aid   |
| <b>Olivia</b>    | 20         | she/her                             | climate justice; disability justice   |
| <b>Christina</b> | 26         | she/her & they/them                 | anti-racism; anti-gentrification; language access; public policy  |
| <b>Art</b>       | 24         | he/him                              | housing scarcity; urban development; municipal politics   |
| <b>Stephanie</b> | 22         | she/her                             | opposing anti-Asian violence  |
| <b>Anson</b>     | 27         | he/him                              | historical and cultural productions about Vancouver's Chinatown   |
| <b>Kimberley</b> | 27         | they/them                           | queer spaces; queer Chinese spaces; municipal/provincial/federal politics; Vancouver Chinatown stewardship; climate justice |
| <b>Anne</b>      | 19         | she/her                             | access to abortion; opposing anti-Asian violence  |
| <b>Clara</b>     | 25         | all, but mostly she/her & they/them | LGBTQ community and queer identities; mental health advocacy; harm reduction  |

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<sup>3</sup> For work documenting the methodological specificities of interview via video call, see Deakin and Wakefield (2014), Howlett (2021).



Following each interview, I obtained unrefined interview transcriptions from the videoconferencing software. I manually corrected and updated these transcripts for word accuracy and punctuation. This process produced 113 transcribed single-spaced pages. I used *NVivo* software to analyze each transcript through a sequential coding strategy. Deductive codes were used to capture overarching themes pre-specified by the interview guide, such as advice, Chinese identity, class, intersections of marginalization, motivations, and solidarity (See Table 2, in Appendix). While these parent codes accounted for the broad categories of responses from my interlocutors, I also used inductive codes to capture emergent and more granular responses (Taylor-Powell & Renner, 2003). For example, responses related to feelings of “conflict,” “difference,” or “repression” as related to Chinese identity were coded within each feeling as a subtheme, as well as the parent theme of “Chinese identity.” After the coding for each transcript, I completed a short memo to reflect on surprises, themes, thoughts, connections, or issues of importance arising from each interlocutor’s experiences. These memos allowed for consistent highlighting of notable elements across the coding process (Lester et al., 2020). Memos were also helpful in deriving broader themes from coded text segments. I used these themes to construct three thematic networks (Attride-Stirling, 2001) corresponding to the different stages of mobilization I describe and interpret in separate chapters within the results section: motivation, participation, and reconceptualization. Within these stages of mobilization, I saw how distinct threads of the model minority paradigm were evident throughout each stage. These threads – valorization, insulation, and self-interest – weave through the stages of mobilization in analysis of how my interlocutors’ experiences dispute and discard the model minority paradigm.

**Table 2**  
**Select Code Descriptions**

| <b>Code Name</b>                        | <b>Code Definition</b>   | <b>Code Example</b>  | <b>Reliability</b> |
|---|--|--|--------------------|
| <b>Advice</b>                           | Advice given by participants. Deductive.   | “I think it’s important that people remember what they can speak on. And, other times when they can just listen, that’s okay to listen and let that person speak instead.”<br>– Clara  | 100.00             |
| <b>Chinese Identity</b>                 | Discussions pertaining to Chinese identity. Deductive.   | “I was learning more about my ancestry – I'm a fifth-generation Cantonese person. So, I started doing work within Chinatown more specifically and intentionally.”<br>– Kimberley   | 92.13              |
| <b>Class</b>                            | Discussions about class identity. Deductive.   | “I work at a pretty good job where I don't have to worry about being exploited. I don't have to like, think about trying to form a trade union anywhere. So, in terms of like, I'm not focusing on that kind of issue.”<br>– Art | 99.22              |
| <b>Intersections of Marginalization</b> | The importance of identity intersections amongst participants. Deductive.  | “As someone who is racialized, an immigrant, and also lives with a chronic mental illness, I have at times felt quite discarded and uncared for by the community.”<br>– Mary   | 97.64              |
| <b>Motivations</b>                      | Participants mention what motivates them to become involved or stay involved in social movements. Deductive.     | “I think the main motivation was seeing a lot of people, and people of color as well, jump on to whatever mainstream media is saying about Asian countries and just accept this negative view of themselves.”<br>– Brandon       | 96.85              |
| <b>Solidarity</b>                       | References to instances or experiences of solidarity (in general) through change-making and activism. Deductive. | “We are up against the same system. Our liberation is ultimately all connected to that of all other racialized people.”<br>– Olivia  | 96.06              |

## **2.5 *Researcher Positionality***

My positionality as a third-generation Chinese settler informs how I come to this project as both “insider” and “outsider within” (Collins, 1986). As a politically engaged member of the Chinese diaspora raised in Vancouver amongst fellow Chinese Canadians, my own political participation locates me as an ostensible insider compared to other non-Chinese researchers. However, I am differentiated from Chinese organizers and activists through my class privilege as a graduate student at a major research university. The accompanying status and power of which gives me legitimacy to document and circulate this insider knowledge – an opportunity to harness “personal and cultural biographies as significant sources of knowledge” (Collins, 1986, p. 529) where experience and sociological training complement each other. Despite the recognition given to this theoretical approach (Alimahomed, 2010; Cohan, 2019), I anticipate criticism about the methodological rigour of conducting so-called “mesearch,” where my closeness in positionality is also viewed as bias.<sup>4</sup> To ensure that analysis and conclusions drawn are accurate representations for those studied (Miles & Huberman, 1994), draft excerpts of this project were shared back with interlocutors. The affirmation from my interlocutors allows me to conclude their contributions are presented accurately throughout this thesis.

## **2.6 *Reliability and Generalizability***

Besides concerns of bias informed by researcher positionality, qualitative research also faces general critiques about its inability to ensure an inter-subjective stability of meaning. To address this issue of reliability, I enacted coding procedures guided by Campbell et al. (2013). These procedures are aimed at achieving inter-coder reliability simultaneously to address the

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<sup>4</sup> For a more in-depth discussion of how closeness in positionality can strengthen research, see Enriquez (2020).

“unitization problem” common to the process of coding in-depth interview data. This problem – designating the same or similarly sized units of text among each code – complicates the ability for two researchers to reach clear agreement on a coding schema. After being trained on the code book, the independent coder evaluated a sample of the original data. Proportional agreement scores show the stability of the analytic approach (See Table 2, in Appendix). All codes received a high agreement score through this exercise, thereby assuring reliability in the analysis process.

This thesis reflects a small group of interlocutors. As younger racialized people engaged in processes of social change, this collective of interlocutors are not representative of a general population or the Chinese diaspora in Canada. While the sample size and composition may be perceived as a limitation to the generalizability of findings, the goal of the current study is not to make broad and definitive conclusions about political mobilization or processes of racialization. Rather, I embrace the particularity of my interlocutors and the significance of their experiences through “case study logic” (Small, 2009). Although analogous in some ways (young adults, self-identification as Chinese, political participation), they are not homogenous. Interlocutors have gained varying amounts of experience through different movements and organizations. They represent a range of age, gender, sexuality, and migratory backgrounds. This variation among my interlocutors allows insight into differing or overlapping pathways to political mobilization uniquely shaped by processes of racialization.

### **3. RESULTS**

#### ***3.1 How Being Chinese (among other identities) Affects Motivations for Activism***

Using interviews with my interlocutors in this project – diasporic Chinese activists and organizers living in what is colonially known as Vancouver, Canada – I note how racialization influences their mobilization. The model minority stereotype, which structures the dominant paradigm of racial meaning for Asian people in North America, prescribes notions that Asian people achieve success and status in ways that insulate them from oppression and are accordingly uninterested in political action. This paradigm continues for Chinese people in Vancouver, despite histories of mobilization. By reading *against* the model minority paradigm, I reveal how my interlocutors understand their various identities as diasporic Chinese people in contrast with racialized expectations, and how they derive meaning from their work for various causes. As diasporic Chinese people undertaking activism and organizing, their motivations operate in contrast to the model minority paradigm in ways that illustrate how race, class, and other intersecting structures of power shape the mobilization of Chinese people in Vancouver. These motivations are identified as follows: 1) coping with exclusion, 2) addressing intersecting structures of inequity, and 3) harnessing advantage as an opportunity for change.

##### **3.1.1 Coping with Exclusion.**

As diasporic Chinese youth living in the racial context of Canadian society, my interlocutors in this project experience the realities of racialization. Within the racial context of Canadian society, the model minority paradigm adjoins with discourses of multiculturalism and liberal democracy in portraying Asian people in Canada with both “positive” and “negative” stereotypes (Padgett et al., 2020; Pon, 2000). The “positive” aspects of the model minority paradigm might

be considered those which see Asian people as predisposed to educational and economic achievement, while the “negative” aspects are those that condemn Asian people as unassimilable threats. These views – the model minority and forever foreigner stereotypes, respectively – operate dialectically, as the forever foreigner stereotype operates covertly within the implications of the model minority paradigm as racial framing (Au, 2022; Kawai, 2005).

This stereotyping of Asians in North America as high-achieving outsiders results in isolating and invisibilized forms of racial discrimination (Museus, 2022; Museus & Park, 2015; Trieu & Lee, 2018; Walton & Truong, 2022). When the model minority paradigm pushes Asian experiences of exclusion outside of mainstream concern, this lack of attention can be mistaken as an absence of racial discrimination altogether. In addition, this misunderstanding can also hide historical and continuing responses to Asian experiences of exclusion, perpetuating the idea that Asian people are passive because they have no justification for seeking political changes. In contrast with this view of Asian passivity within the model minority paradigm, my interlocutors discussed experiences of isolating and invisibilizing incidents of racial discrimination and how they connected these moments to education and opportunities for agency.

In some cases, like Anne’s (she/her), activism was a way to cope with firsthand negative experiences, as well as a method of empathizing with others. Anne’s motivation to participate in activism for reproductive rights and racial justice came through a reconciliation of personal experience and agency to create change. She said, “I’ve had my own experiences with racism... I’ve also heard stories from other communities, and I feel like when you connect with different communities and you hear about their stories, it motivates you to also want the best for them.” Anne’s understanding of racial discrimination, through both personal and second-hand accounts, presented as motivation to create change and help rectify these issues.

Feelings of racial discrimination also contributed to Stephanie's (she/her) motivations for activism and advocacy work opposing anti-Asian violence. She talked about how learning about structural racism in university gave her a new understanding of former desires to repress her Chinese identity. Stephanie described how norms instilled by white supremacy led to feelings of shame during her adolescence: "I hated being Chinese. I really wanted to be white... And then that internalized racism, growing up here, you're kind of almost embarrassed of your parents." Stephanie then contended that reflections on her personal experiences and feelings of identity repression were supplemented and influenced by education, as well as the political context of COVID-19-induced xenophobia towards Asian communities. These forces combined to influence her motivations for pursuing activism and advocacy around intergenerational understandings of anti-Asian sentiment. For both Anne and Stephanie, confronting and coping with personal feelings of racial exclusion informed their mobilization.

Surging levels of racial discrimination also motivated Brandon (he/him) to become more vocal and involved in anti-racist and anti-imperial activism and advocacy during the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. He said,

Previously I kept it to myself or discussed it in friend groups. I think the main motivation was seeing a lot of people, and people of color as well, jump on to whatever mainstream media is saying about Asian countries, be it like China, Vietnam, Korea, and just accept this negative view of themselves.

Here, Brandon discusses his impetus to question people who bought into negative media representations of Asian countries. Xenophobia, particularly towards people racialized as Asian, became increasingly rampant during the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in North America. There was an immediate motivation for Brandon to counteract current rhetoric about Asian communities and Asian countries, but also an awareness that this racialization was linked to broader and historical contexts: "I kind of feel, no matter what, Chinese people, and Asian

people as a whole, will never fully be accepted into Canadian society. I feel like that's one of the pitfalls I have with that sort of [hyphenated] identity.” In the wake of a racialized global panic, Brandon saw that the roots of anti-Chinese sentiment were based in foundational aspects of racialization within Canadian society. This clouded Brandon’s opinion of a hyphenated identity and attachment to the state. Specifically, the easy racialization of Chinese people as undesirable and/or carriers of disease demonstrated to Brandon that Asian people are always at the mercy of nationalist and racialized exclusion.

In our respective discussions, Anne, Stephanie, and Brandon reveal how they experienced racial exclusion in ways they were able to connect to education and opportunities for agency. Anne disclosed that she was both witness to and recipient of negative racial meaning from external sources; Stephanie reported that these racial meanings became an issue when internalized; and Brandon identified the ways in which media portrayals inculcate public discourse with certain sociopolitical ideas about various Asian populations. For these three interlocutors, negative processes of racialization were primary influences on their motivation to mobilize for race-related causes. This is significant in demonstrating that 1) despite public perceptions of post-multicultural racial equity in Canada, especially for East Asian people within the model minority paradigm, people racialized as Chinese can still endure negative processes of racialization like discrimination; and 2) this racialization occurs to an extent that racial justice is a meaningful motivation to begin pursuing activism.

### **3.1.2 Addressing Intersecting Structures of Inequity.**

While my interlocutors all experienced forms of racialization, many also identified how other intersecting structures of inequity had emerged and influenced their respective political



socialization and what kinds of issues they chose to pursue. This diversity in identity and experience is significant in contrast with the way the model minority paradigm flattens difference and distinction among Asian people (Zhou & Bankston, 2020). It achieves this by peddling the stereotype that Asian success arises through a strong work ethic within a barrier-free environment of sociopolitical equality (Yoo et al., 2010). This stereotype works to uphold white supremacy by erasing the legitimacy of Asian experiences of intersectional inequity and intensifying the competition between Asian and racialized groups (Jeong et al., 2024; Park et al., 2015). My interlocutors described how various intersecting structures of inequity operated in the context of their individual racial identity and experiences, contrary to the model minority paradigm's view of Asian people as monolithic and insulated from oppression.

Clara (she/they), an organizer for LGBT and queer identities and spaces, told me about how the material circumstances of their upbringing helped underscore the similarities experienced by fellow marginalized communities:

I didn't have anything when I was younger... I don't know how to explain it. I would just say [class position] does contribute [to my motivations for activism] because I've seen and gone through some of the things that a lot of these marginalized communities went through.

In Clara's life, their material circumstances directly established for them a sense of empathy and identification with other communities seeking justice, strengthening their personal ties to activism work and organizing outcomes. This integration of personal aims for change with communal ties was also evident in Clara's consideration of how experiences of marginalization through gender identity, sexual orientation, and mental health have led her to activism. They said, "I saw a lot of stuff that was happening that I wasn't happy with, and that's why I wanted to see a change. I wanted to work towards that." Clara's statement succinctly reflects a

commonality amongst my interlocutors, regarding the influence of personal experience on motivation to seek social and structural change.

Olivia (she/her), an organizer for climate and disability justice, described how her experiences as a multiply-marginalized person left her feeling “ostracized” by society and led her to develop community with other people intent on creating social change. An orientation towards organizing was also influenced by her diasporic connections and her class position, which she described as shifting between lower middle and working class. With a class-conscious understanding of global climate crises, Olivia noted specifically how the burden of climate change does not fall equally on all. As wealth serves to insulate many from the effects of climate catastrophe, she discerned that different material circumstances equip people with differing capacities and survival needs. The urgency of climate organizing was also magnified by her diasporic connections. Olivia talked about how systems of colonialism and capitalism are detrimentally affecting her family, and that climate disaster has brought flooding and other threats to the coastal regions of her homelands. The destructive legacy of colonial and imperial impositions carry on through capitalism’s rampant climate destruction throughout many places in the Global South and for those unshielded by capital, as indicated by Olivia earlier. Olivia illustrates how the experience of these historical and contemporary structures of inequity are compounded at the intersection of class, race, and diasporicity.

Kimberley (they/them) spoke broadly, identifying how it was not only their class position, but an array of “structures of power and social hierarchies like sexuality, gender, and race all intersected and influenced the ways they perceive and organize” for different sociopolitical issues. Kimberley expanded on how their motivation to participate in organizing

work within Chinese and queer Chinese communities stemmed from a desire to explore multiple aspects of their identity, including their Chinese heritage:

My motivation for organizing within this community initially at least, was to learn more about myself, to learn more about in particular, things like the shame that I felt around identifying with that community having grown up in a very white space and organizing in all-white spaces, and then having that be the context that sets my organizing, you know, story start... I came to terms with the things that my identity holds through organizing. Like I came to terms with my sexuality as a queer person, and I started doing work within queer arts communities in Vancouver, and when I was learning more about my ancestry – I'm a fifth-generation Cantonese person – I started doing work within Chinatown more specifically and intentionally.

Kimberley describes how their entry into identity-related organizing work occurred through a journey of understanding those parts of their self. Having been previously involved in “all-white” political spaces, a transition to organizing in queer arts communities and Chinatown spaces gave Kimberley the opportunity to engage with those communities and become reconciled with their sexuality and ethnic identity. Like Olivia, Kimberley saw in organizing the ability to help impart social change but also unite with those who were similarly marginalized or held experiences in common.

Mary (she/her), an activist and advocate for mental health, housing justice, and anti-gentrification discussed how different aspects of her identity and experiences significantly shaped her understanding of class structure in Canada. Mary reflected on how her positionality influenced the way she experienced the Canadian mental health system, and that these experiences revealed many structural insufficiencies around social services and support:

As someone who is racialized, an immigrant, and also lives with a chronic mental illness, I have at times felt quite discarded and uncared for by the community and I could see how if I didn't have the privilege in combination with the luck of having had access to resources, and a family support system that was able to, for lack of a better way of saying it, essentially be traumatized through how unwell I got, but was still able to still be there for me? I can very easily see myself in the position of, for example, a resident of the Downtown Eastside.

Mary spoke about how living at the intersection of several marginalized identities gave her deeper insight into the power of her class position as contributive to the support structure she was able to access. This insight became clear as she considered the difference that those with less support must experience: “As I was starting in my recovery, I felt quite hopeless and helpless. But, one of the ways I felt I could do something was to contribute and give back, where I felt like there were such big gaps in support.” Enduring and coping with the imbalance of a social world built against those with mental illness, in tandem with the effects and experiences of living as a racialized immigrant in Canada, were ultimately formative towards Mary’s motivations for mental health advocacy and anti-gentrification activism. In Mary’s case, the choice to enter into and ability to derive meaning from efforts within the Downtown Eastside and Chinatown neighbourhoods stemmed from her multifaceted identity and experiences.

In addition to being racialized as Chinese, many of my interlocutors live at the intersection of multiple structures that inform their experiences and identities. Clara, Olivia, Kimberley, and Mary explained how these structures – class, migration, settlerhood, sexuality, gender, diasporicity, mental health – were simultaneously important to their motivations for pursuing activism and organizing work. Informed by these various structural intersections, my interlocutors experienced or understood many issues that they sought to change. As activists and organizers pursuing change *while* Chinese, these other aspects of experience and identity do not merely form a laundry list of issues to tackle single-mindedly or within a closed community. Within spaces of unity for structural change like organizations or broader movement communities, interlocutors have cultivated connection and meaning with others against the very same systems that have pushed them “outside” together. As diasporic Chinese activists and organizers, my interlocutors understand the importance of racialization to the motivation and

meaning behind their work, but also how the nature of intersectional inequity calls them to move outside the bounds of activism purely *for* Chinese causes.

### **3.1.3 Harnessing Advantage as an Opportunity for Change.**

Some of my interlocutors were motivated by experiences of discrimination and structures of inequity, but some also found motivation to pursue activism and organizing via advantages and opportunities they had been granted. Although the model minority paradigm perpetuates a monolithic view of Asian people as economically advantaged, there do exist notable differences in income among Chinese sub-ethnic groups in Canada (Fong & Man, 2023). For Asian people who occupy higher levels of class privilege, there may be opportunities granted by structures of white supremacy, but Oh and Eguchi (2022) maintain these opportunities should not be considered “racial privilege,” given they can be situationally revoked. This distinction is hidden by the model minority paradigm when Asian people are stereotyped as a uniformly high-achieving group, elevated above other racialized groups. In contrast with these expectations of Asian people as self-interested in maintaining this model minority designation, my interlocutors describe how opportunities granted through various advantages served as motivation to pursue activism and organizing.

Class-privileged upbringings afforded Art and Christina the opportunities and abilities to participate in activism and organizing that sought claims beyond their personal needs. This class privilege translated to social capital in the form of post-secondary education and resultant skills and connections. Art (he/him), an activist within urbanist and municipal politics, saw his class privilege widen the scope of issues he was able to pursue:

My family that I came from is a bit above the middle class... Their privileges have helped me in that regard. I didn't have to take on debt to go to uni. And yeah, that was

because of this class background... Where I happen to be [class-wise,] has a pretty big influence on what I do whether that's implicit or otherwise. Perhaps maybe the scale of issues that I choose to pay attention to... I work at a pretty good job where I don't have to worry about being exploited. I don't have to like, think about trying to form a trade union anywhere. So, in terms of like, I'm not focusing on that kind of issue.

Art was mindful that his family's status had afforded him a position which he sustained, and that this position allowed him the opportunity – through secure employment – to expend time on political issues beyond organizing for basic needs.

In Christina's (she/they) case, a class-privileged upbringing which ensured access to forms of social capital instilled for her a sense of obligation:

Due to the kind privilege that I grew up having, I have a lot of responsibility towards, not only my community, but other communities that we stand in solidarity with... I know that my ability to attend post-secondary education kind of funneled me towards Chinatown activism and organizing and also towards hua [foundation]... And I know that I get perceived in a specific way, because I have full availability of English language when I speak. But also in writing, I know that I come across in a specific way. And those types of things do offer me privilege that I try to work through and recognize in my work but also advocate to support other folks as well.

Here, Christina elucidates how class privilege simultaneously offered the opportunity and ability to pursue organizing and advocacy work via the alignment of their education, social connections, and linguistic privilege through perceived nativity. These forms of social capital are advantages she hopes to reconcile by working towards forms of equity, in solidarity with other communities.

At his workplace, Anson (he/him) was made aware of manufactured access issues within his purview, sparking his intention to act. Cultural documentation work in Chinatown – collecting, curating, and sharing historical knowledge – initiated Anson's relationships with low-income, monolingual Chinese senior residents of the neighbourhood. After he coordinated a complimentary visit for local seniors at his new place of work, they made him aware that only certain portions of the exhibits were language accessible: "I saw them at the end, and I said, 'Oh, you're done already!' And they were like, 'Yeah, everything's written in English, so we can't

really understand what's going on, can just only look at it.” Anson saw how these seniors faced class and language barriers to productions about their own cultural histories, which in turn further informed his motivation to counteract those inequities. Though this exhibition was capitalizing on Chinese cultural histories – a barrier Anson had already needed to bypass through obtaining free admission for the low-income seniors – the institution did not have the resources or capacity to make their offerings fully linguistically accessible. Anson saw this instance as reinforcing motivation to continue pushing for more intersectional forms of accessibility within his institution, a form of change he was able to pursue due to his insider status within the institution.

Canadian society continues to grapple with the legacies of colonialism and anti-Blackness structuring an uneven system of racial difference which seeps into every facet of life. That some Asian people have been offered advantages within this system of white supremacy does not negate its enduring power to revoke model minority status, nor does it insulate from other forms of intersectional inequities. Throughout the two previous sections in this chapter, my interlocutors have proven this. In the face of these intersectional inequities, Chinese activists and organizers are an affront to the model minority paradigm which supposes them as industrious and meek servants of capital. These expectations are further unraveled by Chinese activists' and organizers' ability to leverage uneven social advantages to undo their complicity in furthering systems of inequity.

#### **3.1.4 Discussion.**

My interlocutors were motivated to pursue activism and organizing work via different experiences and understandings of social injustice and inequity. These findings reflect much of

the literature around marginalized identities and motivation towards activism. By having read against the model minority paradigm, I contend that understanding the motivations of my interlocutors in contrast with various stereotypes about educational and economic achievement not only refutes the different components of this paradigm, but also more clearly illustrate the ways race, class, and other intersecting structures of power are experienced by Chinese people in Vancouver.

Although the model minority paradigm is often endorsed as a positive and harmless stereotype of Asian people as educationally and economically successful, it does so with several negative and insidious consequences for all racialized people due to the paradigm's role in upholding white supremacy. My interlocutors' motivations to pursue activism and organizing drew from experiences of racial discrimination and political socialization that contrast with stereotypes of passivity, experiences of intersecting inequities that contrast with stereotypes of political insulation, and the use of class privilege as an opportunity which contrasts with stereotypes of self-interest. These motivations confirm previous scholarship around mobilization, contrast with racialized expectations entailed by the model minority paradigm and distinguish the importance of understanding of how race and class shape experiences for diasporic Chinese people in Vancouver.

First, as racialized people, the interlocutors I spoke with have been variably shaped by the meanings associated with external perceptions and self-perceptions as result of their racialization as a non-white, Asian, and/or Chinese person (Omi & Winant, 2015). For Anne, Stephanie, and Brandon, their motivations to pursue activities for social change grew from firsthand experiences and awareness of racialized exclusion. These firsthand experiences, paired with greater context through an educational setting, gave them personal motivation as well as the necessary language



and abilities to describe these systems and how to act in opposition. This process of realization and subsequent determination to act has been documented within research on racialized activists, particularly African Americans and Asian Americans who turn to activism as a method of coping (Museus, 2021; Szymanski, 2012). That my interlocutors have found similar pathways to social justice, as a way of coping with racial discrimination, demonstrates how the racialization of Chinese individuals in the Canadian context operates to a similar end. This documentation of racial discrimination as a catalyst in diasporic Chinese political socialization in the Canadian multicultural “post-racial” era is both significant in its novelty and as it dispels stereotypes about passivity.

Second, my interlocutors demonstrated how they had gained awareness of the intersections of class and other inequities either through personal experience or community advocacy and that these intersecting systems were important to their motivations. Clara and Olivia discussed how their personal perceptions of class marginalization served as motivation to act. This mechanism of collective identity has been identified consistently as inclination for mobilization; the more one identifies with a certain group, the more they feel inclined to act for that group (De Weerd & Klandermans, 1999; Mummendey et al., 1999; Simon et al., 1998; Simon & Klandermans, 2001).

The people I spoke to are also familiar with how multiple systems of power overlap, and that they must be solved through multiple dimensions of analysis (Crenshaw, 1989). Kimberley and Mary were both aware and acknowledged that experiences through their own intersections of identity contributed to their motivations to organize. Interlocutors’ awareness and motivation to counteract intersectional forms of injustice can be understood through the lens of intersectionality as a collective action frame, whereby interlocutors have used the concept of

intersectionality to both make sense of their identities, and as a motivational orientation to justice (Terriquez et al., 2018). My interlocutors have in common their racialization, but different aspects of their identities and experiences have led them to understandings about the interplay of class structure and other systems of oppression.

While some interlocutors explained that experiences of racism acted as their motivating factor to start or continue social justice work, it is important to note how activists and organizers racialized as Chinese are multi-faceted and experience oppression through multiple dimensions, disproving the model minority paradigm's notion that Asian people are insulated from any kind of oppression. This confirmation is novel again in documenting the existence of multi-faceted oppression facing diasporic Chinese people in multicultural "post-racial" Canada, as well as the motivation and participation of diasporic Chinese people in causes for activism and organizing beyond "Chinese" in-group activism.

Third, forms of economic advantage and opportunity influenced the motivations of several of my interlocutors and their ability to act for certain causes. This aligns with the notion that class position serves as a determinant of political power and can therefore affect people's differing capacities and opportunities to act (Manza & Brooks, 2008). As a result of their class positions, Art and Christina had access to resources which guaranteed a level of education and employment through which they had the ability to pursue certain methods of activism. Christina described how her education had presented the opportunity to get involved in activism and her abilities had equipped her with the power to carry out actions that help support others. This empowerment is reflective of research demonstrating how education acts to incubate class and political socialization which increase feelings of political efficacy, a person's perceived ability to effect political change (Paulsen, 1991). For Anson, status inside his institution was a form of

privilege that allowed him to directly voice his concerns about issues of inaccessibility. This availability of political resources and opportunity for Art, Christina, and Anson leading to action for social change is a trend recorded within mobilization literature (McAdam, 1999; McCarthy & Zald, 1977). In the context of Asian racialization within North America that perceives Asian people as monolithic, affluent, and efficient labour in service of capitalist and colonial projects, my interlocutors' use of economic advantages and opportunities as motivation for activism rebuts the model minority paradigm's stereotype of Asian self-interest. This is also a novel documentation in the Canadian racial context.

Diasporic Chinese youth like my interlocutors are diverse and come to activism in distinct ways. The model minority paradigm obscures both these processes of experiencing structural oppression and political socialization to remedy those experiences. While my interlocutors' motivations are largely impacted by perceptions of injustice encountered through processes of racialization, class marginalization, or other intersections of inequity, these interviews also highlight how some of my interlocutors harness advantage and opportunities to create change.

The notion that "privilege" influences understanding and obligation towards fellow and differently marginalized groups aligns with findings that those with a marginalized identity of a certain dimension use it to comprehend other dimensions of marginalization (Croteau et al., 2002; Curtin et al., 2016). This mechanism of mobilization – like the others exemplified by my interlocutors, the frameworks of personal or common injustice through race, class, or other structures of power – illustrates the different ways experiences of oppression can aid in political socialization and mobilization.

My interlocutors' motivations for action dispel the model minority paradigm in multiple ways. Motivations to act because of their marginalized and privileged experiences of Canadian society's unequal social structures dispels the falsehoods that Asian people are passive and simply the most industrious racialized group in an egalitarian society. Additionally, the work by interlocutors which is motivated by or serves a cause outside the realm of "Chinese activism," solely for the interests of Chinese communities, dispels the falsehood that Asians are purely motivated by self-interest, as "model minorities" concerned with achievement.

Given that this project is situated within both the scholarly absence of documentation about diasporic Chinese activism and the popular misconception that post-multicultural Canada has no need for it, this chapter helps detail how and why activism undertaken by diasporic Chinese people holds significance to understandings of race, class, and other intersecting structures of power. In the following chapter, I once again use the model minority paradigm to understand how, despite their motivations to act and evident participation within activism and organizing, there are continued perceptions of diasporic Chinese absences within social movements.

### ***3.2 Accounting for Chinese Absences in Activism and Organizing Spaces***

In this second chapter, I use the interviews with my interlocutors to understand the influence of racialization within post-mobilization processes. While my interlocutors and many other diasporic Chinese people do participate in various forms of social justice work, the epistemic erasure of Asian Canadian activism has resulted in a perceived lack within academic literature as well as popular perception. To theorize why this absence persists, I once again examine how processes of racialization differentiate the experiences of my interlocutors as they have navigated

different forms of activism. I do this by reading *through* the model minority paradigm and anticipating the stereotypical expectations placed upon diasporic Chinese activists and organizers at various levels of social context – interpersonal, organizational, and conceptual. Reading through the model minority paradigm reveals how this perceived absence is misconstrued through an incomplete view of Chinese racialization and can be corrected through a dynamic understanding of how my interlocutors have been discouraged by the racialization they face within activism and organizing.

### **3.2.1 Minimization of Chinese Activists.**

The predominance of the model minority stereotype impacts Asian American political activity in various ways, often prohibitively due to the way these stereotypes of economic and educational achievement affect internal and external racial perceptions (Lin, 2020; Yi & Todd, 2024).

Broadly, those who are positioned as model minorities are compelled to maintain a system which privileges them socially and economically. Although there is an under-documentation of diasporic Chinese and Asian politics in Canada, we know that the model minority paradigm also influences Asian racialization in the Canadian context (Padgett et al., 2020; Pon, 2005). My interlocutors spoke about the ways they are perceived as Chinese organizers and activists, and the ways that they perceive Chinese organizing and activism in Vancouver. Their post-mobilization experiences reveal how, as diasporic Chinese people in Vancouver, they have experienced forms of racialization which minimize their Chinese racial identity and experience and discourage political agency.

The model minority paradigm normalizes and encourages political passivity. As model minorities, Chinese people in Vancouver are not expected to be politically active. Where

minimal political involvement might be taken as a form of apathy, Stephanie speculated about how social expectations may play a role in suppressing stronger and united responses by Chinese communities:

I would like to see more support from each other and more grouping. I feel like a lot of [outspokenness from Chinese people in Vancouver] is individual. I think with the model minority myth; there's just this pressure for Asian people to just not be problematic and just to stand by.

Stephanie's comments about the "individual" character of political outspokenness from Chinese people in Vancouver reflects the current lack of broad and visible movements undertaken by diasporic Chinese communities. Additionally, Stephanie's observations about a lack of political expression from Chinese people in Vancouver suggest that an ingrained sense of indifference via the model minority paradigm may serve to discourage more widespread political action. Through an understanding of the model minority paradigm, pressure – either explicitly or implicitly – to remain politically uninvolved, stems from a desire to maintain a sense of hierarchical racial privilege. When model minorities are rewarded for their participation in systems of capital and white supremacy, why might they jeopardize those rewards? As a result, racialized social expectations of passivity can discourage involvement in activism and organizing.

The model minority paradigm also neutralizes the validity of racialized identities and experiences. Olivia cited a specific example which illustrates how Chinese people can be made to feel undesired and excluded in what she describes as Vancouver's "white dominated" environmental organizing spaces. Olivia recounted an anti-oppression training exercise where she heard someone say that since Vancouver was "filled with Asians," it was not possible that she – a Chinese person – could experience oppression. The minimization of Olivia's racialized identity by white organizers is an example of how those within political movement spaces are able to maintain systems of oppression. This assumption follows from a model minority

paradigm where Asian people in Vancouver, given the especially high concentration of Chinese people in Vancouver, occupy a high level of social privilege within the historical context of racial formation in the city. However, racial privilege does not negate other experiences of oppression. This specific form of minimization through the model minority paradigm deprives Olivia of legitimacy to act when it becomes implied that she has not suffered anything worth acting for. If other diasporic Chinese people in Vancouver are made to feel this way, activism and organizing logically become non-options for exploring and expressing their experiences as racialized people.

The minimization of Chinese mobilization also results in unsubstantive engagements with Chinese racial identity and experience. Christina explained how this minimization happened within broader organizations:

I think it was around the late 2000s, early 2010s, where there was a lot of younger Asian folks really getting into environmental organizing, but feeling like an outsider or tokenized, within the white organizing circles that they were in... Can we organize in a way that feels safe for ourselves, where we get to connect with our community and bring them along in these conversations?

Christina described how the treatment many younger Asian organizers experienced in white environmental organizing spaces drove them to seek more culturally inclusive ways of organizing. These people did not feel meaningfully included in mainstream environmental organizing and sought new potential outside of existing organizations. To those unaware of this history and newly created organizations meant to engage Asian communities in organizing and political conversations (e.g., *hua foundation*<sup>5</sup>, Christina's organization), the absence of Chinese and Asian people in those previously-attended organizations could read as disengagement. On

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<sup>5</sup> Intentionally lowercase.

the contrary, organizations like *hua foundation* establish for local organizers a hub of connection across cultures, where community engagement in change-seeking is prioritized.

Insights from Stephanie, Olivia and Christina indicate how the model minority paradigm minimizes the racialized identity and experiences of Chinese activists and organizers in Vancouver, such that Chinese racial experience and identity loses substantive power as an avenue to pursue activism and organizing. When being Chinese is associated with passivity, experiences of discrimination are invalidated, and alternative possibilities are foreclosed, the designation of model minority can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. My interlocutors experienced forms of minimization that stem from a fundamental misunderstanding of the complexity of Chinese communities in Vancouver. The historical formation of Chineseness in Vancouver lends itself to a view of Chinese and adjacent East Asian groups as insulated from all forms of oppression, due to perceived levels of racial privilege. This curtails the legitimacy of Chinese people in Vancouver to act on their experiences, therefore discouraging political mobilization.

### **3.2.2 Social Movement Organizations as Microcosms of White Supremacy.**

As explored in the first chapter, my interlocutors draw heavily from various identities to inform their motivations for political activism and organizing. This identity-informed motivation is a double-edged sword in the realm of social justice work and organizations for social movements, where despite their intention to solve social problems, organizations do not exist outside of the same social context and can effect harm on already-marginalized members. As social organizations – groups of people – social movement organizations (SMOs) are prone to interpersonal issues that can result in exclusion for racialized members. SMOs are groups which must navigate choices around decision-making and organizational structure in a way that



effectively reconciles member participation and their goals to achieve change (Polletta, 2004). Through this process, organizations can become structured in ways that unintentionally replicate white supremacy (Hughey, 2007). This translates from the American context, given the racial landscape of Canadian society, where whiteness is treated as a culturally neutral default (Taylor et al., 2007). Through an understanding of the model minority paradigm, where Asian people in North America are thought to experience negligible racial discrimination, the experience of racial hostility within SMOs also falls to the wayside and can become invisible. Some of my interlocutors with experience working within SMOs told me about how they encountered exclusionary forms of racialized hostility, painting SMOs as an undesirable environment for Chinese people in Vancouver.

Activism and organizing are contentious areas of work, where activists and organizers must deal with the volatile content of their work (serious social issues with material consequences), as well as the often-unstable form of how this work is undertaken (shifting political and institutional contexts). If organizations are not built to withstand these conditions, the toll may be exacted upon their members. Kimberley described how their early entry into organizing spaces, which was tied to various aspects of their identities, resulted in experiencing burnout: “I was consistently the youngest person, often the only person of color, the only queer person at the table, and I was just exhausted from having to advocate for the communities that I am a part of, and their existence.” Kimberley’s experience represents a common feeling among several interlocutors who also felt the personal toll accompanying most forms of political advocacy and social justice work. Kimberley’s experience was attributed to multiple marginalized identities that they hold, including being younger, racialized, and queer in

environments that were perhaps both explicitly and implicitly hostile towards their ability to work and exist.

Within Canadian society, the broader umbrella of politics, social movements, and their respective organizations are structured by white supremacy, privileging the voices of those with power. Organizations that are not actively engaged in inverting these engrained power structures can easily uphold them instead. Art speculated about the predominance of white voices in political spaces he was involved in:

Issues of governance, transportation, or housing definitely, are predominantly white. I'd say it's still majority male. I'm not particularly sure why, since everybody needs to live in houses and move around. I'm not sure how much of it is like barriers to access... Or the matter's simply just not getting out enough.

Art captured the ways in which the centring of whiteness in political spaces may discourage racialized people from participating. Although transportation and housing are needed by all, political institutions and organizations may be intimidating and inaccessible in various ways.

While the normalization of white supremacy in organizations produces subtler deterrents for racialized members, like burnout and intimidation, it can also foster environments where explicit deterrents like racist and xenophobic sentiments go unquestioned. Christina discussed how racial discrimination in organizing spaces led to the founding of the organization she works through, *hua foundation*. She explained how the organization was originally founded around environmental advocacy against shark fin consumption. Reactions from white activists gave the organization incentive to continue with multi-issue advocacy from a place of cultural understanding and strategy:

A lot of [white environmentalists] said some really racist things in support of the campaign. They'd be like, "Yeah, you're doing great work. All those people are so barbaric for doing that." For someone who is a racialized person from this community, it's like, well, you're calling my dad barbaric. That doesn't make me feel good to have your support.

*Hua foundation* arose through a desire to secure culturally nuanced space for Chinese and other racialized people to gather and seek change. Very directly, they sought to remedy the issues they encountered through their initial environmental campaign. This example illustrates that even when Chinese and other racialized people hope to become politically active and involved in organizing spaces, oppressive social structures are still imposed within “socially-aware” political environments.

My interlocutors reported burnout, intimidation, and discrimination as forms of harm they encountered through traditional modes of activism and organizing. These experiences speak to systemic deficiencies within these spaces and organizations, rather than an amorphous sort of political apathy that can be explained away through the model minority paradigm. Without an understanding of their members’ identities, and active work to undo the structures of white supremacy inherited from society at large, there is a risk of reproducing one (or more) systems of oppression, by being too narrowly focused on campaigning against another. Interlocutors’ observations are also indicative of the general harms activism culture can exact upon participants, as result of its nature as underfunded and overexerted modes of change-seeking. However, if organizations are eager to mobilize without productively dealing with internal relationships and dynamics of anti-oppression, they should not be surprised if some members choose to disengage.

### **3.2.3 Activism’s Incongruence with “Productive” Citizenship.**

Accounting for the absence of diasporic Chinese activism and organizing brings into focus a group that is not indigenous to the lands governed by the Canadian state, and for whose communities the processes of migration are fresh, within recent memory, or form significant

understandings of subjectivity. Given that the demands of political participation may be impractical for immigrants' pursuit of material and ideological membership to the state, the question of citizenship and belonging is an important avenue of analysis. This is especially the case for diasporic Chinese participation in activism and organizing, as the study of social movements has been critiqued for its under-engagement with the concept of citizenship (N. Y. Kim, 2013; Marx, 1995).

Though the concept of citizenship and specific processes within migration were not explicit foci of this project, their emergence within interviews indicates how activism may impede commitments to settlement. This analysis is founded on the sociological perspective of migration as influenced by global structural forces, but also the individual motivations and goals of immigrants themselves (Massey, 1999). Various forces like imperialism and capitalism influence the movement of immigrants, and within those circumstances, immigrants make choices to secure their livelihood. Such choices as the pursuit of citizenship entail attachment to the state and a national identity, given the bureaucratic structures of citizenship but also the nature of citizenship as a form of social organization (Brubaker, 1992). Within the process of settlement, whether through formal citizenship or not, material commitment to the state are imposed onto immigrants. My interlocutors discussed how these commitments can be incongruent with participation in contentious activism and organizing.

The ideological expectations for diasporic Chinese immigrants in the Canadian context are influenced by the model minority paradigm, which are strengthened by two aspects of immigration and settlement policies. Canadian multiculturalism emphasizes civic and political attachment, and encourages recruitment into the national identity (Bloemraad, 2006, 2015). Additionally, the skill-based mode of admission for immigrants has portrayed immigration as a

resource for economic development (Reitz, 2012). An integral component of the model minority paradigm is the reverence of certain racialized groups because of their perceived productivity for the state. This emphasis on productivity becomes especially intensified for immigrants in Canada whose entry and settlement are reliant on the economic value they provide for the state (Ma, 2023). My interlocutors revealed how the nature of activism as a contentious form of change-seeking can come into conflict with other priorities as Chinese people navigating settlement come to understand themselves as members of Canadian society.

In terms of material commitments, activism can become impractical for diasporic Chinese communities, or any community moving through complicated processes of migration and settlement. Art noted his encounters with people in Vancouver holding non-voting citizenship status throughout election campaigning:

When I was talking to folks about the federal election or municipal election, a lot of them were working on their permanent residency, or they were permanent residents. And for them, there wouldn't be a whole lot of reason to care about these things that they couldn't vote for anyways. So maybe that could contribute to [a perceived lack of political participation]. And then back to class.

It follows that people who are focused on personal advocacy, like the process of formally obtaining citizenship, may have less capacity or interest for other political participation. Art's observations underscore the importance of intersectionally-minded considerations to engaging and sustaining involvement of migrant communities in political activism and other work which may hinge on their citizenship status. His comments also referred back to earlier discussions about class privilege and those who are materially secure having additional capacity for political involvement. This example arose in conversation about perceived political neutrality on the part of Chinese communities in Vancouver. While many contemporary stereotypes of Chinese migrants to Canada portray a picture of transnational elites with access to global capital, it is

important to remember the range of material realities faced by a majority of Chinese migrants. On the part of SMOs or political institutions, meaningful inclusion and recognition of Chinese migrants' perspectives would recognize that a difference in legal status and precarity significantly hinders participation in higher-risk forms of activism or relegates activism to a lower priority.

Within processes of migration and settlement, there are also ideological expectations that may deprioritize activism. That is, the pursuit of change or civil rights may be threatening to the idea of becoming and belonging as a member of Canadian society. Stephanie cited an example about diasporic Chinese political participation and activism being affected by social processes of settlement like integration and acculturation. In her work conducting research and reporting about local experiences of anti-Asian violence, Stephanie was especially interested in expectations of passivity throughout the reporting process:

I wanted to show people our age that it's important for us to stand up because a lot of times our parents can be passive around these issues because they're immigrants. I don't blame them. If I was in a new country, and I felt a lot of racism I would just want to keep quiet and try to integrate. That's how my parents are and so it was really hard to explain to people... It's not just the language. There's so many older Asian people who speak perfect English, but they may just feel invalidated.

Stephanie's work sought to highlight the nuances around reporting experiences of violence, such as different social pressures which may discourage disclosure. In this instance, Stephanie identifies how confronting racial discrimination could be especially jarring to newly-settled migrants. In coping with new experiences of being Othered while trying to acculturate within Canadian society, political passivity may present as a logical choice. As Stephanie identifies, this feeling can linger for long-settled immigrants who still anticipate their voice being "invalidated."

My interlocutors reported instances of activism as a contentious activity which conflicts with the priorities of diasporic Chinese people concerned with maintaining material and

ideological attachments. Activism can be a competing interest for those who want to imagine themselves within the cohesion of Canadian society. Art's conversations with people navigating complicated and bureaucratic processes of obtaining citizenship, and Stephanie's investigation of the anti-Asian violence reporting process help illustrate how the social context of mobilization towards political participation of any kind, let alone more risky activities, differs for those moving through processes of migration and settlement. These broader observations about the framework through which activism operates are important considerations when accounting for the lack of diasporic Chinese political participation and activism in Canada.

#### **3.2.4 Discussion.**

The model minority paradigm influences the way my interlocutors are perceived as Chinese activists and organizers. As suggested here, the paradigm can work in prohibitive ways to discourage or cloud activism and organizing undertaken by Chinese activists and organizers. When Chinese communities are misunderstood through the stereotypical racialization of model minority-hood, perceptions of political passivity can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Viewed through the lens of the model minority paradigm, my interlocutors' experiences being discouraged within organizations are construed as disengagement. The absence of diasporic Chinese organizers and activists is instead more intelligible through a dynamic view of the complexity of Chinese racialization. Here I provide a discussion of how the model minority paradigm influences understandings of Chinese activists and organizers, and how my interlocutors' experiences can guide towards a new paradigm of diasporic Chinese activism which fully appreciate all the ways that Chinese activists come to this work.

During their work as activists and organizers in Vancouver, my interlocutors experienced processes of racialization through the model minority paradigm which minimized Chinese racial identity and experience as a legitimate basis for mobilization. Stephanie's observations about expectations of passivity and the continued power of the model minority myth illustrate how white supremacy can keep model minorities invested in their privilege through pressure to "stand by" and not intervene in politically contentious activities that jeopardize this positioning. This framing, where Asian people are set up to compete with other racialized groups for resources and status, is understood through Kim's (1999) concept of "relative valorization."

Kim maintains that the installation and maintenance of a hierarchy that valorizes Asians over other racialized groups (Black people, in Kim's American framework), works to secure white dominance over both groups. This dynamic was evident in Olivia's anecdote about the white organizers who denied that Asian people could experience racism in Vancouver: the implicit comparison to other racialized people reinforces the hierarchy and process of valorization that Kim describes. This sort of denial was also evident in Christina's description of Asian organizers feeling tokenized in white environmental organizations. Tokenization – a superficial treatment of racialized identity – is another way whiteness delegitimizes the mobilizing power of racial identity and experience.

These experiences of the model minority paradigm reflect those of Asian American college student racial justice activists who felt that "relative racialization" – comparative racial framing of Asian Americans as model minorities – shaped their work through racialized comparisons and competition, marginalization within social justice agendas, and internalized racism (Museus, 2022). Compared to this study of racial justice activists, my interlocutors were also involved in other kinds of social movements yet still reported experiencing this type of



relative racialization, indicating the widespread nature of this racial perception across social movements. Additionally, the under-documented influence of the specific historical formation of Chinese communities in Vancouver on processes of racialization was displayed here through the specific ways that Chinese people are viewed as lacking legitimate basis for mobilization (i.e., “Vancouver is full of Asians”). At an interpersonal level, my interlocutors have experienced how the model minority paradigm disempowers their participation in activism and organizing.

Within activist spaces like SMOs, my interlocutors experienced various ways that an inherited structure of white supremacy can deter the participation of racialized members. The forms of discouragement they saw or faced directly were attributed to the failure of organizations to productively grapple with their internal environment as a space for embodying the values they sought to achieve. In accounting for the apparent absence of diasporic Chinese activism and organizing, it is important to interrogate how this issue of organizational structure can further invisibilize the ways that diasporic Chinese people like my interlocutors experience racialized harm leading to disengagement (Sue et al., 2021). The model minority paradigm which reads disengagement as a sort of innate political apathy from Asian people is bolstered when organizations fail to “deal with” oppressive structures.

Many organizations evade racism or view racial conflict as a distraction to the dedicated work of the organization (Beeman, 2015; Slocum, 2006). This refusal to recognize differential racialization leads to poor experiences or even withdrawal from activism for racialized members of SMOs, like the burnout Kimberley reported experiencing. Gorski and Erakat (2019) discuss how racialized activists attributed their burnout, an inability to continue engaging in activism, to racism at the hands of white activists. The overwhelmingly white and male build-up of many traditional political institutions, like Art reported witnessing, may intimidate and discourage any

participation at all. To counter these effects and ensure SMOs are groups for sustainable work, they must be structured and equipped to deal with conflict (Dorion, 2024).

Organizations that embraced class and racial difference demonstrated how diversity and “non-traditional” structures were able to strengthen the possibilities of their work, in terms of recruitment and efficacy (Poster, 1995; Pulido, 2002). This is reflected in the experience Christina discussed, where *hua foundation* sought to build a culturally nuanced space for Chinese and other racialized people to do effective work together. While social movement literature has studied how issues of race and other oppressive systems are handled within SMOs, the experiences of my interlocutors, read through the model minority paradigm where racism against Asian people is invisibilized, importantly contribute to an understanding of the ways diasporic Chinese activists and organizers specifically can become discouraged and disengage from organizational spaces.

My interlocutors discussed certain ways diasporic communities, like those they belong to, may turn away from the concept of political activism altogether. This is understandable when one considers how the model minority paradigm designates the role of “productive citizen” to diasporic Asian people. The paradigm prescribes social status for Asian people in North America on the basis of their productivity and on condition of their designation as Other. These components of Asian racialization are analyzed more extensively within the earlier discussed racial triangulation theory of Kim (1999), which sees how Asian Americans are distanced from whiteness through “civic ostracism,” (e.g., being seen as “forever foreigners”) and subsequent work by Day (2016), which claims that Asians in North America are viewed through the labour needs of the settler economy (i.e., large scale Asian immigration to America originated as an inflow of an industrious workforce).

This racial framing is applied to all Asian people in North America, especially those who have recently migrated. Within the Canadian context, official policies of neoliberal multiculturalism value immigration as a form of labour recruitment, emphasizing the economic contributions of immigrants (Ku, 2011, 2013; Thobani, 2007). For Asian immigrants to Canada, particularly those migrating under precarious circumstances, this emphasis on productivity is also reinforced by a narrative of “gratitude” often cast upon them (Ma, 2023). Asian immigrants are expected to be hardworking and grateful for their place in Canadian society, and to ask or fight for better treatment would go against the grain of those expectations.

Currently, the bounds of political engagement are also enforced by bureaucratic knowledge and ability. These ideological and material investments in settlement – feeling like and becoming part of Canadian society – are encouraged by official channels of immigration and settlement. However, they are also reflected in the strategies and tactics embraced across modes of change-seeking, both institutional politics and grassroots community organizing alike. Examples from Art and Stephanie highlight how Asian immigrants may not choose to prioritize forms of activism which jeopardize their livelihood or misalign with the idea of being a productive citizen. These conversations underscore the immense effort required of immigrants by Canadian society to demonstrate belonging but also reveal how this framework of citizenship might be strategically embraced when imagining accessible forms of activism that can allow the full and productive participation of Asian immigrants, especially those with precarious relationships to the state.

The model minority paradigm perpetuates a misunderstanding of Chinese racialization throughout multiple levels of social context – interpersonal, organizational, and conceptual – which affect the ways diasporic Chinese activists and organizers like my interlocutors are

perceived. When reading through the model minority paradigm, which paints Asian people in North America as economically and educationally exceptional, the absence of diasporic Chinese activism and organizing is clouded by perceptions of diasporic Chinese communities as innately passive, intentionally disengaged, or simply incapable. The rationale behind this absence comes into clearer view when accounting for the complexity of Chinese communities and the dynamic ways they experience racialization within activism and organizing.

Disempowerment of Chinese racial identity and experience at an interpersonal level, invisibilization of racism at an organizational level, and the incongruence of “productive citizenship” with activism at a conceptual level all influence decisions by my interlocutors or those they know to step away from mainstream activism and organizing. In this way, the model minority paradigm’s view of political passivity as an innate quality of diasporic Chinese communities can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Rather than remaining within the confines of that paradigm, my interlocutors’ experiences have shown how their approach to activism and organizing may entail a new paradigm which embraces considerations around differential racialization, anti-oppression, and accessibility of participation. In the following chapter, I explore and analyze more ways in which my interlocutors consider how to fully include and engage their communities in activism and organizing.

### ***3.3 A New Paradigm for Community Care***

This final chapter is comprised of a collation of discussions with my interlocutors about the bridging work taking place externally across communities, and internally within their communities to materialize social change through a new paradigm of action and community care. As explored in the previous chapter, traditional modes of activism and organizing have often

reinforced racialized harm through the model minority paradigm in ways that discourage diasporic Asian and Chinese participation. In considering how to fully welcome and incorporate the needs and desires of their communities, I use my interlocutors' experiences to identify a new paradigm for diasporic Chinese activism and organizing. In the previous chapter, I provided analysis of the ways diasporic Chinese racial identity and experience become perceived as incompatible with activism through multiple levels of social context. Through my interlocutors' resistance to these perceptions, I identified themes of "differential racialization," "anti-oppression," and "accessibility" as guiding values in their work. I maintain that these values contribute to a paradigm focussed on coalition, in stark contrast with the model minority paradigm view of diasporic Chinese people as self-interested and passive.

After reading *against* the model minority paradigm to understand how my interlocutors derive meaning from their work in Chapter 1 and reading *through* the model minority paradigm to understand why the absence of Chinese activists and organizers is misconstrued in Chapter 2, I now read *outside* of the model minority paradigm to reconceptualize the work my interlocutors do in bridging understanding and relationships within and across communities to achieve change. My interlocutors' work to bridge externally involves relationship-building beyond conceptions of solely Chinese or pan-Asian solidarities and adherence to uncritical modes of diversity and inclusion. Their work to bridge internally involves relationship-building beyond surface level or nominal engagements with their own diasporic Chinese communities. These strategies of bridging the outer and inner connections between communities respond to the need for activism and organizing demonstrated in earlier chapters which acknowledges the contextual racialization of diasporic Chinese people in Canada. As a departure from the model minority paradigm, the "coalition paradigm" contemplates how embracing differential racialization, anti-oppression, and

accessibility can put forth more sustainable and meaningfully inclusive forms of activism and organizing.

### **3.3.1 External Bridging.**

Within the coalition paradigm, my interlocutors work to build external bridges with other communities by understanding the relationality of diasporic Chinese to other racialized and marginalized communities. My interlocutors embrace an approach that acknowledges differential racialization and anti-oppression in ways that balance the reality of racialization they face with broader systems of injustice. By “differential racialization,” I am referring to the way that Asian people face a different type of racialization relative to other racialized groups, and by “anti-oppression,” I am referring to an intersectional and active orientation against multiple engrained systems of oppression. This paradigm of work understands that relationships with other marginalized people are necessary in mobilizing against systems of oppression.

For my interlocutors, the notion of differential racialization was evident both on its own, and within an understanding of multiple kinds of marginalization as a unifying experience. Olivia acknowledged diasporic Chinese communities “are up against the same system” as other racialized communities. Along her journey to this realization, Olivia was actively unlearning the model minority paradigm placed upon her. She maintains as a young Chinese person, she was “taught to be palatable” and socialized to believe she should not “get involved with situations that don’t involve [her.]” Olivia was emphatic that the oppression of other groups of people was something that deeply concerned her and informed her pursuit of climate justice. This example highlights how the model minority paradigm can prescribe passivity to diasporic Chinese

communities in a way that restricts political interest within the bounds of “own-group” issues, which can result in active hostility towards other racialized groups.

Clara described seeing this hostile behaviour on social media: “On Twitter I see a lot of Chinese conservatives, and interestingly enough, they are really emboldened in their identity, which is good. But then they use it to promote anti-Black views.” They clarified that although social media provides space for Chinese communities to connect and be politically vocal online, she does not find community amongst people with these views. Clara was aware that she was not obligated to ally with divisive and self-involved communities of fellow Chinese people on the basis of shared ethnicity rather than shared values.

Other interlocutors spoke similarly, understanding that as racialized people subjected to the same structure of oppressive systems, their interests and goals were linked to those of other marginalized communities. Brandon mentioned how class consciousness was an avenue through which to broaden awareness of these ties:

I feel like [class is] a good way to try and help bridge people to understand, because we see people get harmed through violence and war especially with the incredible amount of US military bases worldwide, and ongoing conflict that's pursued primarily by the US. Helping people understand that it harms people just like you; it harms families and working-class people. It's not harming the upper class. The 1% is not going to be harmed by this; they're the ones benefiting from this. So, trying to help them understand from that perspective is a motivation.

Brandon was emphatic that an understanding of class helps contextualize the harms of imperialism and colonialism for those removed from the immediacy of its effects. This rhetorical strategy holds potential efficacy for racialized communities, especially many whose personal or ancestral histories have been marked by imperial impositions.

Through testimony from Olivia and Clara, we see how within diasporic Chinese communities, the effects of model minority aspirations to socioeconomic success and adjacency

to whiteness are still presently felt. Whereas the model minority paradigm encourages political seclusion, the coalition paradigm encompasses an awareness of linkages through structural oppression (such as class struggle, as suggested by Brandon), which can raise the significance of “non-Chinese” issues in the eyes of Chinese communities. The pressure to ignore these linkages between communities helps keep systems of oppression in place. Of course, this awareness around differential racialization and structural oppression within Asian communities is not new. Accounts of Asian American labour organizing and the transnational and radical politics of the Asian Canadian movement show how Asians in North America have come to understand their position within structures of race and class (C. J. Kim, 2004; X. Li, 2007). However, in the face of continued pressure to acquiesce to model minority exceptionalism and isolation, I believe my interlocutors’ understandings of differential racialization are especially notable given their work in activism and organizing outside of Chinese cultural spaces, bridging across communities.

My interlocutors showed understandings of anti-oppression in their opinions and experiences around meaningfully organizing in solidarity with other racialized communities. Several were familiar with the risks of solidarity falling into the trap of the “white saviour complex.” Christina recognized that East Asian communities have a particularly careful role to consider among fellow racialized people:

Sometimes you need to check your privilege. Especially for a lot of folks within, visibly East Asian communities or those who are perceived as being part of the so-called model minority. I think a lot of the time, but not all, we come from a little bit more privilege. Not that people who are of East Asian background don't experience racism because they definitely do. But it's just, the racism is different. And recognizing that, sometimes you gotta come in with a lot of humility.

Christina’s observations speak to the fluctuation of relative social privilege when moving across different contexts. For Chinese and East Asian people, racial discrimination and structural inequities are experienced in a different way than many other communities. Recognizing this



difference in experience is important to ensuring that other communities' experiences are not minimized or excluded when engaging in collaborative work.

Clara also spoke about these tensions in organizing spaces, where she contends that consideration of social positioning and contextual expertise goes a long way to solving interpersonal problems:

I've seen sometimes, for example, with Black people and Asian people working together. Sometimes I've seen Asian people speaking over Black people and vice versa kind of stuff, because when you work together, you almost... In a sense it's almost co-opting the struggle, so you almost feel qualified to talk about that, but then that's an issue right? I think it's important that people remember what they can speak on. And, other times when they can just listen, that's okay to listen and let that person speak instead.

Clara's experience seeing the "cooptation" of different communities' experiences echoes the importance of Christina's advice about humility. Though communities can gain knowledge and power through banding together in political contexts, it is imperative that each recognize how differential racialization and other forms of structural oppression have resulted in different social realities for different communities.

My interlocutors are eager to learn from other communities in ways that lead towards the reinforcement of each other's power. Mary discussed how this principle was actively taking shape in her practices:

If I'm organizing something for an Indigenous community or for an Indigenous community member, I'm always putting in the forefront that I'm doing something alongside them, and they are the ones that are leading me. And I'm not taking up too much space and making those decisions. I'm someone to help, provide resources, and bring my skill set. But I'm focusing on how to challenge myself and keep myself accountable because sometimes I have faltered in that.

Mary was cognizant that though she had already been conscientious about her role organizing with Indigenous community members, her practices could still benefit from reminders about balancing power and autonomy between herself and her collaborators. My interlocutors were

mindful of the ways racialization and other forms of oppression affect their positions in different social contexts. These observations and recommendations are prudent for Chinese and other racialized communities to hold in mind when entering cross-cultural spaces or organizing in solidarity.

My interlocutors' work with other communities is guided by understandings of structural oppression and the ways that structures like race result in different contexts of engagement. Christina, Clara, and Mary emphasized how diasporic Chinese people can balance empowerment and humility in activist and organizing spaces to fulfill an effective but respectful role alongside other participants. The coalition paradigm, which aspires for diasporic Chinese communities to play an active role in mobilizing alongside other racialized and marginalized communities, entails understandings of differential racialization and anti-oppression so that relationships are built with common understandings of the social realities that inform why and how communities can act for change together. This approach to relationship-building stands in contrast to models of "allyship" that uncritically uphold the status quo (Bhardwaj, 2021; J.-A. Lee, 2016). Eliminating the reproduction of structural oppression within working relationships and organizations is important to preventing frustration, burnout, and discouragement which ultimately derails movement efficacy.

### **3.3.2 Internal Bridging.**

Within the coalition paradigm, my interlocutors also work to build internal bridges within their communities through understanding the needs and desires of diasporic Chinese people in relating to each other. My interlocutors approach their communities with an acknowledgement of the accessibility they need to navigate difference and facilitate strong understanding and

relationships together. This consideration for accessibility reflects the ways the coalition paradigm can productively account for disparities of information and education due to barriers of cultural, linguistic, or class difference. Additionally, accessibility can look like a prioritization of access to spaces where diasporic Chinese communities can be together and strengthen understanding, belonging, and dedication towards their community and the changes they seek. Materializing social change through the coalition paradigm involves methods of bridging internally to ensure the meaningful inclusion of diasporic Chinese communities in activism and organizing work.

My interlocutors pointed to gaps within their communities where knowledge facilitating political action, especially certain understandings of structural power, could be better bridged. Anne identified ideological rifts between her and her parents: “Sometimes we’ll have differing opinions about certain beliefs because we were raised in different environments... Sometimes it can be difficult, but I think, just trying to understand them and the culture they grew up in is really important.” Despite generational and cultural differences, Anne underlined a need to empathize when approaching political discussions with her elders. Christina echoed this sentiment for culturally-cognizant organizing and noted how knowledge of her family’s histories motivate and inform her approach to wider strategies:

How do we promote intergenerational conversations about these types of topics, like for example, having conversations with our parents about what it means to be settlers and understanding settler colonialism and that type of thing... Just having those conversations within my own family. And then how do we expand that to a broader scale?

Christina’s own experiences likely reflect those of many other racialized families, where traditional flows of social justice issues and political knowledge may be rendered inaccessible to them through cultural, linguistic, or class difference.

Kimberley addressed the work needed to bridge gaps of understanding within racialized communities, noting that the organization they work through, *hua foundation*, avoids “leaving people behind because of lack of access to things or class location level.” *Hua foundation* centres these understandings of structural barriers in their social justice work to ensure equitable reach. Kimberley elaborated about the responsibility for ensuring outreach within one’s community: “If someone’s racist uncle says something to us, it’s not our responsibility to educate them, but we can. But if a *Cantonese* uncle says something anti-Black, anti-Indigenous, or racist, it’s our responsibility to reel in our racist uncle.” Their response describes how disparities in knowledge circulation and accessibility of information must be overcome to achieve inter-community solidarity.

In strategies for building access to knowledge within communities, compassion and responsibility are key. Insights from previous chapters about the barriers to involvement in organizing and advocacy from my college-educated interlocutors who are fluent in English make it apparent that navigating such spaces could be difficult or impossible for other members of the Chinese diaspora who have less access to education or opportunities to learn about the basis for activism and organizing. Therefore, to bridge gaps of understanding and develop solidarity extending beyond Chinese communities, the implementation of culturally-cognizant outreach strategies in political spaces is a vital consideration for the coalition paradigm. Anne, Christina, and Kimberley talked about their experiences having complex conversations with family or community members. This approach goes beyond surface level assumptions that diasporic Chinese people are not capable of mobilization, or that experiencing distressing phenomena like racial discrimination will lead directly to mobilization. Previous analysis of Asian American critical consciousness describes how connections should be made between experience and

education about racial positioning (Lin, 2020; Saavedra & Yoo, 2023; Trieu & Lee, 2018).

Rather than discouraging or writing off their own community members, my interlocutors instead seek to build their capacity for mobilization.

My interlocutors reported back on ways that their work facilitated and prioritized community togetherness as a strategy of strengthening understanding, belonging, and dedication. Christina discussed how there are specific intra-community politics regarding place of origin and ancestral connections amongst Chinese communities that are important to acknowledge when building equitable community supports:

There's folks within the Chinese community, an entire spectrum of like class and socioeconomic status and those types of things. [Portraying] it as one community is destructive towards building supports for other members of the community who may not have the same privileges as my family. [They] came here in the 1950s, and 60s, right? And so that's a very different level of privilege than someone who is, you know, like a Cantonese-Vietnamese refugee who came with their family in the 70s.

Christina differentiates between the class privilege held by different groups of diasporic Chinese families and communities in accordance with different circumstances of migration and settlement. These different histories of migration and settlement bring accompanying political priorities and economic capacities. This understanding and strategic embrace of intra-community difference ultimately works to strengthen *hua foundation's* advocacy across Chinese communities as they seek to understand effective ways to mobilize these communities.

Anson described how his involvement in the Chinatown community deepened his sense of understanding for local Chinese Canadian activism and organizing, and was beginning to help him develop his role in the community. He reflected on how being around Chinatown facilitated this understanding of his relation to the community:

Being part of [the] research team has been educational and beneficial for me to better understand how Chinese Canadians organize and do activism work because in the past, I was a bit more... I saw myself as an outsider. I still feel like an outsider. This past year I

was living in an apartment in Strathcona, so I did go down to the neighborhood quite often, but still, I didn't really find myself fitting in in Chinatown. So, [with my new position at a community organization,] I feel like [I am] able to contribute in a small way.

Anson discussed how even though he was located within the community, it was mostly through the context of his work convening with community members that he came to feel more involved. For Anson, who identifies as an ethnically Chinese person born in Singapore and raised in Malaysia, being together with community members in Chinatown was important to strengthening belonging.

Mary's work in Chinatown indicates how diasporic communities can find intra-community connection through organizing around common interests. On the topic of organizing as a diasporic Chinese person, Mary noted that participating in community-minded work can act as "a way of feeling closer to communities that people may have left behind in migration."

Though organizing for causes related to racial affinity often present the opportunity for communities to connect, I contend that Mary's observation signifies the deeper significance of this connection for diasporic communities. Mary alludes to her work in anti-gentrification and other community efforts to improve life for residents of the Downtown Eastside and Chinatown. Through this work, she has been able to form relationships with fellow organizers like Chinese elders who reside in the area.

Mary cited the success of the 2017 anti-gentrification campaign in Chinatown as a moment of pride in her organizing efforts, and of her support of Chinatown elders in that victory she remembers, "getting to share in the joy with them." For people like Mary, community-minded work where organizing is grounded by common politics, but also common language, culture, and histories can build connections with other people who similarly face the existential

or physical feelings of loss that accompany diasporic subjectivity and ultimately strengthen their dedication to their community.

My interlocutors described how they approach intra-community relationship-building with a mind to accessibility of information and togetherness. Christina, Anson, and Mary's work prioritized access to spaces for communing in ways that strengthened their understanding, belonging, and dedication towards their communities. Prioritizing access in this way, which embraces the creative and emotional potential of sharing time and space together, goes beyond forms of nominal inclusion that may not result in strong collaborative creations. Precedent within the Asian Canadian movement and local community organizing substantiates the power of mobilizing cultural forms of resistance and cultural practices to effect change (J.-A. Lee, 2007; X. Li, 2007). The coalition paradigm necessitates the accessibility of information, opportunities, and space to build relationships in order to materialize the full and meaningful participation of diasporic Chinese communities in activism and organizing.

### **3.3.3 Discussion.**

The coalition paradigm is the name I have given to this reconceptualization of activism and organizing which incorporates understandings of differential racialization, anti-oppression, and accessibility in ways that allow diasporic Chinese communities to be active participants in mobilization for change alongside other communities – a coalition for change. This paradigm is exemplified in the ways my interlocutors prioritize and strategize various ways of bridging externally and internally to develop the education, opportunities, and relationships necessary to sustain effective work. Contrary to the model minority paradigm which discourages or clouds diasporic Chinese activism and organizing, the coalition paradigm allows for consideration of

multiple ways that connection and knowledge can facilitate political socialization within Chinese communities. Here I provide a discussion of how the coalition paradigm is based in evidence from historical activism and organizing work of Asian American and Asian Canadian communities. Like these precedent models of activism and organizing, the coalition paradigm seeks to build a way of understanding and relating which fosters work that is socially sustainable, yet politically robust.

Within the coalition paradigm, an understanding of diasporic Chinese communities' relation to and role amongst other racialized communities is needed in order to develop strong working dynamics that do not fall back into the model minority paradigm of Chinese exceptionalism or seclusive Chinese or pan-Asian solidarity. Experiences shared by Olivia and Clara about the power of the model minority paradigm to pit Chinese people against the interests of other racialized people once again demonstrates the theoretical utility of Kim's (1999) concept of relative valorization, and the need to recognize how this racial hierarchy is upheld. Asian American activists are engaging in work that actively deconstructs anti-Blackness and other competitive racial frameworks and instead builds movements through interracial cooperation and solidarity (Dinh, 2022; Hope, 2019; Pheng & Xiong, 2022; D. Wong, 2021).

As Brandon discussed, class consciousness has also been a historical strategy of mobilizing and connecting working class diasporic Asian communities (M. Cho, 1994; C. J. Kim, 2004). In fact, there exists a strong history of Asian American resistance within realms of queer, feminist, and worker organizing, contrary to popular perceptions and in spite of the chauvinism that dominated past eras of mainstream Asian American activism (Aguirre & Lio, 2008). Similar to these models of activism and organizing, the coalition paradigm does not



discard of Chinese racial identity and experience but rather supplements them with broader structural understandings of oppression.

Within the coalition paradigm, relationships with fellow marginalized communities are sought with an active anti-oppression approach which seeks to go beyond uncritical modes of diversity and inclusion. In a study of current Asian American college student activism, understandings of differential racialization and anti-oppression inform activists' solidarity and intersectional approaches (Museus et al., 2021). This approach, which operates similarly to the coalition paradigm I describe, is in contrast with approaches to social justice that recycle "white anti-racist allyship politics" which risk reifying the model minority paradigm (Bhardwaj, 2021). To move away from this type of patronizing relationship between communities, Christina, Clara, and Mary advised on how Chinese communities can approach collaboration with understanding and respect. My interlocutors have shown how their work to bridge relationships externally is guided by understandings of systems of racialization and oppression that allow them to fulfill a cooperative and active role alongside other communities seeking change. The consideration paid to relationships with other communities and the different contexts of engagement within organizations is in contrast with many unsustainable organizational models that can lead to burnout and disengagement.

The dominance of the model minority paradigm in shaping both external and self-perceptions of diasporic Chinese activism and organizing requires an active approach to ensuring the accessibility of education and opportunity for intra-community political socialization. As communities with high proportions of immigrant members, Asian Americans demonstrate lower levels of political participation and socialization due to various institutional barriers around culture, language, and class (Ong & Scott, 2009). These barriers can result in misperceptions of

racial justice movements (Yellow Horse et al., 2021). Discussions with Anne, Christina, and Kimberley about their experience bridging internal gaps of understanding around social justice demonstrate how barriers to political socialization are present for diasporic Chinese communities in Vancouver too.

White supremacy relies on the model minority paradigm to perpetuate these misperceptions about racial positioning, so it remains imperative to deny its prescription of racial hierarchy and relative valorization of Asian people through modes of resistance which decentre whiteness (Tran & Curtin, 2017; Walton & Truong, 2022). Current research on Asian American political mobilization maintains that the experience of racialization through racial positioning (i.e., racial hierarchy and comparison) or discrimination alone are unhelpful in developing political consciousness, and rather fostering the connections between education and experience are most effective (Lin, 2020; Saavedra & Yoo, 2023; Trieu & Lee, 2018). The coalition paradigm that my interlocutors work within understands this and prioritizes community access to resources for political learning, and space for connecting in ways that strengthen political consciousness. Rather than taking their community for granted, the coalition paradigm allows diasporic Chinese people to build capacity among friends, family, and other community in ways that mainstream political institutions have not prioritized.

The coalition paradigm is a reconceptualization of diasporic Chinese activism and organizing that responds to the way the model minority paradigm has racialized Asian people in North America as self-interested and passive. Within this new paradigm, my interlocutors hold understandings of differential racialization, anti-oppression, and accessibility that see diasporic Chinese communities as meaningful participants alongside other racialized communities in

pursuit of social change. In short, this conception of activism and organizing is focused on the substantial aspect of coalition, the relationships which fuel work together.

Externally, this manifests in an orientation towards relationships with other communities that understands how diasporic Chinese people stand in relation to other racialized groups. There is an understanding of shared marginalization, but an acknowledgement of the different ways that each community can experience race and other forms of oppression. These understandings of differential racialization and anti-oppression respond to the way race is seen hierarchically within the model minority paradigm and the relationship between Asian and other racialized groups is competitive, rather than collaborative. Race is exceptionalized, not invisibilized, but acknowledged for the ways it positions people differently within relationships and organizations.

Internally, the coalition paradigm manifests as a prioritization of accessibility of resources and space for fostering political consciousness within diasporic Chinese communities. My interlocutors acknowledge that there may be gaps of understanding within their communities due to the existence of various barriers to political socialization. This strategy of outreach to facilitate the full and meaningful participation of their communities responds to the passivity prescribed by the model minority paradigm where Asian people in North America may be disempowered, invisibilized, or otherwise seen as incompatible with activism and organizing. The coalition paradigm my interlocutors work within is informed by their own experiences but is also informed by the long history of Asian activism in North America which recognizes the strength of Asian communities as active conspirators in mobilizations for social justice.

## 4. CONCLUSION

After the initial Vancouver Chinatown anti-gentrification campaign against the development at 105 Keefer began in 2017, activists and organizers started to activate the adjacent community plaza for both campaign and non-campaign events. Since the 2023 decision reversal, this practice has re-emerged with fervor. Rallies are gathered, art is made, culture is shared, and relationships are built. Against what has become a bureaucratic emblem of the neoconservative turn in Vancouver's Chinatown, this practice and these groups are powerfully resisting the further denial and erasure of critical community activism and organizing.

This project sought to remedy the epistemic erasure of Chinese racialization and mobilization in Canada. My interlocutors in this project have graciously shared their experiences and insight around how racial meanings are assigned to their actions as activists and organizers. Racialization, among and alongside other structural oppression, was important to the beginning of their mobilization. Racialization was also influential to their experiences post-mobilization, within activism and organizing spaces. These experiences informed their current approach to activism and organizing, which I theorize as the “coalition paradigm.”

The racial framings implied by the model minority paradigm become clearer through theories of AsianCrit, racial triangulation, and racial capitalism. Through this analytical framework that understands the structural reproduction and historical construction of race within white supremacy and capitalism, it is not just “racism” which influences my interlocutors. Rather, they are influenced by the full extension of framings (both negative and those that appear positive) exacted by racialization. Analyzing the motivations of my interlocutors in contrast with these framings refutes the different components of the model minority paradigm. Analyzing the participation of my interlocutors in line with these framings clarifies how the paradigm

perpetuates. My interlocutors experience racism, but they also experience more insidious forms of racialization that de-legitimize their mobilization. The model minority paradigm is superficially bothersome in the way it can hide the full extent of Asian racialization, but fundamentally dangerous in the way it disempowers the mobilization of a significant population.

The model minority paradigm continues to obscure its own reality as a tool of white supremacy. It does this by perpetuating stereotypes that affect both internal and external perceptions of Asian political efficacy. Positioning my interlocutors' motivations and participation within the structural implications of the model minority paradigm demonstrates how these racial perceptions are inaccurate but can still discourage mobilization. Despite this negative influence on mobilization and post-mobilization processes, experiencing these forms of racialization have allowed my interlocutors to develop broader understandings of structural oppression in their pursuit of organizations and opportunities that see Chinese communities as meaningful participants in coalitional work for change.

The coalition paradigm is instructive of the practical needs and desires of activists and organizers. Besides material resources, which are an unfortunate necessity for enabling organizational success within a capitalist system, the pursuit of relationship-building was important to interlocutors' mode of change-seeking. This paradigm is likely influenced by the same impulse towards solidarity and cooperation researched by several scholars working in the Asian American context (Bhardwaj, 2022, 2023; Hope, 2019; Pheng & Xiong, 2022; D. Wong, 2021). The documentation of this approach to change-seeking is an important step in dispelling common racial framings of exceptionalism, political apathy, and political isolation.

This project contributes to the extant literature on racialization and mobilization in several ways. First, within the framework of Canadian multicultural "post-racial" society, my

interlocutors' discussions about their experiences of racialization and political socialization demonstrate the realities and catalyzing power of racial discrimination and other systemic oppression for diasporic Chinese youth. Additionally, my interlocutors' political socialization incorporated understandings and manifestations of solidarity – in their mobilization through and for reasons beyond in-group activism. Within the Canadian context of studying Asian racialization, the significance of racial discrimination, intersectional oppression, and solidarity to experiences of Chinese racialization and political socialization confirms the systems of white supremacy and capitalism that act upon diasporic Chinese subjectivity, despite notions of multicultural progress.

Second, this project explored how my interlocutors were involved across different movements (i.e., beyond environments centred around racial justice), and experienced the minimizing effects of “relative racialization,” a process that marginalizes Asian racial identity and experience. Museus (2022) documented this process among Asian American college students pursuing racial justice activism. My findings demonstrate how this may extend beyond spaces where race is centred, and afflict Asian activists irrespective of their organization's ideological focus.

Third, this project reviewed the specific ways that my interlocutors, as diasporic Chinese activists and organizers, were discouraged and disengaged from spaces for activism and organizing. Though social movement literature accounts for the various ways that white supremacy can result in organizational conflict within such spaces, there is less understanding about the ways activism and organizing become or are constructed in hostile or impractical ways for diasporic Chinese people.

Finally, my analytical framework reviewing and contrasting the “model minority paradigm” with the so-called “coalition paradigm” is a novel approach which attends to the nuances of racial capitalism within the context of activism and organizing. This is the first project on contemporary diasporic Chinese people in Canada to interrogate the significance of racialization to mobilization. Compared to similar American studies (Chopra et al., 2024; Filler, 2018), this project incorporates understandings of social movement studies and processes of racialization.

This project holds several limitations. Constraints on space prevent closer examination of how specific identities other than race have influenced experiences within activist and organizing spaces. My pool of interlocutors was limited due to resource availability. Analysis would also be enriched through the inclusion of interlocutors from a greater range of class, educational, and organizational backgrounds. Additionally, this analysis reflects responses from interlocutors who were most confident or willing to participate in an interview.

In future research, Chinese racialization and mobilization should be studied more closely in the context of concepts like intersectionality and diasporicity. Examining these understandings of subjectivity would likely showcase the powerful role of Chinese activism and organizing within global and transnational movements and contexts. Extending from this, studies could also examine the particularities or broadness of Chinese activism and organizing by looking at the significance of place and specific geographies, or by looking at a national sample of activists and organizers. Overall, the underdevelopment of research on Asian and Chinese racialization and mobilization in Canada leaves many avenues to pursue. What remains imperative is the continued strive towards understanding and implementing the meaningful participation of all people in mobilizing against the rising tide of injustice that marks our current society.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A



# SEEKING INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

*DIGITAL & POLITICAL CONTOURS OF  
CHINESE-CANADIAN COMMUNITIES*

### ABOUT THE PROJECT

We want to learn how different communities of "Chinese-Canadians" have engaged in digital activism.

### WE WANT TO TALK TO FOLKS WHO ARE:

"Chinese-Canadian" / diasporic Chinese,  
doing organizing/activism work,  
using social media/digital tools to organize  
living/have lived in "Vancouver," and  
between ages 18-30

### DETAILS

Requires single interview, 30-45 minutes, via Zoom.

### COMPENSATION

PARTICIPANTS WILL RECEIVE \$25 FOR THEIR TIME.

### INTERESTED?

CONTACT: CAITLIN CHONG (CO-INVESTIGATOR)  
AT [REDACTED]

QR CODE  
REMOVED

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: DR. RENISA MAWANI,  
[REDACTED]

**V1 (07/19/22)**  
**ETHICS ID: #H22-01800**



scan for contact info

## Appendix B

### Interview Consent Form

**Study Name:** Digital & Political Contours of Chinese-Canadian Communities

**Principal Investigator (P.I.):**

Dr. Renisa Mawani (she/her) – Professor, UBC Sociology

**Co-Investigator (C.I.) and Primary Contact:**

Caitlin Chong (she/her) – Master’s Student, UBC Sociology

This project is being conducted as part of Caitlin Chong’s graduate thesis research and is funded in part by the Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

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**Invitation and Study Purpose:** You are being invited to take part in this research project because you are a “Chinese-Canadian” or diasporic Chinese person between the ages of 18-30 doing organizing and/or activism work, with experience using social media or digital tools to conduct said work. Involvement in this project will include your commitment to participate in audio recorded interviews. The purpose of the project is to gain insight into how Vancouver's varying communities of Chinese-Canadians have engaged in digital activism and how intersecting identities affect their online social presence and political engagement. We hope this project will result in the documentation of best practices for social justice organizing in the digital age, and the creation of an online resource where this information is housed. This resource will serve as a site where young or inexperienced folks can familiarize themselves with information they may require in beginning to do organizing and/or activism work themselves.

**Study Procedures:** Participation will require you to meet one time with Caitlin via Zoom for an in-depth interview. We will send you our interview questions to review before the agreed date for our interview.

The interview will be individual. The people present will be yourself (the participant) and Caitlin (the co-investigator).

During the interview, we will discuss your experiences doing organizing and/or activism work, including your use of social media and/or digital tools in doing said work. The interview should run for 30-45 minutes in length. The interview may be audio-recorded if you consent to allow it. If you do not consent to audio recording of the interview, Caitlin will take notes instead.

Additionally, as the interview will take place over Zoom, please be aware of your choices around protecting your identity while using Zoom. You may log in using only a nickname or a substitute name or research code given ahead of time by Caitlin, and you are not obligated to turn on your camera.

During the interviews we will receive feedback from you and other participants regarding what the final outcome should look like. After this consultation, we will keep you informed about how we plan to create the eventual web resource.

**Project Outcomes:** Firstly, this project will inform Caitlin's master's thesis. Secondly, although our project outcome depends on consultations during the project, we hope to use your interview excerpts to construct the previously mentioned online resource which will serve as a site where young or inexperienced folks can familiarize themselves with information they may require in beginning to do organizing and/or activism work themselves.

**Open Access:** The information from this project may also be published in academic journal articles and books. Any information you provide that discloses your identity will not be shared. Anonymized research findings will be made publicly available for the benefit of future research and community knowledge. After research findings are made publicly available via third party publishers/distributors, you will not be able to withdraw your data. Because any information gained from you will be changed to protect your identity and privacy, we do not think that publishing your information will increase any risks or harm to you.

**Potential Benefits:** We do not believe participating in this study will explicitly benefit you. However, in the future, others may benefit from what is learned in this study.

**Potential Risks:** We do not believe participating in this study will harm you.

**Confidentiality:** Your confidentiality will be respected throughout the whole study. Information disclosing your identity will not be released. You will choose a pseudonym (fake name) for yourself at the beginning of the study. This fake name will be used to protect your identity in our research findings. We will have a master list of the real and fake names. Only the P.I. (Dr. Mawani) and Caitlin will have access to this list. It will be stored in a separate password



protected folder on Caitlin's encrypted laptop until the study is finished. Then it will be transferred to Dr. Mawani's encrypted laptop where it will be destroyed after 5 years.

Caitlin's thesis, as well as the web resource will contain excerpts from interviews with you and other participants. We will be in touch prior to publishing, to allow you to review the information you shared. Any identifying information or names mentioned within interviews will be changed before making information available to the public.

The web resource will be managed by Caitlin. She will have full access to edit or remove information from the resource at any time. If you would like to have your information removed from the resource at any time – prior to, during, or after the publishing of the resource – Caitlin will remove your information as soon as possible.

**Remuneration/Compensation:** As a token of appreciation, we are offering interview you \$25 CAD for your time. This money will be offered via cash, e-transfer, PayPal, or cheque.

**Contact for information about the study:** If you have any questions or concerns about what we are asking of you, please contact Caitlin Chong at [redacted].

**Contact for concerns or complaints about the study:** If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, contact the Research Participant Complaint Line in the UBC Office of Research Ethics at 604-822-8598 or if long distance e-mail [RSIL@ors.ubc.ca](mailto:RSIL@ors.ubc.ca) or call toll free 1-877-822-8598.

**Consent:** Participation is **voluntary**, and you may **refuse** to participate or **withdraw** from the project at **any time without any risk to yourself**. If this occurs, you are free to choose between destroying your contributions to the study or releasing them for use without your participation.

Your signature below indicates that you:

- Consent to participate in this study.
- Understand the above stated purpose of the project and the project agenda.
- Have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

---

Name

Signature

Date

---

Phone number

Email (optional)

## Appendix C

### Interview Guide

#### Biographical Information

Name:

Pronouns:

Place(s) of residence:

Ethnic background:

#### Detailed Questions

*Topic one: organizing/activism*

1. Could you tell me a bit about the kind of work that you do?
  - a. Are there specific issues you organize around?
2. What motivates you to organize for these issues?
  - a. When did you become involved with this issue?
3. What do you think about the concepts of “organizing” and “activism”?
4. What does it mean to be an organizer or activist?
  - a. Do you consider yourself one? Why or why not?

*Topic two: class*

5. Where do you identify yourself in the existing class structure? (e.g., upper, middle, working, etc.)
  - a. Does your class identity contribute to your motivations and intentions for organizing and/or activism?

*Topic three: Chinese-Canadian/diasporic Chinese identity and community*

6. What is your opinion on the label “Chinese-Canadian”?
  - a. Do you see yourself as a “Chinese-Canadian”?
7. Alternatively, do you identify yourself via the “Chinese diaspora”?
  - a. What is your opinion on the concept of the “Chinese diaspora”?
8. Is this community part of your motivations for organizing and/or activism?
9. What advice would you pass along for younger and/or less experienced Chinese-Canadians and/or diasporic Chinese folks looking to get involved in organizing and/or activism work?

*Topic four: social media and digital tools*

10. Can you tell me if and how you have used Instagram as a tool in organizing and/or activism? (If not Instagram, other social media?)
  - a. What kinds of benefits or challenges have you faced in using Instagram (or other social media) as a method of organizing and/or activism?
11. Besides social media, are there other digital tools you find useful in your organizing

and/or activism work?

12. What kinds of relationships form throughout the use of Instagram (and/or other social media) as a method of organizing and/or activism?
13. What advice would you pass along for those using and engaging social media platforms and digital tools for organizing and/or activism work?

*Topic five: solidarity*

14. Does solidarity-building play a role in your organizing through Instagram (or other social media)?
15. If you organize via Instagram, what has your experience been like engaging the Chinese-Canadian community online?
16. Do you find community amongst Chinese-Canadians on Instagram?
17. Can you speak about “cross-racial solidarities” in organizing and/or activism work? For example, in thinking of organizing for racial justice, Indigenous/Asian and Black/Asian solidarities come to mind.
  - a. How have you experienced or viewed these relations and solidarities in tangible forms?
18. What advice would you pass along for those who want to create community and solidarity within and through organizing work?

*Topic six: COVID-19*

19. How has the COVID-19 pandemic shaped your organizing and/or activism work?
  - a. How has it affected the way you use or rely on Instagram (and/or other social media) and digital tools as methods of organizing?
20. What are the differences between organizing through social media like Instagram, as organizing physically, in person?

*Topic seven: wrapping up*

21. Overall, in your efforts to create change, what have been the biggest barriers you have encountered?
22. What has been the moment, process, or accomplishment you are most proud of?
23. What kind of structure, content, or features would you like to see in the web resource resulting from this project?
24. Is there anything else you would like to mention or ask?