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# Negotiating the Melancholy of Alterity:

## The Oppositional Digital Visual Culture of East-Asian American Women Artists

By Sarah Qiuyi Zhang

Through the interview of four East-Asian American women artists of diverse backgrounds, alongside semiotic analysis of their selected works, I investigate their oppositional digital art practice as well as their general online experiences. The digital sphere replicates the same forms of racially and sexually based oppression that occurs in the non-digital world in rapidly diverging forms. The main findings demonstrate that digital technologies offer novel ways for East-Asian American artists to resist oppression, visibilize their struggles, and explore their identities. Oppositional techniques can be sorted into three broad categories describing the archival, discursive, and voyeuristic capabilities of digital space. These categories describe a broad range of practices including generating alternative autobiographical histories, forging larger communities of resistance, and subverting the white male gaze. East-Asian American women artists actively challenge structural power through innovative multimedia methodologies that challenge mainstream representations in which they are regarded as subhuman, and resist essentialized roles and fixed markers of East-Asian culture and identity. Their diverse experiences converge upon the common goal of resisting hegemonic order and fostering a supportive space in which the voices of their community can be heard. Drawing on movements like postcolonial feminist scholarship from Anne Anlin Cheng, Trinh T. Minh-Ha, and Saidiya Hartman, as well as Third Cinema, I argue that social media sites and other internet communities expand and enable the development of a digital postcolonial aesthetic and art practice for East-Asian American women artists, allowing them to exercise agency over their artistic and historical narratives.

## Section 1: Introduction

In “The Melancholy of Race,” Anne Anlin Cheng asks the poignant question “is there ever any getting over race”?<sup>1</sup> She describes the Freudian conception of melancholia, or a “pathological version of mourning,” a so-called disorder in which grief attaches itself to an individual’s ego and is borne as an unfinished remnant of a denied loss. Cheng utilizes Freud’s convention to draw attention to the condition of race in America, as racialized subjects continually relive their loss and legalized exclusion from full personhood. As a historically marginalized group in the United States, East-Asian American women often recall painful histories and lived experiences through art, which possesses key liberatory potential for them as an instrument of their own voice as well as an essential tool for visibility beyond their immediate communities. Combined with the auto-representational capabilities of digital space, emergent artistic expression and the rapidly forming ecosystems in which East-Asian American women share their experiences have yet to be thoroughly examined in academic literature. A communal solidarity with one’s own identity is formed in complex interactions between online and offline worlds as East-Asian American women artists stay loyal to their sense of loss and call attention to the systems that have generated the conditions which continually subject them to violence and prejudice through novel forms of creation.

Postcolonial feminist scholarship indicates that all is not lost despite painful legacies of racism, imperialism, and colonization so imperative to the formation of American as it is known today. Utilizing the writings of Saidiya Hartman on archival violence, Anne Anlin Cheng on melancholy of race and beauty, Trinh T. Minh-Ha on Third World aesthetics, and Lisa Nakamura on the digital labors of women of color, my research will outline the complex histories, processes, and ideologies behind oppositional art practices. Through the exploration of the spectrum of experiences of East-Asian American women, it is evident through their art and habitual practices that the remembrance of loss and formation of collective outpouring is an act that consists of equal parts grief, joy, anger, and nascent optimism for a liberated future.

### 1.1 Background

The events of the global COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent rise in hate crimes against Asian-Americans in the United States uprooted very physical manifestations of racist and xenophobic sentiment. While surprising and unexpected to some, exclusionary anti-Asian sentiment is not only historically prevalent, but foundational to the narrative and social structures undergirding the United States. It is clear that despite popular and critical designations of Asian-Americans by the white majority as a “model minority” group, or the racial group that enjoys the highest “proximity to whiteness” in the United States, they still face racialized discrimination and violence under white supremacy. Existence-as-transgression marks the inception of the history of East-Asian women in America, as legislation like the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the Page Law of 1875 often made their very entrance into the country illegal. East Asian-American women occupy a uniquely contested space within the fabric of America. As subjects reckoning with a legacy of imperialism and diasporic displacement, they experience complex forms of racialized and gendered oppression. An often silenced, invisibilized, and homogenized group, contemporary East-Asian American women must find ways in which they can cultivate their own voices in the United States.

The internet, initially conceptualized as a space free of hierarchies, is a promising platform by which Asian-American women can express their agency in a country that often relegates them to subhuman status. The internet and digital spheres are of particular interest because Asian-Americans are the most prolific internet users of any ethnic group. The Pew Research Center finds that up to 95% of English-speaking Asians in the US are regular internet users, as compared to 85% of whites, 81% of Hispanics, and 78% of Blacks.<sup>2</sup> While the digital sphere is in theory an ideal space of full democratic ownership by willing parties, it often reproduces the same power hierarchies and inequalities of non-digital spaces. Despite extensive scholarship on oppositional post-colonial artistic methods, a comprehensive examination of emergent digital artistic practice by up-and-coming Asian-American women artists is sorely lacking in the existing academic canon. The intersection of art and activism is a locus that can be extremely instrumental in the liberation of Asian-American women. Additionally, the medium

1 Cheng, Anne Anlin. “The Melancholy of Race.” *The Kenyon Review* 19, no. 1 (1997), 49

2 Perrin, Andrew, and Maeve Duggan. “Americans Internet Access: Percent of Adults 2000-2015,” 1

of art may reach a broader audience than that of academic scholarship or conventional written theory. Thus, I want to elaborate on the common practices, motivations, and techniques of East Asian-American women artists who primarily utilize the digital sphere to challenge existing structures of white heteropatriarchal hegemony in the US and the larger world. Drawing upon oppositional legacies of post-colonial thought, artistic practice empowers East-Asian American women to process, interpret, and present their struggles both to their communities and larger audiences. Digital artforms present an outlet for East-Asian American women to challenge existing hegemonic orders, question conventions of (in)visibility, and contest mainstream narratives.

## 1.2 Overview

My research will begin with a literature review that explores the history of the identifier “Asian-American,” and describes the historical legacy of gendered and racialized violence East-Asian American women face. Afterwards, I will examine notable works of Third Cinema and postcolonial artists like Trinh T. Minh-Ha and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha. Then, I will examine the current socio-political position of East-Asian American women as well as the methodologies behind their digital activities. A survey of the scope of digital organizing, education, and exhibition they have done as well as barriers they may have encountered will be outlined. Finally, I will conclude with a brief overview of existing interviews with East-Asian American women artists and emphasize identity gaps in current literature that my research will address. The methodology section will follow the literature review in which I outline my research methodology and semantics of how I conducted my interviews and formal analysis. The analysis section will then report my findings, as well as highlight key themes based on a history of the subject’s internet use, former and current artistic practices, and reactions to a rise in anti-Asian hate crimes.

## Section 2: Literature Review

### 2.1 *The Origins of “Asian-American” as Identifier*

Prior to the late 1960’s, the label “Asian-American” was not utilized as a coherent personal nor political identity. Tim Libretti’s research on Asian-American cultural resistance reveals that the term “Asian-American” became popularized thanks to the work of Third World Liberation Front activists.<sup>3</sup> With extensive roots in UC Berkeley and San Francisco State University, the Third World Liberation Front promoted “(inter)national, anti-imperialist, anti-colonial resistance politics”.<sup>4</sup> Libretti views the Third World perspective as one that aims to encourage a global understanding/solidarity of race. Similarly on a micro level, the Asian-American Political Alliance, which was aligned with the larger Third World movement, aimed to promote a national pan-ethnic Asian-American solidarity.<sup>5</sup> Libretti problematizes and deconstructs the many meanings of the term Asian-American, which has long been criticized for being exclusionary or erasing non-East Asian identities. He concludes by emphasizing a pan-Asian identity must be voluntarily adopted in strategic contexts for successful political mobilization, but was never intended to homogenize the experience of differing Asian ethnic groups.<sup>6</sup>

Libretti’s conclusions are part of the reason why I have chosen to focus specifically on East-Asian American women, as I would like to be precise in my inquiry and not generalize the experience of East-Asian women to all Asian-American women. Readers will notice that I sometimes explore a more general Asian-American label in my literature review, and this is because the overwhelming volume of existing Asian-American literature and research has historically prioritized and referred to East-Asian subjects. As such, Asian-American literature almost always includes the East Asian perspective by default. I have limited my scope of inquiry for original research subjects to diversity within East-Asian female perspectives and do not wish to generalize to all Asian-Americans due to this tendency. A perpetual question in Asian-American studies concerns the “true” or “genuine” Asian-American identity, and the best response to this is that identity is constructed. As a fluid puzzle that is constantly in flux, scholars disagree about the exact definition of such a label. For this research, I will use the Pew Research

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3 Libretti, Tim. “Asian American Cultural Resistance.” *Race, Gender & Class* 4, no. 3 (1997): 20-39. Accessed December 13, 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41674835>, 31.

4 Libretti, 36.

5 Libretti, 31.

6 Libretti, 36.

Center's definition of Asian American as "either immigrants from Asia or descendants of immigrants".<sup>7</sup> I will expand off of their definition and note that my use of East-Asian applies to the exact same group, but limiting to those of specifically East-Asian descent. In summary, the umbrella term "Asian-American" was formed in the late 1960's not to erase unique ethnic identities, but rather serve as a rallying point for cohesive political mobilization. Subsequently, the manner in which individuals "experience" an Asian-American identity is highly dependent on class, gender, nationality, and more. One element in particular, gender, holds a high degree of salience for the subject of my research.

## 2.2 *Asian American Women and Larger Activism Movements*

As discussed previously, a monolithic Asian-American experience simply does not exist and to claim so would be reductionist. The Asian-American woman has historically felt excluded from larger movements like the wider feminist movement and the Asian-American movement. In my research, the use of the term women will refer to Katie L. Kirkland's trans and queer inclusive definition as the "type of person to whom the oppressive norms of femininity apply can be subject to self-objectification if they internalize these norms".<sup>8</sup> Esther Ngan-Ling Chow writes about the exclusion of Asian-American women from both of these movements, leading to the subsequent formation of organizations that focused on the struggle of Asian-American women. She has authored research specifically examining the exclusion of Asian-American women from feminist groups as well as their exclusion from Asian-American groups.<sup>9, 10</sup> During the development of the Asian-American movement in the 1960s, Chow concludes that Asian-American women preferred to ally with Asian-American men in their struggles against racism and classism, largely because they felt as if the mainstream feminist movement mostly turned a blind eye to race and class.<sup>11</sup> Asian-American women often also experienced a language barrier, struggling to communicate and find common ground with the white women in mainstream feminist movements.

In their involvement with Asian-American movements, Asian-American women often experienced sexism and systemic exclusion from positions of power, with the frequent expectation that they would be serving their male counterparts. In fact, many Asian-American men felt that participation of Asian-American women in feminist movements was a betrayal that was insulting towards their egos and detracted from their work in the Asian-American movement, as well as diluting their ethnic identity.<sup>12</sup> As such, Asian-American women often faced a double bind between people who shared common interests of transnational status or gender. In response, Asian-American women formed their own organizations that included social services, professional societies, and specialized groups that involved preservation of art, etc.<sup>13</sup> In her 1992 work, Chow elaborates on the Asian-American women's different causes and concludes that these types of organizations often lacked material support apart from when they served as auxiliaries to male-dominant Asian-American organizations.<sup>14</sup> Both works by Chow conclude that while the organizations didn't necessarily enjoy longevity or significant political traction, they were a platform by which Asian-American women gained leadership/political acumen, heightened their consciousness of racial and gender inequalities, and made the need to fight against their unique oppression more urgent.<sup>15</sup> As described by Chow, the early efforts of Asian-American women to participate in 1960's era activism that centered their race and gender often forced them to choose "either/or". Their subsequent response was to organize into groups that prioritized their unique and specific experiences and advocate for those in their position. Even in an era that fought for greater equality for all, Asian-American women had to actively combat racist and

7 "Chapter 1: Portrait of Asian Americans." Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project, December 31, 2019, 1.

8 Kirkland, Katie L. "Feminist Aims and a Trans-Inclusive Definition of 'Woman.'" *Feminist Philosophy Quarterly* 5 no.1 (2019), 19.

9 Chow, Esther Ngan-Ling. "The Feminist Movement: Where Are All the Asian American Women?" *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal. English Supplement*, no. 2 (1992): 96-111. Accessed December 13, 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42772039>, 97.

10 Chow, Esther Ngan-Ling. "The Development of Feminist Consciousness among Asian American Women." *Gender and Society* 1, no. 3 (1987): 284-99. Accessed December 13, 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/189565>, 287.

11 Chow, "The Development of", 287.

12 Chow, 288

13 Chow, "The Development of", 287.

14 Chow, "The Feminist Movement", 97.

15 Chow, "The Feminist Movement", 97.

sexist stereotypes, some of which came from people that shared in one or more of their communities.

### 2.3 *The “Stereotypical” East Asian-American Woman*

A myriad of stereotypes of East Asian-American women come from lingering imperialist tropes from the 18th century. Persistent gendered and racialized discrimination plagues Asian-American women, who are often perceived to be hypersexual, exotic, and subservient. Linda Trinh Vo and Marian Sciachitano investigate the modern status of the Asian-American woman beyond “Exotics, Whores, and Nimble Fingers”.<sup>16</sup> Their research focuses on outlining the historical legacy of Asian-American women as well as the modern resistance towards harmful stereotypes. They interrogate and aptly summarize the exploitation and objectification of Asian American women:

Global capitalism, imperialism, and militarism have long shaped the contradictory subject-positions of Asian American women as both “desiring subjects” and “working subjects.” Our exoticized/eroticized bodies have been sold in the transnational sex industry, our nimble fingers have been sought for various sweat-shop factories located here or in export processing zones, and our ability to serve as domestic workers has made us particularly favored in the health and child care professions and in service-sector occupation.<sup>17</sup>

Vo and Sciachitano assert that Asian-American women have been highly subjugated since the very inception of Asian presence in America, as many Chinese and Japanese women were forced into prostitution and exploited by Asian men. The American capitalist workforce demanded cheap male Asian labor, and worker demands for female company in turn commodified and exploited Asian women.<sup>18</sup> Vo and Sciachitano connect this struggle to larger global movements, examples of which include the “comfort women” of Korea and China, sex tourism and trafficking, the mail order bride industry, and abusive low wage working conditions.<sup>19</sup> In summary, Vo and Sciachitano attempt to connect the historical struggle of Asian-American women to a global struggle, and mount a call to action for modern Asian-American women to recognize their roots and join a larger transnational resistance movement made possible by the digital age.

Esther Ngan-Ling Chow also discusses the traditional racist and sexist stereotypes that plague Asian-American women. In contrast to Vo and Sciachitano, Chow adopts a more insular approach and focuses on national organizing efforts in her analysis of Asian-American women, forgoing a fully transnational stance. Chow concurs with Vo and Sciachitano that the historical image of East-Asian women as sexual slaves persists due to continued US imperialism and involvement in Asian wars. Persistent and hyper-specific tropes Chow cites include “‘Susie Wong’ for Chinese women, the ‘geisha girl’ in the Japanese tea house, the bar girls in Vietnam... The ‘picture bride’ image of Asian women is still very much alive”.<sup>20</sup> “Yellow Peril,” or the fear of the takeover of Western countries by East Asian subjects is another lingering imperial trope. Summarized by John Kuo Wei Tchen and Dylan Yeats in their attempt to trace the development of anti-Asian sentiment across history, they find that yellow peril “blends Western anxieties about sex, racist fears of the alien other, and the Spenglerian belief that the West will become outnumbered and enslaved by the East”.<sup>21</sup> Fears of the “yellow peril” resulted in legislation like the Page Law of 1875, which “prohibited the recruitment to the United States of unfree laborers and women for ‘immoral purposes’ but was enforced primarily against Chinese”.<sup>22</sup> This law reflected anti-Chinese sentiment that was widespread in the United States at that time, and was in practice a way to regulate Asian immigration without categorically designating race as the basis of the policy. Effectively, this law prohibited the entrance of East-Asian American women into the US based on perceptions of their poor moral character and hyper-sexuality

16 Vō, Linda Trinh, and Marian Sciachitano. “Introduction: Moving beyond “Exotics, Whores, and Nimble Fingers”: Asian American Women in a New Era of Globalization and Resistance.” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 21, no. 1/2 (2000), 1.

17 Vo and Sciachitano, 3.

18 Vo and Sciachitano, 3.

19 Vo and Sciachitano, 4.

20 Chow, “The Development Of”, 288.

21 Wei, Tchen John Kuo, and Dylan Yeats. *Yellow Peril!: an Archive of Anti-Asian Fear*. London: Verso, 2014, 3.

22 “Page Law (1875).” *Immigration History*, July 18, 2019. <https://immigrationhistory.org/item/page-act/>.

seven years before the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act. Also prominent in this act of legislation is the criminalization of sex work, devaluing the potential labor done by East-Asian American women. The law essentially relegated all possible work done by East-Asian women immigrants to prostitution, and the linking of their identity to sex work and sexualized forms of violence persists in the modern Western imagination. A prominent example in recent history is the Atlanta massage parlor shootings, in which a white male shooter targeting female East-Asian American massage and sex workers.<sup>23</sup> In summary, fighting pervasive historical tropes of Asian-American women as yellow skinned and monolithic exotic sex objects ingrained in the American psyche is very much a part of many East-Asian American women's daily struggles. They may seem relatively harmful as they paint the Asian woman as mysterious and sexually desirable, but they often lead to real-life violence and death. Later in this literature review, stereotypes will prove to be a popular subject tackled by the art practice of East Asian-American artists. Thus, the contemporary status of Asian-American women and where they stand in American socio-political order in the post 1960's era is the natural next step in this research inquiry.

#### 2.4 *The "Authentic" East-Asian American Woman and Modern Iterations*

Modern East Asian-American women often reckon a complex and abstracted identity and struggle to find their place in the American socio-political landscape. Emily S. Lee examines what she deems "The Ambiguous Practices of the Inauthentic Asian-American Woman," or the tension Asian-American women feel between assimilating in a white American status quo and respecting their ethnic heritage. Lee begins by interrogating the model minority myth, an idea originating in a *New York Times Magazine* article in 1966 that Asian-Americans hold cultural beliefs and lifestyle habits that are optimal for success and integration into the mainstream American economy compared to other ethnic groups.<sup>24</sup> Lee argues that this not only harms Asian relations with other minority groups like Hispanic and Black communities, but leads to a harmful impact on the subjectivity of Asian-American women. Mainstream portrayals of Asian groups mostly focus on the upper middle class, and erases those of lower income groups. This sends a message to Asian-American women that to be economically successful and celebrated by America, they must renounce their ethnic cultural practices.<sup>25</sup> In this analysis, class is an important but often overlooked element to Lee as she points out that segregated members of the Asian-American community, who refuse to relinquish their cultural identity and assimilate, are not embraced by the mainstream culture/economy and are thus more likely to be poor, reinforcing a positive feedback loop that oppresses low income segregated Asian-Americans. Lee then goes on to highlight that poor segregated Asian-Americans are disproportionately likely to be women because they are often expected to keep cultural practices alive.<sup>26</sup> Asian-American women are thus trapped in a double bind between being "authentically" Asian and consistently alienated by mainstream cultural and economic institutions or assimilating into white culture and renouncing their ethnic roots. Lee concludes with a more optimistic view, stating that Asian-American women do not need to necessarily pick between one identity or another, but rather retain agency to adopt a negotiated position that mixes cultural practices. Lee ultimately asserts that there is no "wrong" or "inauthentic" way to be an Asian-American woman.<sup>27</sup>

As many East Asian-American women are light-skinned and enjoy proximity to whiteness due to their appearance as well as the model minority myth, they occupy a complex position among women of color. Min Zhou problematizes this dilemma by asking the question: Are Asian-Americans becoming white?<sup>28</sup> Similar to Emily S. Lee, Zhou acknowledges that Asian-Americans enjoy a proximity to whiteness that some public officials would even deem full assimilation.<sup>29</sup> According to the Pew Research Center data last updated in 2019, educational attainment among Asian Americans is "markedly higher than that of the U.S. population overall. Among those

23 Cheng, Anne Anlin. "The Dehumanizing Logic of All the 'Happy Ending' Jokes." *The Atlantic*. Atlantic Media Company, March 23, 2021, 1.

24 Lee, Emily S. "The Ambiguous Practices of the Inauthentic Asian American Woman." *Hypatia* 29, no. 1 (2014): 146-63. Accessed December 13, 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24541958>, 150.

25 Lee, "The Ambiguous Practices", 153.

26 Lee, 153.

27 Lee, 158.

28 Zhou, Min. "Are Asian Americans Becoming White?" In *Contemporary Asian America* (third Edition): A Multidisciplinary Reader, edited by Min Zhou and Ocampo Anthony C., 378-88. NYU Press, (2016), 378.

29 Zhou, Min. "Are Asian Americans Becoming White?", 378.

ages 25 and older, 49% hold at least a college degree, compared with 28% of the U.S. population overall”.<sup>30</sup> Asian-Americans also enjoy a markedly above average income, “a median \$66,000 in 2010, vs. \$49,800 for the U.S. population”.<sup>31</sup> Some similar statistics are referenced by Zhou, who points at this evidence as strong proof often cited for the model minority myth. Both Lee and Zhou supplement their research with quantitative research that collects and describes demographic and income information about Asian-Americans. This approach is incredibly effective because it presents quantitative data, and then supplements the data with qualitative research methods to elaborate and probe these numbers in more detail. I plan to adopt a similar blend, as I think this can be a useful approach for my research. Ultimately, Zhou concludes that “the stereotype of the ‘honorary white’ or model minority goes hand in hand with that of the ‘forever foreigner’”.<sup>32</sup> She posits that the main point is not whether Asian-Americans are becoming white as there is ample evidence to the contrary, but that “Americans of Asian ancestry still have to constantly prove that they are truly loyal American”.<sup>33</sup> Zhou is ultimately a lot more pessimistic in her assessment than Lee, who believes that Asian-American women can truly assimilate in American society if they desire to do so. In summary, both Lee and Zhou find that modern day Asian-American women face consistent questioning by society as well as self-negotiation in establishing their hybridized identity in America. Nevertheless, each woman has an individualized experience and has some degree of agency over how they present their identity to the world. Identity is truly a complex phenomenon, and another aspect of Asian-American identity that has been challenged since its inception is the notion of essentialized race. Increasingly, individuals of mixed ethnic backgrounds have also laid claim and challenged the Asian-American identity.

### 2.5 *Expansion of “Asian-American” Label and Mixed-Race Identity*

A further problematization of the Asian-American identity is posed by scholars studying mixed/multiethnic individuals who may belong to one or more Asian identities. The experiences of mixed-race individuals are unique because they often feel alienated or not “Asian enough” to participate in Asian activism and discourse. Jennifer Lee and Frank D. Bean interrogate multiracial identification and the changing color lines of America in their research. They aim to discover whether Americans truly live in a post-racial society, and whether ideals of racial integration and harmony have been achieved. They examine trends in racial identification from US Census and Pew Research data from 1990-2016, and find that the significant growth of the Asian multiracial population is due to increasing rates of intermarriage of Asians with other ethnic groups: “Today, about one in four married Asians is intermarried and the majority of whom marry whites, and among third and higher generation Asians, intermarriage accounts for more than two out of every five marriages”.<sup>34</sup> Racial identity is a complex concept that is very difficult to encapsulate via the checking of boxes on a form, and the option to identify with two or more races was only made available for the US Census in 2000.<sup>35</sup> Lee and Bean emphasize that race is a sociocultural construct rather than a scientifically fixed category. Ultimately, Lee and Bean conclude that “While a ‘post racial’ future may be ideal, we are far from there, even for Asian Americans for whom patterns of integration do not mean full inclusion”.<sup>36</sup> This is a similar conclusion to Zhou’s, as she maintains that Asian-Americans are far from full and complete members of mainstream American society.

In an interview with mixed-race Asian American women artists Sita Kuratomi Bhaumik and Saya Woolfalk, Laura Kina discovers how their unique process of self-identification dictates their art practices. Kina finds that the inclusion of mixed-race identities is essential in surveying the range of Asian-American experiences because they are a significant portion of the community and expand the definition of what it means to be Asian. Their inclusion de-essentializes the Asian-American identity and dispels the notion that there is a “right look or way” of being Asian-American. Saya Woolfalk states that she identifies as multi-racial, and finds that “identity

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30 “Chapter 1: Portrait”, 1.

31 “Chapter 1: Portrait”, 1.

32 Zhou, 384.

33 Zhou, 384.

34 Lee, Jennifer, and Frank D. Bean. “Are We “Postracial”? Intermarriage, Multiracial Identification, and Changing Color Lines.” In *Contemporary Asian America (third Edition): A Multidisciplinary Reader*, edited by Min Zhou and Ocampo Anthony C, (2016), 391.

35 Lee & Bean, 394.

36 Lee & Bean, 401.

is an ever-shifting thing, ever mutating position, which is relational and not fixed”.<sup>37</sup> Sita Kuratomi Bhaumik did not identify with the label of “Asian American” until college, and now embraces it as “a strategy or a tool for political agency, community building, and all sorts of things”.<sup>38</sup> Their work challenges the subjectivity of being Asian-American and showcases the intersections of remixed identities. As multiracial identities become increasingly common in America and more importantly the Asian-American community, it is important to give these groups unique consideration in analysis in a manner that fully encapsulates their experience. As such, de-essentialization of the Asian-American designation and fighting oppression is also an important goal of digital Asian-American organizing efforts, which has broadened the conversation and discourse on the Asian-American identity considerably.

## 2.6 “Is There Any Getting Over Race?”: *The Myths of a Post-Racial America*

While there are notable efforts to de-essentialize the Asian-American identity and expand understandings of racial constructs in the US, many scholars disagree with the oft cited state of America as “post racial”. Anne Anlin Cheng writes about the “melancholy of race,” and poses the following question:

“What does it mean that the deep wound of race in this country has come to be emphasized as a card, a metaphor which acknowledges the rhetoric as such and yet simultaneously materializes race into a finite object that can be dealt out, withheld, or trumped? Why the singularity of a card? Who gets to play? And what would constitute a ‘full deck’”?<sup>39</sup>

Cheng summarizes the history of racialization in America as “a history of legalized exclusions” as well as a “history of misremembering those denials”.<sup>40</sup> As such, the melancholy of race refers to the particular experiences of racial minorities in the US as being on the fringe of the dominant, existing simultaneously as painfully and visibly different yet invisible. Identifying a complex process of racialization that constitutes an active cycle of both “othering” and reincorporation, the melancholy of racialized subjects is exacerbated by the neglect to address the systemic roots of oppression as well as failing to initiate a healing process for existing racial traumas.<sup>41</sup> Cheng cites a number of artworks by American artists of color who craft complex narratives and allegories that trace their individualized experiences of racial trauma, including authors like Nella Larson, Ralph Ellison, David Henry Hwang, Carolivia Herron, Zora Neale Hurston, and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha.<sup>42</sup> She finds that many of these authors link the melancholy of race to some symbolic manifestation of grief in the body. In her other work titled “*Wounded Beauty: An Exploratory Essay on Race, Feminism, and the Aesthetic Question*,” Cheng explores the relationship between the physical form and links to beauty for racialized and sexualized subjects. Noting that extensive literature exists on how expectations of beauty harm women and how patriarchal dynamics impose violent standards, Cheng states that there is way less examination of how standards of beauty affect racialized and sexualized subjects. She suggests that discourses on racial beauty are still lacking in nuance and must move beyond mental binaries of authentic beauty vs. aspiring to whiteness. In order to appraise the different facets of racialized beauty, Cheng presents different case studies like that of the Hottentot Venus and Alek Wek. In conclusion, Cheng finds that the politics of beauty and desirability are inextricably intertwined with fetishization:

“Beauty seems to offer itself as a quintessential object of fetishization. (After all, it seems to be beauty’s main job to affix the viewer—we call it enthrallment.) One might even say that, for many people, the perception of beauty is the mode of fetishization. Whether it is the beauty of commensurability (that which

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37 Kina, Laura. “Chimera: A Conversation on Mixed Race/Mixed Methods with Sita Kuratomi Bhaumik and Saya Woolfalk.” In *Queering Contemporary Asian American Art*, edited by KINA LAURA and BERNABE JAN CHRISTIAN, 152-62. SEATTLE; LONDON: University of Washington Press, 2017. Accessed December 14, 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvcwnszk.19>, 154.

38 Kina, 154.

39 Cheng, “The Melancholy of Race”, 49.

40 Cheng, 50.

41 Cheng, “The Melancholy of Race”, 54.

42 Ibid., 53.

constitutes the standard to be compared with) or the beauty of difference (that which is exotic, unique, and cannot be compared), beauty seems made for the service of incarnating the fetish".<sup>43</sup>

Thus, beauty is ultimately worth "everything and nothing" for women of color in America as a standard of beauty in the Western world is predicated upon whiteness, and yet means everything because cultural and societal beliefs hold that beauty can excuse difference, including racial difference.<sup>44</sup> This poses larger questions for the positionality of racialized and sexualized subjects as they straddle the boundary between subject and object, the differential and aspirational. Cheng points to the deep grief and ambiguity in which women of color exist within the United States. East-Asian American women constantly straddle being both the object of disdain and of desire, two elements that are not actually as disparate as they may seem.

Exploring the confluence between "acts of love and brutal excess," Saidiya Hartman writes about historiographical methods and the violence inflicted upon Black women in America through the institution of the archive.<sup>45</sup> She calls attention to the specific forms of sexualized and racialized violence that Black women faced throughout American history, a violence inflicted doubly so through first the initial events of bondage, enslavement, and rape and secondly by their erasure and dehumanization in the historical record/archive. Hartman notes that racist tropes emerged such as "a flagellant and a Hottentot. A sulky bitch. A dead negress. A syphilitic whore," much like aforementioned racial caricatures of Asian women.<sup>46</sup> In an attempt to reconstruct the narrative of Venus, a girl who only exists briefly in historical record as a murder victim in passing, Hartman reveals the limitations that conventional notions of history and historical research present to understanding the lives of women of color. She ends up choosing to not write any speculative narrative concerning Venus, as "to do so would have trespassed the boundaries of the archive".<sup>47</sup> Grappling with the question of how one may tell an impossible story, Hartman highlights that "the necessity of recounting Venus's death is overshadowed by the inevitable failure of any attempt to represent her. I think this is a productive tension and one unavoidable in narrating the lives of the subaltern, the dispossessed, and the enslaved".<sup>48</sup> Hartman's text specifically addresses the experience of Black women in America, but many of the core conclusions can be generalized to include other racialized women. Cheng cites the case study of the "22 Lewd Chinese Women" in which "a group of young women who were denied entry into the U.S. at the Port of San Francisco despite having proper travel documentation, because the immigration inspector thought they were prostitutes based on how they looked to him".<sup>49</sup> Little is known in the historical record about these women besides the fact that they were targeted for their appearance. This case epitomizes aforementioned themes of the melancholy of race, volatility of beauty, and violence of the historical archive. It is imperative to recall this type of historical silencing, loss, and marginalization when examining the narratives of East-Asian American women in the United States.

### 2.7 *Third World Cinema, Post-Coloniality, and Reversing the Historical Gaze*

Post-colonial studies is a broad discipline and critical modality that focuses on the legacy of European colonialism and imperialism and its effect on subjects of colonization. Critical thinkers that are foundational to this discipline include Edward Said, Franz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, and more. Trinh T Minh-Ha delineates her own experiences as an Asian-American artist and explores questions of hybridized identity and womanhood in a post-colonial setting in her influential work *Woman, Native, Other*. Her work as writer and multimedia filmmaker examines the methods and materials of artistic production for racialized and sexualized subjects. Minh-Ha identifies a "triple bind" for women writers and creators of color:

"She who 'happens to be' a (non-white) Third World member, a woman, and a writer is bound to go

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43 Cheng, Anne Anlin. "Wounded Beauty: An Exploratory Essay on Race, Feminism, and the Aesthetic Question." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 19, no. 2 (2000): 191-217. Accessed May 10, 2021. doi:10.2307/464426, 203.

44 Cheng, 205.

45 Hartman, Saidiya. "Venus in Two Acts." *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (2008): 1-14. muse.jhu.edu/article/241115, 5.

46 Hartman, 7.

47 Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts", 9.

48 Hartman, 12.

49 Cheng, "The Dehumanizing Logic", 1.

through the ordeal of exposing her work to the abuse of praises and criticisms that either ignore, dispense with, or overemphasize her racial and sexual attributes. Yet the time has passed when she can confidently identify herself with a profession or artistic vocation without questioning and relating it to her colon woman condition".<sup>50</sup>

Minh-Ha goes on to describe how women of color develop and inherit traditions of an oppositional and anti-colonial literary art culture. She challenges the distinct dichotomy between art for the elite and art for the masses, and instead describes the Third World doctrine of "an art for the people, by the people, and from the people".<sup>51</sup> To Minh-Ha, this is a way to challenge hegemonic orders and a way that art is imperative to speak for marginalized people.

The Third Cinema is a movement started by Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, which opposes (neo)colonialism, capitalism, and the hegemonic Hollywood system of film distribution and commodification.<sup>52</sup> Third Cinema showings aimed to generate a discursive viewing culture, which they believed would enable the transformation of society. Technical markers of the movement include improvised production and distribution techniques which deemphasized the Western individual-based author function.<sup>53</sup> Thus, many people involved in the production of these films were often amateur or occupied multiple roles, consistently prioritizing a collaborative approach in the creative process. Aiming for a decommercialized cinematic culture that inspires a revolution of the masses, the Third Cinema movement outlines a possibility for subjects of colonization to resist oppression through artistic practice:

"Third cinema is, in our opinion, the cinema that recognizes in that struggle the most gigantic cultural, scientific, and artistic manifestation of our time, the great possibility of constructing a liberated personality with each people as the starting point – in a word, the decolonization of culture."<sup>54</sup>

The legacy of Third cinema and other postcolonial examinations of oppressive structures live on in the legacy of many East-Asian American women artists today. In the later sections of *Woman, Native, and Other*, Minh-Ha connects the identity, histories, and art practice of women of color in a manner that cites her own intimate knowledge and also that of other women artists of color. She calls attention to the fact that in many cultures, genealogies of knowledge and ways of knowing come from the storytelling practice of women. While at some point, story teller became distinct from historian, which is distinct from artist based on an onus of truth, Minh-Ha problematizes this distinction and current conventions of truth:

"Managing to identify with History, history (with a small letter h), thus manages to oppose the factual to the fictional (turning a blind eye to the 'magicality' of its claims); the story-writer - the historian - to the story-teller. As long as the transformation, manipulations, or redistributions inherent in the collecting of events are overlooked, the division continues its course, as sure of its itinerary as it certainly dreams to be".<sup>55</sup>

In this analysis, Trinh T. Minh-Ha asserts through the reference of work of other women artists of color like Nikki Giovanni that and Theresa Hak Kyung that the artistic culture of a people and also a "manifestation of our collective historical needs".<sup>56</sup> Ultimately, what Minh-Ha envisions as a potential model of oppositional artistic culture for women of color is not art for art's sake or art for function's sake, but art for *our* sake. The "our" here is a collective group that questions colonial modes of thinking and those who inherit interconnected cultural forms of knowing, being, and producing. A vibrant art culture is thus vital to East-Asian American women in ways that

50 Minh-Ha, Trinh, T. *Woman, Native, Other*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1989, 6.

51 Minh-Ha, 13.

52 Solanas, Fernando, and Getino, Octavio. "TOWARD A THIRD CINEMA." *Cinéaste* 4, no. 3 (1970): 1.

53 Getino and Solanas, 10.

54 Getino and Solanas, 3.

55 Minh-Ha, *Native, Woman, Other*, 120.

56 Minh-Ha, 15.

exceed pure aestheticism.

Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictée* is cited by both Trinh T. Minh-Ha and Anne Anlin Cheng cite as a seminal subject of study in fields like "Asian-American, feminist, film, and post-colonial studies".<sup>57</sup> As a genre-defying text, *Dictée* is considered an post-colonial autobiographical memoir that invokes filmic and diasporic memory. As a Korean American, Cha immigrated to the United States at the age of 10 and would go on to attend UC Berkeley. She was an artist, writer, performer, filmmaker, and academic whose work defied active categorization. Cheng states that *Dictée* reimagines historical events and problematizes the archive, and highlights the multi-positionality of Asian-American women, who occupy "multiple positions of religious, colonial, and feminist subject(s)".<sup>58</sup> Written mostly in English and French with some Korean and Chinese throughout, Cha avoids translations that would be of convenience to the audience, which adds to the effect of disorientation. In borrowing techniques from photography and cinema, Cha generates the effect of an "impossibility of imaginary identification"<sup>59</sup>, and questions collective historical memory and truth. Cheng concludes the greatness of *Dictée* comes from its intertextuality and ability to question the dispossession of minoritized female subjects. Thus, the structural and artistic elements of the piece itself becomes a form of social discourse and hegemonic opposition. Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictée* is a vital example of how Third World methods can be used toward the liberational goals of East-Asian American women artists.

### 2.8 *Asian-American Internet Use: Visual Cultures and Empowerment*

Since the inception of the internet to the present day, Asian-Americans have been the most prolific users of the internet out of any ethnic group.<sup>60</sup> This proves that there is certainly no shortage of Asian-American internet users, and Nakamura<sup>61</sup> showcases the potential the internet holds for Asian-American women with her case study of alllookslike.com. This site critiques the stereotype of East-Asian homogeneity and problematizes the essentialization of race by asking users to guess the ethnicity of a random person shown to them on the screen. Subsequently, the test gives individuals a score rating the accuracy of the user in guessing ethnicity. The website had a comment section in which visitors could discuss their results, and many Asian-Americans held dialogues about what their identity meant to them. Nakamura highlights the discursive powers of the internet and social media, namely how its interactive nature leads to challenges to an essentialized Asian-American identity as imagined by white America.<sup>62</sup> In this sense, she finds the internet and its digital capabilities as key in challenging stereotypes and fighting oppression through community organizing and reflection. Thus, Nakamura terms Asian-Americans as "power users," or a "technological savvy consumer and knowledgeable user of personal computers and other consumer electronics"<sup>63</sup>:

The reason I wish to recast Asian Americans as power users of cyberspace is twofold: first, to do so acknowledges their presence as an online force. Indeed, numerous joke lists that circulate via e-mail attest to this self-identification of Asian Americans as avid users of the Internet. Second and more important, cyberspace functions as a vector for resistant cultural practices that allow Asian Americans to both use and produce cyberspace.<sup>64</sup>

Nakamura concludes that digital media's most powerful potential for Asian Americans is its ability to break down the distinctions of user and producer, as well as breaking rigid barriers and expectations of Asian American authenticity.<sup>65</sup>

57 Cheng, Anne Anlin. "Memory and Anti-Documentary Desire in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictée*." MELUS 23, no. 4 (1998): 119.

58 Cheng, Anne Anlin. "Memory and Anti", 121.

59 Cheng, 141.

60 Perrin, Andrew, and Maeve Duggan. "Americans Internet Access: Percent of Adults 2000-2015," 1

61 Nakamura, Lisa. "East Main Street: Asian American Popular Culture." (S. Dave, L. Nishime, & T. G. Oren, Eds.). NYU Press, 2005, 266.

62 Nakamura, Lisa, "East Main Street", 266.

63 Nakamura, Lisa, "East Main Street", 262.

64 Nakamura, Lisa, 262-263.

65 Nakamura, Lisa, 253.

In the same tradition of Nakamura, Ina Seethaler presents the early digital case study of the website “Big Bad Chinese Mama,” or BBCM for short. Her research illustrates an attempt by Asian-American women in the history of the early internet to combat racist and sexist stereotypes using a humor website. Founded in 2000 by Asian-American comedienne Kristina Wong, BBCM featured satirical images of Asian-American women that defy long held belief that they are “exotic, passive beings” and humanizes them as subjects with agency.<sup>66</sup> Seethaler’s research also includes an interview with Wong where she explains some of her motivations for starting such a website, the primary purpose being to fight forms of racialized and sexualized oppression.<sup>67</sup> She ultimately concludes that early forms of internet humor, which is still a mainstay on contemporary social media, is an effective tool for both community empowerment and outreach to a larger audience. Seethaler and Nakamura see the digital realm as one that transcends national boundaries and is capable of generating an active community based on the specific interests and concerns of Asian-American women.

In contrast to the early internet research of Nakamura and Seethaler, Anne Cong-Huyen illustrates the modern digital phenomenon of trending hashtags to display the power that digital forms like social media holds for Asian-American women. Cong-Huyen performs case studies of social media hashtags and how online organizers and academics utilize them to fight oppression through raising awareness. One such example is Twitter hashtag #transformDH, which was started by a group of activist academics (including Asian-American women) who were concerned about the systemic erasure of their communities in digital humanities research.<sup>68</sup> This hashtag promotes an expanded scope of digital humanities and widens access to academic resources so any member of Twitter can ostensibly contribute. Cong-Huyen similarly concludes that online organizing through trending hashtags meaningfully disrupts harmful beliefs about Asian-American women, invoking major transformations in scholarly activity and community formation.<sup>69</sup>

A concurrent perspective provided by Lisa Nakamura in her 2015 research presents the case study of the hashtag #thistweetcalledmyback. Founded initially to call attention to the unpaid digital labor performed by Asian-American women, it quickly expanded into a space where women of color at large described their online experiences.<sup>70</sup> Nakamura notes that many women of color spend their time educating and providing resources for bigoted people in digital spheres in an act of “calling out” to learn why their views are harmful. Digital education and organizing is not properly compensated because of the popular perception that little “actual” labor is being done. Nakamura expands on her own previous work on the internet as an ideal space for Asian-Americans and chooses in this research piece to highlight how digital spaces can also be a violent trap for Asian-American women. Here, Nakamura’s qualitative case study reveals the intersection of popular hashtags, informal discursive practices, and digital mobilization as crucial tools Asian-American women wield in their fight against oppression in digital spaces.

A pessimistic view of digital visibility and heightened representation of Asian-American women is presented by Eileen Boris, who discusses the rising popularity of East Asian-American women digital bloggers. She summarizes the work of Minh-Ha T. Pham on Asian-American female bloggers like Susie Lau and Aimee Song. Song and Lau enjoy millions of devoted internet followers accumulated across several social media platforms. The bloggers sell to their audience the image of ultimate ease and inclusion as they document their travels, purchases, and endless outfits. Boris notes that the bloggers “repurpose the stereotype of Asians as the model minority for a neoliberal time while continuing the devaluation of women’s work by making blogging seem ‘effortless’”.<sup>71</sup> The Asian-American woman blogger thus becomes a commodity, an image bought and sold to the masses. Boris disagrees with the ultimate conclusions of Cong-Huyen and Seethaler in that Boris envisions the digital sphere and heightened visibility of Asian-American women as a sort of trick mirror. Higher levels

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66 Seethaler, Ina. ““Big Bad Chinese Mama”: How Internet Humor Subverts Stereotypes about Asian American Women.” *Studies in American Humor*, New Series 3, no. 27 (2013), 130.

67 Seethaler, 133.

68 Cong-Huyen, Anne. “Asian/American and the Digital|Technological Thus Far.” *Verge: Studies in Global Asias* 1, no. 1 (2015): 105.

69 Cong-Huen, 107.

70 Nakamura, Lisa. “The Unwanted Labour of Social Media: Women of Colour Call Out Culture As Venture Community Management.” *New Formations*, vol. 86, no. 86, 2015, 273.

71 Boris, Eileen. “Fashion Works.” *Feminist Studies* 43, no. 1 (2017): 181.

of representation and visibility of Asian-American women, which is often considered an indication of a greater degree of racial equality, is not inherently useful towards the liberation of the larger Asian-American community. Paradoxically, Asian-American female digital participation can prove to be a hurdle in their own liberation. In summary, digital participation is not necessarily an inherently positive or negative tool. Thus, it is the methods in which Asian-American women use digital tools that can improve and build their communities, as well as counter discrimination. Seethaler, Cong-Hyun, Nakamura, and Boris would all agree that Asian-American women hold some degree of agency in digital spheres, and the exact means by which they utilize them will dictate how successfully they can fight racialized and gendered oppression. Examining the motivations and practices of Asian-American women artists and their relation to the digital sphere is a key aspect of my research.jew

### 2.9 *Existing Academic Interviews, Motivations of East-Asian-American Artists*

The diverse motivations of East-Asian American artists range from an intimate expression of highly personal identity to a larger societal commentary. Through careful examinations of multiple interviews of East-Asian American women artists by Ulfsdotter, Jew, Kina, and Soe,<sup>72</sup> a few patterns and trends become evident. Firstly, artist motivations can mostly be sorted into two main categories. It is important to note that many artists use one or more of these broad categories in the different works they produce, but I will limit my analysis with how they presented themselves and their pieces in each specific interview. One category of artist motivation includes the processing of one's own experiences as an Asian-American woman. This is exemplified by Jew's interview of Canyon Sam, a well-known East-Asian performance artist who states that her art allowed her to render visible to audiences the experiences of Asian-American women.<sup>73</sup> A second category of motivation includes posing an active challenge to the oppressed condition of Asian-American women in their own country. This is evident in Ulfsdotter's interview with Vivian Wenli Lin, a East-Asian American filmmaker and artist that has developed a "counter-cinema that challenges negative portrayals of marginalized women in the mainstream media, particularly those that contribute to social stigmatization, through the expressive potential of alternative voices".<sup>74</sup> In summary, research through interviews can reveal a detailed and nuanced understanding of an artist's work and motivations. What is evident in examining this range of interviews is a lack of East-Asian American women artists who are specifically focused on generating liberational work and promoting it through digital means. Additionally, the interviews mostly focus on artists who already have a prolific body of work and have enjoyed some mainstream recognition. As such, no comprehensive academic research exists that examines the intersection of the art and digital practice of emerging East-Asian American women artists.

## Section 3: Methodology

The research question for this inquiry is: "How do East Asian-American women artists generate an oppositional digital visual culture?" Based on my close examination of prior critical study and literature, I am hypothesizing that East Asian-American women artists take advantage of the archival, discursive, and viral capabilities of the digital sphere in order to generate and maintain an oppositional visual culture using their art. I intend to rely on primarily qualitative research methods like close reading, case studies, and interviews to complete my research.

My research question falls within the tradition of critical theory, cultural studies, feminist studies, and ethnic studies. To understand the ever-shifting contested positions of East-Asian American women artists in this

72 Jew, Kimberly May, Canyon Sam, Denise Uyehara, and Brenda Wong Aoki. "Perspectives on Asian American Performance Art: Contexts, Memories, and the Making of Meaning on Stage. An Interview with Canyon Sam, Denise Uyehara, and Brenda Wong Aoki." MELUS 36, no. 4 (2011).

73 Jew, Kimberly May, Canyon Sam, Denise Uyehara, and Brenda Wong Aoki. "Perspectives on Asian American Performance Art: Contexts, Memories, and the Making of Meaning on Stage. An Interview with Canyon Sam, Denise Uyehara, and Brenda Wong Aoki." MELUS 36, no. 4 (2011): 146.

74 "INTERVIEW: 'VISUALISING OUR VOICES' – HONG KONG SCHOLAR AND FILM DIRECTOR VIVIAN WENLI LIN IN CONVERSATION WITH BOEL ULFSDOTTER." In *Female Agency and Documentary Strategies: Subjectivities, Identity and Activism*, edited by Ulfsdotter Boel and Rogers Anna Backman, 125-34. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018. Accessed December 14, 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1tqx9f7.15.>, 126.

dynamic realm, I intend to deploy mostly qualitative research methods including critical textual analysis, case study, and interview. This type of qualitative research is used frequently to “study social processes or the reasons behind human behavior”.<sup>75</sup> Case studies will be the organizing unit of my research, and each case study will consist of close reading/textual analysis of the artworks of an East-Asian American woman artist as well as an interview with her (as availability hopefully allows). There is a long established tradition in critical theory/cultural studies that relies upon qualitative research methods like close reading as well as interview. Scholars like Stuart Hall, who belongs to the Birmingham Cultural Studies School, believe that interview challenges and allows room for reflection for their subjects, leading to deeper and previous unanticipated insights.<sup>76</sup> This is because critical theory researchers are quite cognisant that existing power structures very much shape how knowledge is produced, as well as who produces most of this knowledge.<sup>77</sup>

My general methodological approach will consist of in-depth interviews with four East Asian-American women artists. Other useful primary resources to potentially supplement primary interviews will be autobiographical material and interviews conducted by others. They allow the subjects of my research to explain some of the motivations behind their own art themselves and directly speak to the intentions and processes involved in their work’s conception. Artists can also elaborate on why they have chosen digital methods to create, showcase and/or promote their work, as well as the nuances of having such a digital presence. It is extremely difficult to translate the complex experiences of East-Asian American women into quantitative data points, and as such qualitative methods that are able to encapsulate this complexity and generate a broader understanding are most appropriate. This is a sentiment shared by Tsene, who found that interview was a method that allowed for quick data collection as well as an unearthing of previously undetected elements.<sup>78</sup> A potential issue may be that the particular artist I am interested in interviewing will either not respond or consent to being interviewed. I will have a backup pool of five artists to contact if this occurs. My research sample will be selected by a process of convenience, which is the best choice in this scenario as I will interview those who give consent first. Though it is often considered a biased sampling method, I will attempt to mitigate this by including a diverse pool of final interviewees in terms of age, background, ethnicity, and preferred art medium.

Particular attention should also be drawn to non-response to call attention to the voices not represented in research. In the context of a convenience sample, priority should be given to people who presumably will be open and honest in the interview process and are not made uncomfortable by the situation, as that may skew the final conclusions of the research.<sup>79</sup> I can supplement interviews with other primary sources with a number of traditional and non-traditional methods. Traditional methods include works that exist in a physical medium and archives. Many artists have published personal manifestos and other autobiographical work that can be accessed in this way. More unconventional methods include looking through YouTube and other social platforms to find recordings of lecture and /interview conversation series, as well as searching through digital forums to find commentary directly from artists themselves. Hutchinson discusses the necessity of digital media methods in qualitative social science research concerning Internet-based data, which extends the scope of study to incorporate “communicative and social media platforms”.<sup>80</sup> These multimedia methods will prove necessary in gathering key establishing information to answer my research question. However, interviews will be the prioritized mode of research.

The selection for interview candidates will be largely based on convenience, but special care should be taken to represent East-Asian American women artists of different ages, nationalities, operating regions, artistic practices, and educational levels. For the initial search, I will focus on East-Asian American women artists that have some sort of digital presence, and use their platform to share their work in some capacity. I will message

75 Stenius, K., Mäkelä, K., Miovský, M., & Gabrhelík, R. How to Write Publishable Qualitative Research. In Stenius K., Miovský M., Babor T., Pates R., O’Reilly J., & Candon P. (2017), *Publishing Addiction Science: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 156.

76 Winter, R. The Nonconformist Practices of Stuart Hall: Cultural Studies and the Politics of Emancipation. *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* (2018), 367.

77 Kincheloe, JL & McLaren, PL. “Rethinking critical theory and qualitative research.” In NK Denzin and YS Lincoln (eds.) *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (1994), 139.

78 Tsene, L. Qualitative multi-method research: Media social responsibility. *SAGE Research Methods Cases* (2016), 5.

79 Turner, D, III. Qualitative Interview Design: A Practical Guide for Novice Investigators. *The Qualitative Report* (2010), 757.

80 Hutchinson, J. An introduction to digital media research methods: how to research and the implications of new media data, *Communication Research and Practice* (2016, 2:1, 1-6, DOI: 10.1080/22041451.2016.1155307, 2.

them via email asking if they would consent to a research interview, with a note that they can refuse for any reason, especially if they do not for some reason self-identify as an East-Asian American woman artist. I will also conduct pilot testing, which is recommended by Turner, which entails running through the research questions with volunteers with similar backgrounds as those who will be ultimately interviewed.<sup>81</sup> This is to ensure the questions will be fair and properly targeted towards answering my research questions. I presumably will not run into any major issues with code of ethics or power relations between myself and my subjects as I myself am an East-Asian American woman. However, this is not to discount the dynamics of class, immigration status, and other potential differences that me and my subjects will have. I will do my best to act as a neutral party and allow the subject of my research to speak directly to audiences. This is another reason that an interview is ideal in presenting the exact words of the research subject to a wider audience. In formulating my research questions, it is difficult to completely plan the questions for open-ended interviews ahead of time. However, I will begin the interviews with a set of 26 standardized questions that will lead to more specific follow ups or probing questions. In terms of the general themes of the questions, I will maintain six main categories of questions I will ask all of my interview candidates: basic demographic questions, specific questions about the art pieces they have sent me in advance, the history of their digital use (including the present and future, their oppositional artistic practice, their digital artistic practice, and reactions to the recent rise in anti-Asian hate crimes. I will ensure that they are open-ended and neutrally worded, with one question posed at a time.<sup>82</sup> Based on their response to these base questions, I will then introduce follow-up questions as recommended by Kvale for the interviewee to elaborate on the answer they provided to search for additional insights. Probing questions will also serve to enhance the depth of a concept and add additional dimensions to examine.<sup>83</sup>

I also wish to include detailed visual/textual analysis of the work itself in order for the content in question to be clearer to my readers. I will ask in advance of the interview for the artists to send three to five key works that they feel are representative of their artistic oeuvre. Audience reception is another specialized focus of cultural studies theorists because of the insight that it can provide into how media texts are shaping societal views.<sup>84</sup> In this way, I also place myself as the researcher as part of the artist's audience, hopefully unearthing deeper questions in this process. This is also a helpful preparation activity for interviewing the artists themselves, as it is extremely difficult to conduct in-depth interviews without knowing their work intimately. In the close analysis, I will look for elements of opposition, relation to the digital sphere, and how the work is or isn't representational of East-Asian American women subjects. The bulk of this close reading should be finished ideally before I interview my targeted East-Asian women artists to better formulate and guide the direction of the interview. During the interview, I will ask for recording consent and use a transcription service called Otter.ai that automatically notes the most popular terms. These recordings will include video as non-verbal cues are essential in interpreting a deeper layer of meaning. After the interview is complete, I will compile both the close reading of texts and interviews into complete case studies of an artist and their work. As discussed by Stenius et al., proving the validity and reliability of data is much more abstracted in qualitative research, so one of the ways in which to ensure this besides the precautions I have already taken which include a decently large and varied interview pool is to make sure my results are repeatable by another researcher and making clear my methodology.<sup>85</sup> It is difficult to make larger generalizations of East-Asian American women artists in the digital sphere without first understanding their work on their own terms. I will hold off on making larger conclusions and forming generalized analysis until I finish all of my case studies/interviews, which should emerge naturally. After these are complete, I will code data into larger and more generalizable categories to present my conclusion. In transcripts, I will look for key terms across interviews and identify key common sentiments in order to form larger categories and theories. I will also pay attention to any key divergences among the artists that may represent a challenge to larger patterns. I also plan on picking out and describing specific digital activities that make up a larger oppositional art practice, like resharing posts or having a public account for example. These categories are very hard to anticipate in advance, and doing so may skew the results of the research. In summary, my research methodology of qualitative open

81 Turner, *Qualitative Interview Design*, 757.

82 Turner, *Qualitative Interview Design*, 758.

83 Kvale, S. *Interviews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks: Sage (1996), 134.

84 Winter, *The Nonconformist Practices*.

85 Stenius et al., "How to Write", 161.

ended-interview as well as close reading compiled into case studies of East-Asian American artists is suitable to answer my research question because it follows the tradition of other cultural studies and social science scholars, is designed in a manner that is repeatable and transparent, minimizes the harmful power relations between me and my subjects, and collects a sufficient range of comparable data.

## Section 4: Analysis Chapter

### 4.1 *Key theme findings*

In total, I interviewed four East-Asian American women artists about their oppositional digital art practice for approximately an hour-and-a-half per session. Drawing from post-colonial and Third World scholars like Trinh T Minh-Ha and Anne Anlin Cheng, I define oppositional artistic practice as work that challenges Western conventions of race, value, structure, gender, and beauty, among other elements. My central focus in my research is to explore how digital social media technologies have generated new possibilities and forms for emancipatory art practices. In visibilizing and voicing the realities for marginalized groups, the subjects generate a unique digital artistic ecosystem. Sophia Terazawa, Jiasi Liu, Rina Lu, and Nusheen Ghaemi hail from diverse backgrounds, ethnicities, artistic disciplines, geographical areas, and more. To provide a basis for understanding underlying themes, a brief biography and close analysis of each artist's work will be presented, as well as a general tracing of their collective early digital experiences.

**Key themes that emerged about their oppositional artistic practice include the archival, discursive, and voyeuristic capabilities of digital spheres. Subjects also described their interaction with visibility, voicing, and digital presence.** Themes were organized into these general categories based on their complex relation with social media, and the most frequent digital features discussed or elaborated upon. Research participants expressed their use of digital media technology as universally paradoxical, a double-edged sword that can be wielded to fight oppression or gain inspiration, but also an active barrier in the artistic process. Artists thus occupy a negotiated position in the digital sphere in which they rely on various social media forms for connections, opportunities, and creative communities. At the same time, the digital sphere presents the possibility for creative burnout, distraction, harassment, and exploitation. Additionally, the permanence of digital media seems to have fostered a greater pursuit of the ephemeral and provoked a particular neurotic anxiety surrounding the form in the subject's artistic practice. The current media ecosystem as outlined by Nakamura, Seethaler, and Cong-Huyen all indicate a shift from traditional to social media and show how the integration of a multiplicity of media networks offer new possibilities for racialized and sexualized subjects to creatively challenge oppressive structures.

### 4.2 *Artist Profiles and Work*

For proper contextualization of more general conclusions about East-Asian American women artists and their digital oppositional practice, brief profiles of each artist along with formal analysis of their selected work will be presented. These profiles are intended to contextualize the artist's answers in the fabric of a comparative analysis that compares and contrasts the diverse experiences of East-Asian American artists. They will henceforth be referred to in later sections of the analysis chapter by last name.

#### **Jiasi Liu**

Jiasi Liu is a 23-year-old Chinese-American who was born in China and immigrated to Montreal, Canada at the age of two. As an individual who has lived in three different countries, her work contains themes of diasporic, transnational, and collective memory. She is currently based in the Bay Area, but is anticipating an imminent move back to Montreal. Primarily working in visual media, she considers herself to be an artist situated in the digital sphere. The digital sphere referenced in my research refers to social media sites and other communities of a social nature, which also includes the use of digitally based media in the creative process. Examples include editing software like Adobe Creative Suite or iMovie. She frequently combines photographic elements shot on film or iPhone with digital art produced on Adobe Photoshop. Occasionally, she also works with hand drawn physical media which she incorporates into her digital-based works. She prefers digital platforms for both creating and circulating her art, with the primary exhibition site being her public Instagram account, @villagehealer.

Liu's self-portrait series titled "autoportrait diptyque" explores conceptions of selfhood and questions of East-Asian American female identity. The French title translated is "diptych self-portrait," which seems to be both a nod to Liu's diasporic experience immigrating from China to Montreal as well as a suggestion for how the pieces might be read together. A diptych is typically defined as two panels attached by a hinge, which may be open and shut like a book. The piece below features a feminine, East Asian coded figure with pale yellowish skin and dark black hair. Notably, the visage of this central figure is missing and seems to be represented by an abstract and dripping blue void. Missing key facial features, the portrait conjures the trope of the universal "yellow woman," a figure that has often been sexualized, marginalized, and erased in the context of American imperialism. Recounted by Wei Tchen and Yeats,<sup>86</sup> the Western fear of a "Yellow Peril" relegates East-Asian women to devious, sexual, and submissive beings in the popular imagination. Cheng's theory of the melancholy of race is invoked, as a sorrowful invisibility in the central yellow skinned figure's features is apparent.<sup>87</sup> The melancholia of being hyper visible and invisible simultaneously manifests in the body through absence and erasure. In representing herself with a lack of distinct facial features, Liu seems to universalize her image as a synecdoche for East-Asian American women as a whole. In some ways, this work is as much a community portrait as a personal one. Liu plays upon Western conceptions of blues and purples as cool colors, deepening the viewer's sense of melancholy. This stylistic choice is an inversion of a typical "oriental" color palette that typically features bright reds and golds, which are emblematic of good fortune and celebration in East-Asian cultures.<sup>88</sup> The companion piece to the blue-toned portrait features the same general composition and central Asian feminine figure. However, this iteration features warmer colors, a backdrop distortion, and fully fleshed visage. The synthesis of hand-drawn elements and digital noise distortions seem to imply that the central figure exists in a hybridized space. Further evidence that suggests this is the contrast between the faded overlay of English text over the central figure's face and the marbled orientalized backdrop. Liu utilizes a painting from the Chinese "Shanshui" style, a traditional genre that includes many landscapes and nature scenes. There is an overall harmony in disparate and opposite elements in the two piece series generated by the opposite color schemes, variations on the same backdrop, and iterations of absence and presence in the same face. The pieces in conversation paint a larger picture of the experiences of many East-Asian American women and the multiplicity of cultural influences that inform their visual universe. Liu's work questions the role of the individual in the larger community of East-Asian American women, and poses questions of cultural heritage and belonging in liminal diasporic space. She shows the wounds of expectations of beauty through the juxtaposition of conventionally "Western vs. Eastern" elements as well as other binaries of color and form, she dispels the myth of East-Asian woman's positionality as dualistic in diasporic space. In Liu's world, she is not forced to pick between opposites, but exists beyond restrictive binary. The experience of the "yellow woman" is not only full of grief, but also of joy: not restricted to being a Western or Eastern subject. In presenting visual contradictions and polarities, Liu draws attention to the complexities of East-Asian American womanhood and the melancholia that comes with being on the periphery of dominant institutions.

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86 Wei, Tchen John Kuo, and Dylan Yeats. *Yellow Peril!: an Archive of Anti-Asian Fear*. London: Verso, 2014.

87 Cheng, "The Melancholy of Race".

88 Chow, "The Development Of", 288.

**Figure 1:** Jiasi Liu, *autoportrait diptyque* (2018), Digital image

### Sophia Terazawa

Sophia Terazawa is a 31-year-old Japanese-Vietnamese American woman who was born and raised in Texas. Currently based in Minneapolis, Minnesota, she is a performance artist, poet, and (anti)filmmaker who employs a cross-disciplinary art practice in her digital platform of choice, YouTube. As a recent graduate from the University of Arizona MFA program in Poetry, she is currently working on her debut poetry collection titled *Winter Phoenix*. Terazawa is unique in the sense that she is the only interviewed artist for which digital platforms are not the preferred media to create and share her work. Her medium of choice would be print, but she enjoys channeling digital media as a form of artistic play. Her lack of social media presence is by choice, with her only direct digital presence being her own website and a YouTube channel. She prefers YouTube to share her digital media-based works, which consist mostly of video and filmic materials. In Terazawa's case, YouTube is her only personally managed artistic connection besides her own website to the digital sphere. The platform of YouTube itself makes Terazawa's work generally accessible to the masses, and she states that while she has considered monetization on this platform, she has rejected doing so, finding that planning any facet of her filmmaking "takes away the fire and energy" she has for a film. She finds that while the filmmakers she admires most don't necessarily choose to post on YouTube, she likes the medium for its "immediacy" and the degree of control she has over her work. In the process of self-publication on YouTube, she retains agency over her own voice as she invites external viewers in, just for a moment, to her artistic universe.

Described by Terazawa as "gestures" and sketches," her poetry films represent spontaneous moments of artistic expression. Citing inspiration from works like *Dictée* by Theresa Hak Kyung Cha and the films of Trinh T Minh-Ha, Terazawa generally characterizes her work as "instinctual" as opposed to "logical". Shot on mostly quotidian consumer electronics like the iPhone 6 and older digital vestiges like VHS and webcam, her poetry films invite viewers into very intimate and vulnerable moments in Terazawa's life. Her improvised production tactics, incorporation of spoken word, and self-composed soundtracks are reminiscent of the larger Third World Cinema movement as described by Solanas and Getino, which champions a revolutionary counter-cinema that rivals the polished and flashy cinematic conventions of Hollywood and the single author function.<sup>89</sup>

Terazawa rejects the traditional conception, label, and logics of the Western individualist filmmaker and views her poetry films as a "voyeuristic playroom" into her larger art practice as a performance artist and poet. She is the director, producer, composer, and editor for most of her works, including *REVERSING THE GAZE*. Terazawa's work is also theoretically aligned with the goals of Third Cinema, dealing with themes of post-

89 Solanas, Fernando, and Getino, Octavio. "TOWARD A THIRD CINEMA." *Cinéaste* 4, no. 3 (1970): 2.

coloniality, resistance to imperialism, and a rejection of notions of respectability.<sup>90</sup> *REVERSING THE GAZE* is a nesting doll of a work as the viewer's perspective is a recording of a recording. The grainy and out of focus perspective garners a sense of disorientation as the recording screen of an old camcorder is visible for the duration of the 3:26 work. These stylistic choices are aligned with Third Cinema goals to "decolonize culture," which is accomplished by subverting notions of quality production and thus rejecting bourgeois conceptions of market value.<sup>91</sup>

Superimposed on the screen at the beginning of *REVERSING THE GAZE* are yellow subtitles that elucidate the words of the poem Terazawa whispers, which composes the audio of the film. Hailed as another revolutionary technique by the Third Cinema movement, combination of spoken word narration and visuals are optimal to further revolutionary goals: "the possibilities of the image, adequate dosage of concepts, language and structure that flow naturally from each theme, and counterpoints of audiovisual narration achieve effective results".<sup>92</sup> There is a layered audio effect that involves Terazawa's words doubled and superimposed on top of each other, which enhances audience disorientation. Dealing with the phenomenon of the violent white gaze upon East-Asian American women, the spoken word features lines like "Do you see me? I used to be white//so white, in fact, that it filled me in a way that my Japanese... and Vietnamese... parents could not satisfy" (*REVERSING THE GAZE*). Quite literally reversing the gaze, Terazawa's eyes are turned defiantly towards the audience as portions of her body and shaky close-up shots of her face and eyes are visible. Mounting a challenge to the fetishistic colonial gaze upon "yellow women," she generates an impossibility of identification by rejecting to establish clarity of focus and utilizing abrupt jump cuts of disembodied scenes and body parts. Similar to the works of Cha and Minh-Ha, her poetry films are a form of intimate, ephemeral existence that challenge preconceived notions and objectivity of the "yellow woman" through their embrace of Third Cinema and decolonial filmic techniques. As "From the Empire, To Dirt" flashes upon the screen at the end of the film, Terazawa calls to the audience for a revolutionary new world and death to the lingering remnants of colonialism and oppression.

**Figure 2:** Still from Sophia Terazara's poetry film *REVERSING THE GAZE* (2015)



90 Getino and Solanas, 4.

91 Getino and Solanas, "Toward a Third", 5.

92 Getino and Solanas, 8.

## Rina Lu

Rina Lu is a 21-year-old Chinese-American woman who was born and raised in Pennsylvania and is currently based in the Bay Area. As of 2020, the Asian population makes up only 3.4% of the state's total population according to the US Census Bureau. Hailing from a smaller, majority white East Coast city, her work is an exploration of Asian identity and frequent invisibility that East-Asian American women face in society. She prefers digital platforms for both creating and circulating her art, with the primary exhibition site being her public Instagram account, @riqlu. She describes herself as mostly a video-based artist, though she hesitates to commit to a single artistic label as she finds this designation limiting. Her work as a Computer Science and Cognitive Science student often blends with her artistic practice, and she is familiar with several programming languages. Her work frequently features visual juxtapositions, ephemerality, and exploration of the prismatic properties of light. While she states that she does not intentionally set out to challenge preconceived notions about herself and East-Asian American women as a whole, she finds that her online persona and more casual Story based art practice is a way for her to express creativity through her identity as a Chinese-American woman. Starting always with inspiration from her daily life like a retreat to Lake Tahoe or an optometrist appointment, Lu's visual universe is equal parts experimental, organic, and digital.

Digital processing and multi-layered works are a notable feature of Lu's artistic practice. Nakamura's work with digital space as a site of resistance is invoked as she sees these locales as more than a site of pure consumption, but also production for Asian-American subjects.<sup>93</sup> Often incorporating visual, tactile, textual, and auditory elements, she makes use of sticker and text functions that allow for the superimposition of text or music tracks, which can be touched and interacted with. A tap on a musical track sticker on a work like *december 29th, 2020* may bring a viewer to a Spotify track or playlist, which highlights the interconnectedness of various digital media in her work. In most of her Instagram Story posts, Lu is the sole creator in terms of the image creation and overall composition. Her digital art explores the possibilities of the Instagram Stories function and the capability it holds for the documentation of passing time. The Story function of Instagram is designed to feature a post for precisely 24 hours, after which it can only be made visible again if the user chooses to feature it on their profile in the "highlights" section. There are many iterations of this similar feature across platforms like Snapchat, Facebook, and Twitter. Time in this case is both paradoxically private and collective, as the Stories posts serve as both a public facing marker and a privately held memory residing in a digital cache. This digital process enables Lu to exercise agency as a subject who has the ability to generate her own narrative as opposed to being an object of study by the West, a capability not offered to generations of women of color in America.<sup>94</sup> Thus, Lu seeks to challenge popular Western distinctions between art/non-art and enshrine her experiences as a Chinese-American woman as a form of simultaneous art practice and self-visibility historiographical process.

Drawing on the legacy of other East-Asian American conceptual artists like On Kawara, whose *Today* series consists of 3000 paintings that consist minimally of each day's date, Lu seeks to expand digital imaginations and question the boundary between life and art.<sup>95</sup> This digital reimagining of the epistolary form invites followers of @riqlu to take a glimpse into her daily life, and defies typical Western and Hollywood values of art production by using colloquial equipment. Lu generates an artistic and personal narrative through what could be construed as digital diary entries through the medium of Instagram Story. Lu enjoys that stories can capture an "in the moment" artistic gesture from her life. Ephemeral media forms subvert commodified consumption of art, rejecting market valuation and trade, which is a way in which digital capabilities can expand upon Third Cinema doctrines of developing a revolutionary counter-culture.<sup>96</sup> *april 28th, 2019 & december 29th, 2020* are representative works in her larger Instagram Stories series. The former work blends one of Lu's tangible artworks, a piece of jewelry that combines silver chain and the body of a crab with digital artistic processing in the form of text overlay that reads "fyi i did not kill any crabs/i am not a crab killer/i am a vegetarian". Juxtapositions that include the organic and synthetic, permanent and ephemeral, and crafted and spontaneous are on full display in *april 18th, 2019*. In the ritual of displaying her art, Lu synthesizes aspects of autobiographical storytelling with tangible art pieces. The parts thus constitute a total piece that transcends self-revelatory narrative and a physical aesthetic creation.

93 Nakamura, Lisa, "East Main Street", 263.

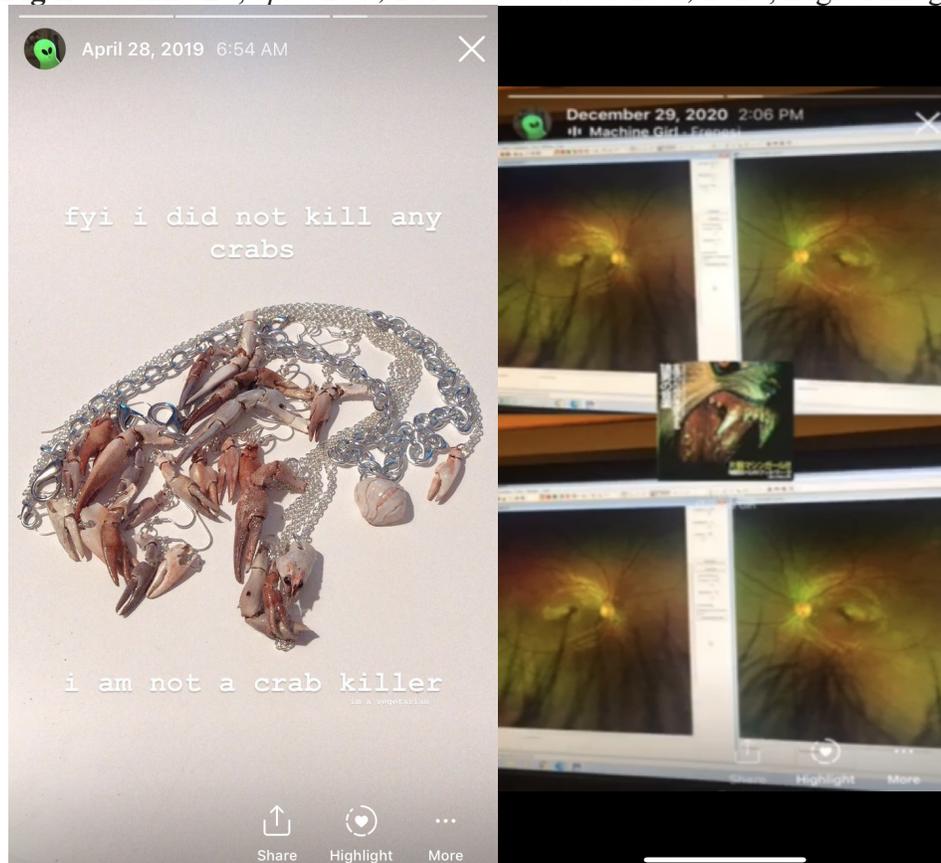
94 Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts".

95 Jew et al., "Perspectives on Asian America", 149.

96 Getino and Solanas, "Toward a Third", 7.

This process is reminiscent of the writings of Trinh T Minh-Ha, who finds that a storytelling tradition is both lived by and passed through generations of women, pointing to an artistic process that is both representative and constituted by the storyteller.<sup>97</sup> The audience has a dual role in spectatorship as they are implicated in both the process of narrative historical documentation as well as artistic creation. Lu's particular hybridized digital practice attempts to break cycles of absence and the silencing of East-Asian American Women in Western historical canon as she documents her life on Instagram.

**Figure 3:** Rina Lu, *april 28th, 2019 & december 29th, 2020*, Digital image



### Nusheen Ghaemi

Nusheen Ghaemi is a 21-year-old Chinese/Iranian American woman who was born and raised in New York City and is currently based in the Bay Area. She is a student studying Art History and minoring in Chemistry. As a native of Brooklyn, she has always been surrounded by East-Asian and wider multicultural influences, which are frequently reflected in her work. She considers herself a multimedia artist that prefers digital platforms for circulating her art, with the primary exhibition site being her private Instagram account, @\_\_nusheen. As a person of mixed ethnicity, she enjoys incorporating her varied cultural heritage into her art and uses it as an exploratory tool. Her work combines her love of craft and tangible artforms, namely crochet, with the hybrid methods of digital collage, including video work. Elements of physical, craft-based media are superimposed on digital images and platforms in Ghaemi's work. She enjoys placing diverse craft projects in conversation with digital vignettes from her life. Her process began with consideration of how to translate and exhibit her crochet pieces in external artistic publications, whether digital or print. Ghaemi found the method of scanning or product photography almost "not enough," and thus took an additive approach in combining physical and digital media to make what she perceived to be a more legitimate and attractive art piece. Overall, Ghaemi's digital artworks possess a craft/DIY sensibility that is comfortable with fluid boundaries, whether physical or conceptual.

As seen in *gothtober*, Ghaemi's multicolored crochet installations can be seen dangling overhead from the ceiling in playfully draped ribbons. The medium of crochet invokes references to older forms of craft throughout

97 Minh-Ha, *Native, Woman, Other*, 126.

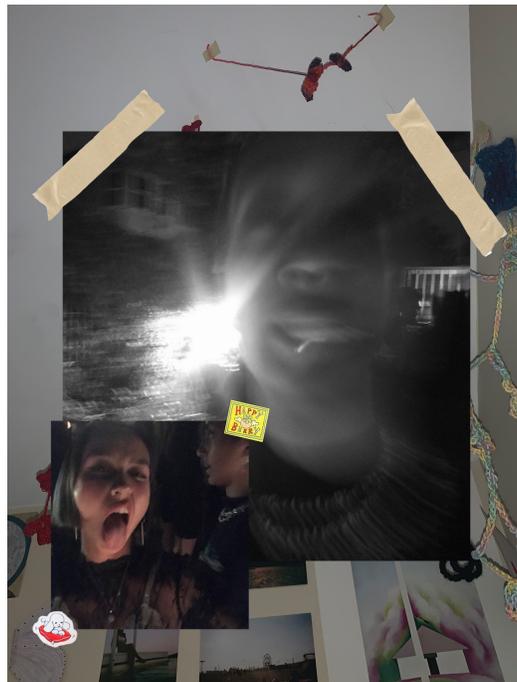
history, of which many pieces are rationalized and relegated to the designation of artifact rather than art, especially by Western anthropologists studying Second and Third World cultures. Trinh T Minh-Ha sees this denigration and devaluation of native cultures and artforms as key to generating narratives of inferiority and dehumanization of colonized subjects.<sup>98</sup> The physicality of Ghaemi's crafted works is juxtaposed with the digitally edited nature of the photo that renders the work visible. Thus, a sense of doubled labor is invoked through firstly the act of crocheting, and secondly through the layers of digital manipulation including that of photography and editing comprising the overall visual composition. It is interesting to note the juxtaposition but also the similarities between the two gendered forms of labor. Ghaemi highlights the fact that people readily view works with tangible form as requiring labor, yet failing to see the labor process behind digital or social media based works. Crochet and crafting have been long stereotyped and economically devalued as women's labor, as is the digital work done by women online in "calling out" and "educating" as recounted by Nakamura (2015). The space depicted in *gothtober* feels intimate and personal, implying perhaps a poster-studded bedroom as seen in the back wall. Playful stickers punctuate the corners of the superimposed photos, conjuring youthful nostalgia as well as making visible the imperfect and spontaneous processes of making art. Masking tape is visible in both the background adhering the crochet, but also in the foreground seemingly holding and displaying central images, including a portrait of Ghaemi herself on the bottom left. In her considerations of self-representation and identity, Ghaemi considers her art an expression of both her Chinese and Iranian culture, and often ponders how her audience may be perceiving these identities through her work. Ghaemi, like many other East-Asian American women, is constantly bombarded with inquiries concerning where she is from or her ethnic background. Much like the mixed-race Asian-American artists interviewed by Laura Kina,<sup>99</sup> she rejects the essentialization and gatekeeping of the Asian-American identity through physical appearance or any other means. The expression on her face in the self-portrait is one of playful and irreverent defiance as she rejects traditional conceptions of what an East-Asian woman must look, sound, and act like. Ultimately, Ghaemi's work evokes the dynamic interplay between the physical and digital worlds, and challenges the undervalued labor of women of color that persists in both spheres.

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98 Minh-Ha, *Native, Woman, Other*, 58.

99 Kina, "Chimera: A Conversation", 154.

**Figure 4:** Nusheen Ghaemi, *hannah & gothtober*, Digital image



### 4.3 Artist History of Digital Involvement

“Thinking back on it now it’s just so embarrassing. It’s so funny. I think that’s where I started to develop a persona. I would develop this idea, not just voice but develop like a whole way of performing on the internet. I would interact with people, a lot like I remember making really close friendships on Xanga, not necessarily writers but just other people who are interested in similar things. My Space was different, I would remember experimenting more with the way I looked in images. And I would say that it also kind of put me into a space where I’ve met a lot of darkness, and other people on the internet, and it was the

first time I became aware of myself as an Asian woman, a very young Asian woman on the internet in front of specifically like predators or men. And I think I developed a kind of other persona” -Sophia Terazawa

The interviewed artists had a spectrum of early experiences and encounters with the digital sphere. They ranged from more private to fully public, foundational to disastrous, euphoric to demoralizing. Subjects were asked about their initial memories involving the digital sphere and associated social communities. All subjects noted that their early experiences were prominently marked by slower, clunky technological equipment. Terazawa noted that her mother had to “wait for the fax machine and punch in a code” everytime she wanted to use the computer, and Liu noted that she did not even have access to a computer or internet connection until middle school. Lu remarked that the more primitive technology required more creativity and innovation on her part. Liu, Terazawa, Lu, and Ghaemi all noted that their artistic production was higher in terms of volume in the earlier days of the internet (early 2000’s-2010’s), though they did not consider what they were doing “art” until they reflected retrospectively. This relates to Lisa Nakamura’s central thesis that the digital labors/activities of women, especially women of color, are sorely undervalued and invalidated frequently on online spheres.<sup>100</sup> In addition to the undervaluation of artistic production, it often fell upon the women themselves to navigate the murky waters of the internet. Early moderation efforts were insufficient to protect research subjects from the brunt of racialized and sexualized harassment, including through private messages and email. For all four artists, it seems like the moment of realization that they were making art and performing a type of labor came when they were thrust upon a larger social media community like Myspace, Tumblr, or Instagram. Here, the artists were exposed to a huge volume of artistic images, and thus began to participate in the image circulation modeled on the social platforms that they had access to.

Microblogging platforms like Myspace and Tumblr were popular among the interviewees, with every subject having at least one microblog account at some point in their earlier life. Many recalled developing online personas or being a part of artistic or fan based communities. Though subjects recounted early encounters with racialized and sexualized harassment, they also noted that online personas could to some degree be as anonymous or public as they wanted, and that sometimes fickle interplay between the two was a key factor in early formation of identity and artistic practice. Subjects like Lu and Ghaemi stated that on sites like Tumblr, other users “didn’t necessarily know” that they were East Asian-American women, and they were thus able to avoid racist and sexist harassment to some degree. In their case, they were not able to fully pinpoint a moment in which they gained consciousness as an Asian woman online, either having a pre-existing Asian identity formed from having similar individuals around them or resisting disclosure of demographic information on digital sites. Terazawa and Liu have clearer recollections of moments in which their identity as an Asian-American women became evident to them in digital spheres. Terazawa remembers interacting with older men on the internet at the age of 14 or 15 and cites that as a foundational time in which her identity as an Asian-American woman began to develop, as many of these “really really gross men” would expose her to or inflict forms of racialized and sexualized violence. At about the same age, Liu remembers similar harassment received in the forms of unsolicited direct messages from random older men on Instagram, which she often deleted shortly after receiving. It is clear that even in the digital sphere, Asian-American female subjects were often made painfully aware of their identity before they were old enough to fully understand what was happening to them.

Microblogging platforms were not only an outlet for interacting with a larger community and sharing art, but also provided key resources for learning how to use different tools and platforms to create. Ghaemi remembers that Tumblr and YouTube taught her how to use Photoshop and digital art software, which came naturally to her at a young age since she was “kind of always online anyway”. Lu remembers that humor and jest informed a large part of her early digital production. Working with social media add-ons like Facebook Graffiti and Jibjab, she enjoyed creating freely and making things that she and her friends found humorous. This reinforces the findings of Seethaler, who concludes that internet humor is a key tool for empowerment and resistance on social media for Asian-American women.<sup>101</sup> Liu notes that transitioning from Tumblr to Instagram in her high school years provided her more exposure to arts and artists in general, though she started feeling like the digital visual creative

100 Nakamura, “The Unwanted Labour”.

101 Seethaler, “Big Bad Chinese”, 133.

sphere was “overwhelming and oversaturated”. Similar sentiments were expressed by Ghaemi and Lu, stating that their associations with social media began to include “pressure and anxiety” starting in their early to late teens. Much of their early digital activities and experiences have been formative for the current digital oppositional art practice of Liu, Terazawa, Lu, and Ghaemi, and initial observations continue to endure in considerations of the present and future.

#### 4.4 *Digital space as (negotiated) archive*

“I gravitate towards [Instagram Stories] because, also I think the impermanence of it also feels more comfortable to me. With posting it feels like something very permanent that’s going to be there for a while and like something then that I need to put more thought into versus with my story... And then yeah after 24 hours it’s gone and I don’t necessarily have to think about it again or what it is saying about my presence. With posting then you also think, how am I curating my feed in general, how are people coming onto my profile like seeing this whole thing about me?” -Nusheen Ghaemi

The increasing prevalence of digital media has augmented the relationship between East-Asian American women artists and how they construct a public-facing body of representation works. How do East-Asian American women approach the process of curating an artistic social media profile that has both public and private aspects? How do various digital features shape how artists use social media to address silencing and the violence of erasure? Saidaya Hartman’s work highlights that for a huge portion of history, Black and other women of color were stripped of their ability to control their own historical and artistic narratives in America.<sup>102</sup> As highlighted in the formal analysis section, each artist gains the agency for narrative self representation as East-Asian American women through digital sphere and public social media sites. To summarize this complex relationship, I propose the term “negotiated archive,” as East-Asian American women subjects are constantly evaluating and augmenting the pieces that constitute their public facing self-archive. Thus, the relation between research subjects and their forms of social media is constantly renegotiated as they utilize privatizing measures to keep both public-facing and intimate works within the same site. My research subjects challenge mainstream historical narratives of East-Asian women as deviant, hypersexual, submissive, and monolithic through their artwork, but in the process inherit the anxieties, burdens, and uncertainties of driving such an abstract process. As an avenue not offered to previous generations of East-Asian American women, the right to digital self-representation and control over what information is available to the public or not is often difficult to navigate. As mentioned in the artist profiles, Liu, Terazawa, Lu, and Ghaemi have had complex histories and differing degrees of public and private aspects when it comes to their digital archives. Digital archives are defined here by all public facing posts and public facing Story highlights, which remain on the profile permanently at the artist’s discretion. Artists can choose to move materials to the private cache, which is defined as one’s post and Story “Archive” (capitalized term refers to the formal Instagram title for the feature), both of which are only visible to the user. Users can move both feed posts and Story posts between public and private view with the touch of a button. Thus, the term negotiated archive is indicative of the constant process of tailoring public and private artistic repositories both managed and produced by the artists themselves.

Curation of identity is a key archival feature that was repeatedly discussed by research subjects. All research subjects described toggling through making certain posts private or public based on how they were feeling at the moment. Some reasons given for this included feeling like there was a flaw in a published piece, growing artistically distanced from previous work to the point where they feel unrepresentative, and wanting to feel more control over their public facing image. Liu, Lu, and Ghaemi stated that they felt pressure to curate an online persona that was not necessarily “them,” but a favorable and curated aspect of their hobbies, personality, and artistic practice. Terazawa sees the publication of her works to a public archive, whether digital or physical, as a form of “safe keeping”. Part of the reason for her choice to take distance from digital space stems from anxiety about the archive, or how her public facing persona and works would represent her both as an East-Asian American woman and artist. She notes that she used to have a public Facebook artist profile (distinct from

102 Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts”.

a personal profile), and stated “ I felt like I was being more obsessed about my image, like the posts that I was making than actually making art,” concluding that “I need a very clear line between my art presence, my artistic presence online, and my offline persona. Once this starts blending together then it’s quite unhealthy”. Terazawa is also different from Liu, Lu, and Ghaemi in the sense that she regularly deletes her works from her devices and personal computer. As a result, much of her digital and physical work had actually been lost from both her public archive and private cache. Even though Terazawa distances herself from most social media, she recognizes that a public facing body of her work is necessary in order for her to make a living from her art. Liu, Lu, and Ghaemi also found that public aspects of their social media and art in general was key in “connecting with other artists,” “finding opportunities,” and potentially “being discovered”. Thus, there is a tension in the process of archive negotiation in the sense that the public facing component is perceived as necessary to keep doing artistic work. However, one of the main features that keeps Lu returning to Instagram is the ability to view past Instagram stories in the private Archive feature. She states that this gives her a sense of comfort and takes the burden of feeling like she constantly needs to keep creating art. Ghaemi and Liu expressed similar sentiments, and valued the diary-like quality of the private Archive. In summary, the digital space acts as a negotiated archive in which East-Asian American women retain agency over their artistic production that can challenge long-held stereotypes, yet exists simultaneously as a source of anxiety, distraction, and obsession. The negotiated archive describes the constant process of self-evaluation and evolution, which provides research subjects with both a private and public relationship with digital media forms.

#### 4.5 *Digital space as discourse*

“So, when quarantine first started in April, May I disabled my account for about a month and a half. And it honestly felt really good to be away from everything, but I went back on, because the Black Lives Matter movement started gaining a lot of traction again. And there was a lot of information that I was missing out on, Or just hadn’t heard about because I wasn’t online... having a digital community and having a lot of inspiration online can be really helpful” -Rina Lu

Liu, Terazawa, Lu, and Ghaemi all note that a key feature of digital spheres is their ability to spark conversation, or at least maintain the semblance of a discursive artistic community in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The discursive space that digital spheres offer refers to the ability to be in direct conversation with intimate associates, but also the ability to reach people beyond your physical community and engage in an online conversation. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, many physical discursive sites have moved into digital spheres, which have made some research subjects feel like they must be involved to keep up with the latest artistic conversations. Digital sites as discursive space is a major focus of Nakamura (2005), who finds that “cyberspace functions as a vector for resistant cultural practices that allow Asian Americans to both use and produce cyberspace”.<sup>103</sup> Lu notes that Instagram offers her the opportunity to follow artists whose work she admires, and also fosters a sort of creative digital sphere that includes her as a member. She also feels like it gave her a community and belonging as an East-Asian American woman when she was growing up in a small town that didn’t allow her to fully be herself or connect with other artists or community members in general:

“When I think of a platform I think of more just the community that I’ve been able to build online or being able to keep different avenues of communication open for people that might have just been in my life briefly but that I still want to talk to. For even people that I haven’t really gotten the chance to interact with a lot yet but that I still feel community with and want to one day talk to or like interact with more”

Lu also mentions the growing popularity of social media activism and the spreading of key information, though she notes that there are insidious traps to this growing movement. She finds that while “spreading awareness is good,” she fails to view activist efforts as fully successful and transformational without “introducing an idea that people actually hold in their consciousness for a day, or even just an hour”. Ghaemi concurs with the notion

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103 Nakamura, Lisa, “East Main Street”, 263.

that Instagram activism does not exist in a sustainable framework that promotes meaningful change, and finds that social media is “made to superficially digest information”. Her ideal vision of how movements can move forward is to find alternative organizing spaces, moving beyond the predatory algorithms and corporate aesthetics.

Terazawa represents a stance and positionality that is distinct from the other subjects, namely that she makes an intentional choice to not have any social media accounts. Like Lu, she finds a lot of digital activism and community discourse to be insubstantial and unlikely to provoke meaningful change. However, she still sees the value in participating in discursive digital spaces. Even though she herself does not have an account, she feels like she can tap into digital discursive spaces by choice and at will if she wants to peek into a certain discourse or community. An example of this provided is how Terazawa uses Twitter with no account:

“There are a few people and organizations who have a Twitter presence that I like and so what I’ll do is I’ll just go to their Twitter page. And I’ll just read their relevant posts. And that’s that’s enough for me, like I don’t need to respond to it I don’t need to share it but, so I’m still connected in that way”.

Liu stated that she is also trying to distance herself from use of Instagram, even considering being off social media altogether: “It can be very overwhelming to see what everybody else is posting about all the time, and sort of like in taking all of that digital information even though it’s not really like labeled as work, or labor. I think it is something that could lead to a sort of emotional and mental exhaustion”.

This is reminiscent of the argument of Nakamura (2015), who finds that women of color are sorely undervalued in terms of the work they do both digitally and elsewhere (274). Liu notes that reading discursive threads on Instagram was helpful for her art practice. Comments from other users that were often women of color were formative in learning about new artistic movements and techniques, as well as generally processing her East-Asian American identity. Remarking that she has often felt isolated from others in the COVID-19 pandemic, discursive digital elements have encouraged Liu to continue to create and participate in online communities. In summary, the discursive spaces in digital spheres encompass both interactions between East-Asian American women and their close associates as well as their interactions with other members of their communities. The discourse generated by these interactions are a key source of inspiration, contestation, and potential for new meaning-making.

#### 4.6 *Digital space as voyeur*

“ I don’t think we can really ever be disconnected from [digital] visual culture because visual culture, it’s like everywhere. Like, it’s not just on social media. So in that sense I don’t think you can’t really disconnect yourself from that. At the same time I feel like being in this world of interconnectivity, all the time and like being plugged in 24/7 is a lot and can be kind of damaging. And, yeah, I think there’s just a lot of information out there and it’s like, there are times when it’s very difficult to filter through all of that and be able to digest it” -Jiasi Liu

Historically speaking, anti-Asian sentiment in America is a phenomenon that is an integral part of the legacy of nationalistic nation building. The history of Asian-Americans in the US has been one of exclusion, criminalization, and discrimination. While the sexualized racism, racialized sexism, and decades long record of violence committed against East-Asian American women is sadly unsurprising those within the community due to their lived experience, recent events like the COVID-19 pandemic and 2021 Atlanta Spa shootings have brought these issues to a broader public prominence.<sup>104</sup> While Atlanta police thus far refuse to rule the shooting a hate crime, Asian-American activists and scholars attribute the violence to the imperial legacy of sexualized racism and fetishization that Asian-American women face. As noted by Esther Ngan-Ling Chow in 1987, the damaging legacy of US imperialism, including tropes like the sexualized and subservient “picture bride” results in real life, often violent consequences for Asian-American women.<sup>105</sup> Research subjects had differing feelings about how

104 Cheng, “The Dehumanizing Logic”, 1.

105 Chow, “The Development Of”, 288.

recent events have affected them. Most were in the stages of processing the information, but all maintained that this anti-Asian violence did not surprise them, as it has always been latent in their lived experiences. Terazawa emphasized that she no longer walks alone, though it was a contemplative habit, and is practicing above all self-care. Subjects noted that it was often a strange experience to see people outside of their community suddenly posting online about the specific struggles of the feminine Asian-American experience. Though these posts were certainly being viewed and gaining traction, they also noted that in many cases that these posters failed to make a true effort to engage or call for substantive change. Subjects were reminded that all the artistic work they were doing to visibilize and de-essentialize the identity of East-Asian American women could be very much flattened, co-opted, and disrupted by outside actors. Liu, Terazawa, Lu, and Ghaemi all noted that they felt a sort of “double bind” when it came to the capabilities of digital spheres. They were at once platforms to counter hegemonic representations of the sexualized and disposable “yellow woman,” but there were also sites that represented a great deal of violence and pain.

In the context of the increase of hate crimes committed against Asian subjects, Anne Anlin Cheng’s conception of the melancholy of race asserts that people of color in America “hover on the edges of the dominant progressive narrative as objects at once ungrieved and unrelinquished”.<sup>106</sup> Asian-American women are quite literally being annihilated under the white male gaze, and present events are demanding some sort of individual and collective reckoning with the current structures in power that fail to protect them. Liu recalls the myriad of violent and graphic videos circulating on the internet showing violent crimes against Asian-American women and elders. She asked the question

“What does visibility really mean in America? I see Hollywood’s celebration of films like *Crazy Rich Asians* but I also see videos of my community elders violently attacked, then plastered across social media, often by people who don’t even belong to our community. I don’t see the mere increase in visibility as enough in our total liberation.”

Liu illustrates the darker sides of digital representation, and how the public gaze and visibility does not always lead to meaningful change. She sees the Atlanta Spa Shootings as a turning point in which decades of imperial violence against East-Asian American female subjects have again resurfaced. The burden of digital visibility as East-Asian American women is something that all research subjects have grappled with in consideration of their relationship with digital spheres, especially in the recent months. Ghaemi stated that she felt more emboldened to make herself and her culture visible in her art:

“Something I’m thinking about is how other people are seeing [my] culture through my work, or seeing the influences of that culture on me. Especially because being mixed heritage and people often don’t actually know what ethnicity I am. If I share something that is very clearly inspired by Chinese culture or something like that. I, the way that I imagine like other people digesting that is like, reflecting that Chinese identity onto me and done like recognizing that within me and I feel like, almost in a way I’m asking for like a form of validation of that identity”

Liu, Terazawa, and Lu expressed similar sentiments as Ghaemi. In putting their artwork out in the world, research subjects were forced to critically examine the connection between their art and identity, as well as how their individual work represented their East-Asian culture. Generally, East Asian-American women artists are using the digital sphere to circulate work that subverts society’s expectation of them, whether through visibilizing methods of self-representation or otherwise. While heightened visibility can pave the road for future artists, visibility does not negate the existence of invisibility, and the myriad of digital experiences held by each East-Asian American woman artist points to the perpetual fact that people from their communities continue to face disproportionate violence in more ways than one. Continuing the disruptive work of Third Cinema and post-colonial scholars and activists, each subject hopes that their work can continue to challenge oppressive institutions and stereotypes. Liu, Terazawa, Lu, and Ghaemi seek to continue to utilize digital methods to center their struggles and work as East-

106 Cheng, “The Melancholy of Race.” *The Kenyon Review* 19, no. 1 (1997), 51.

Asian American women artists.

## Section 5: Conclusion

As a historically marginalized group experiencing both racialized and sexualized oppression, how do East-Asian American women generate an oppositional digital culture through art? East Asian-American women have historically been excluded from both mainstream feminist and Asian-American activism movements throughout American history. Facing persistent stereotypes of promiscuity, exoticism, and submissiveness even to the present day, Asian-American women occupy a complex position in modern America. They stand as bearers of their culture and shoulder the responsibility for cultural transmission and dissemination. I set out to understand the particular materials and methods of artistic production, as well as the reasoning behind it. To begin, I examined existing scholarship in my literature review concerning the histories of East-Asian America in the US, ranging from the very beginning of their presence to the current day. Their labors and wisdoms devalued and dismissed, I found that contemporary perceptions of East-Asian American women were still plagued with colonial and imperial stereotypes of hypersexuality, homogeneity, deviousness, and submissiveness.

I explored my central research question through the interview of four artists, Jiasi Liu, Sophia Terazawa, Rina Lu, and Nusheen Ghaemi, in addition to formal visual analysis of their work. They were chosen through a convenience sample, and each answered a standardized series of questions that were designed to make the total interview last no more than two hours. I found that each artist was inspired by Third Cinema and postcolonial, philosophical, and visual works like that of Trinh T Minh-Ha<sup>107</sup> and Teresa Hak Kyung Cha. This research project was designed to explore the history, development, and process of how East-Asian American women generate an oppositional digital visual culture. A comprehensive examination of emergent oppositional digital artistic practice by younger millennial East Asian-American women artists is sorely lacking in the existing academic canon. Interview sections were split into questions about their early digital histories, digital art practice, oppositional art practice, and reactions to rising anti-Asian sentiment in the United States. Interview transcripts were examined thoroughly and results were coded, yielding five main sections to my analysis.

Firstly, the research subject's artworks were formally analyzed to examine how they constructed meaning and challenged oppressive beliefs about East-Asian American women. Through a combination of reading the pieces for the content as well as the general presentation techniques, I found that each artist had developed their own approaches to creating and sharing art. Jiasi Liu's digitally based art shared on Instagram account @villagehealer dealt with the melancholy of race and dispelled the binaries of East and West, among others, that many East-Asian American women feel forced to align with. Sophia Terazawa's cinematic art, shared on YouTube, utilized a hybrid of Third World Cinema and digital post-colonial techniques that problematized the white male gaze and recalled the violence it inflicts upon herself and her community. Rina Lu's Instagram Story-based digital work shared on her account @riqlu introduces techniques of multimedia digital storytelling intertwined with methods used by Third World feminist scholars in the pre-digital era. Nusheen Ghaemi's synthesis of her physical craft-based crochet pieces with playful elements of digital collage and overlay on her account @\_\_nusheen invokes an exploration of gendered and sexualized modes of labor, as well as their historical and contemporary devaluation. It is clear that both the content, form, and creative process of East-Asian American women's art inform the oppositional visual culture they are able to generate on the internet.

In my investigation into key interview themes, I sorted the rest of my analysis into four remaining sections. The first section concerned the early digital experiences of research subjects, and detailed the formation of their racial, gender, and artistic identities. Subjects noted that while their early internet experiences often involved memories of humorous projects and creative fun, they were also marked by fundamental instances in which their identity as East-Asian American women was made painfully aware to them in the form of harassment or digital violence. It is clear that in the transition to adulthood, subjects also experienced a "pressure and anxiety" associated with their digital personas. The subsequent exploration of their contemporary experiences with digital media are sorted by three main capabilities: their archival, discursive, and voyeuristic properties. "Digital space as negotiated archive" describes the tension between the public and private in digital spaces, especially Instagram,

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107 Minh-Ha, Trinh, *T. Woman, Native, Other*.

by which privacy can be toggled by the touch of a button. While digital spaces offer East-Asian American women artists the ability to control their own historical and artistic narratives, this degree of agency also made research subjects highly uneasy, and in some cases obsessive. They are constantly in the process of reevaluating how their public facing works may represent themselves or their culture. “Digital space as discourse” reveals that many research subjects value the conversations and interactions that social media and other community platforms offer them. They realize that many forms of digital labor by women of color to educate about art or activism go uncompensated or unrecognized, and they themselves must critically think about the line between pleasure and work gained from such platforms as an artist.<sup>108</sup> “Digital space as voyeur” raises questions about how subjects experience racialized and sexualized violence, and how social media can paradoxically both increase visibility but fail to promote any change. In fact, visibility can often act as a false marker of progress, but is really a concession that often derails meaningful structural change. Research subjects were not entirely surprised by the recent rise in anti-Asian hate crimes since the COVID-19 pandemic, as they felt their lived experiences had always made them aware of such deep hate. Subjects also discussed how people outside of their communities began to circulate information, and in some cases graphic and violent footage of attacks. They were thus reminded that as East-Asian American women, they knew how best to advocate for their own communities, though sometimes they also do not have all the answers. Power structures inevitably impose a certain gaze upon the research subject’s communities that they are actively trying to subvert through their oppositional digital art practice.

In the future, more detailed inquiry could be mounted into the diverse experiences of East-Asian American women artists. My sample size of four subjects was relatively small, but a larger pool of subjects that utilize more diverse digital platforms and tactics could yield more descriptive and enlightening results.

My research study elaborated on the common practices, motivations, and techniques of East Asian-American women artists who utilize the digital sphere to challenge existing violent structures of white heteropatriarchal hegemony in the United States and beyond. The intersection of art and activism is a locus that can be extremely instrumental in the liberation of Asian-American women as their practice is fundamentally inseparable from their identity. While the digital sphere was conceptualized as an ideal space of full democratic ownership and equal participation to all willing parties, it is very much a space into which the inequities, power structures, and hegemonies of the non-digital realm bleed. However, the digital sphere also offers key liberational potential for subjects as they can better control their own artistic narratives and histories. As digital technologies rapidly evolve, East-Asian American women will have to continue the fight to visibilize their struggle, organize against oppression, and continue to work towards a liberated future free of prejudice and violence.

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108 Nakamura, Lisa, “The Unwanted Labour”.

**Appendix A:**

## Starting Questions:

- a. Do you consent to this interview being recorded by audio and video for research purposes only?
- b. Do you consent to your selected works being analyzed and included in the analysis findings?
1. Demographic questions
  - a. What is your age?
  - b. I know this is a loaded question, Where are you from/where do you consider your hometown?
  - c. How would you describe your ethnic background?
  - d. Where are you currently located?
  - e. Do you speak any other languages?
  - f. What is your occupation?
    - i. What are you studying?
2. History of internet use, impact of digital on work
  - a. What is your first memory of being on the internet or utilizing digital technology?
  - b. Do you think early exposure to technology has shifted your approach to making or sharing art?
  - c. When did you first start to realize that digital methods could be a vehicle for making art?
  - d. When did you first start to realize that digital methods could be a vehicle for sharing art?
  - e. Do you have any negative memories associated with your digital experience?
    - i. Do you remember the first time or couple of instances in which you were harassed or bullied for being an East-Asian American woman?
3. Digital art practice
  - a. How would you describe your current relationship with digital spaces, including social media?
    - i. Has the pandemic shifted your relationship at all?
  - b. Do you have a preferred digital medium for your work?
    - i. Does this change when I ask about what platform or avenue you prefer to use when sharing your work?
  - c. What are some visual symbols or motifs that you utilize or find yourself gravitating towards in your work?
  - d. What are some digital symbols or motifs that you utilize or find yourself gravitating towards in your work?
  - e. Have you considered leaving social media completely? How about the digital sphere in general?
    - i. Is going off the grid an option that appeals to you in any way?
4. Oppositional practice
  - a. How does consideration of your identity and what is expected of you inspire or limit you in the process of creation?
  - b. Do you find that your work often engages with your identity consciously or unconsciously?
  - c. Would you consider your art as actively challenging oppressive ideas of East-Asian American womanhood?
  - d. What do you think about the growing “social media graphic design” activism?
    - i. Do you think it is effective in fighting oppression?
  - e. Do you think social media platforms and digital spheres offer enough protections to marginalized peoples?
    - i. How are some ways they could improve, based on your own experience?
5. Reactions to anti-Asian sentiments in the US
  - a. How are you feeling in the current moment as an East-Asian American woman artist?
  - b. Has your digital art practice shifted at all after the pandemic or the recent rise in Asian-American hate crimes?
    - i. Do you feel a heavier burden of visibility?
  - c. Have you received any influx of mean or hateful comments about you or your work?
    - i. Has it increased, stayed the same, or decreased?

- d. Has there been a higher degree of positive or supportive messages?
- e. How do recent events change how you approach your digital artistic practice?
  - i. Will you be creating or sharing your work differently?

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