

## UCL Migration Research Unit

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This paper was originally submitted as a dissertation in completion of the requirements for the degree Masters in Global Migration. The views expressed in this paper are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of UCL's Migration Research Unit.

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## UCL Migration Research Unit Working Papers

No. 2020/5

### **Beyond the invisible, silent models of 'success': An exploration of 'British- Chinese self-representations on podcasts and Instagram**

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**Migration Research Unit**



**Beyond the invisible, silent models of 'success':  
An exploration of 'British-Chinese' self-representations on podcasts and Instagram**

**Candidate number: HLJF7**

**2020**

**This research dissertation is submitted for the MSc in Global Migration at  
University College London.**

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## **Abstract**

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, 'Chinese' people have been hyper visible. Previously, such occurrences were minimal, often limited to sensational events, such as the 2004 Morecambe Bay cockling disaster and the 2019 Essex lorry deaths. Besides these events, the 'Chinese' are perceived as the 'model minority': a narrative conflated with stereotypical depictions. The lack of visibility of the 'Chinese' beyond headline-worthy events has rendered them silent and self-sufficient. This is problematic for 'Chinese' migrants who live in the United Kingdom (UK), as out of all the ethnic minorities, the 'Chinese' have encountered the most racial incidents. Amidst the silence, many 'second-' and '1.5-generation' of 'British-Chinese' migrants have turned to digital platforms, such as podcasts and social media channels such as Instagram, to construct individual and collective identities and to present alternative representations of the 'Chinese community', one that is beyond their silence and success. Yet, the findings show that these self-representations rarely counter dominant discourses and often struggle to reach beyond ethnic 'Chinese' individuals. The findings also demonstrate the problematic nature of identity markers and terminologies, including its homogenising and bounding effect. Due to the quotidian use of such terminologies, when possible, we need to acknowledge their imperfections to avoid participation in the essentialisation of the diverse 'Chinese community'. The increasing hostility towards 'Chinese' individuals during COVID-19 has generated more noise around 'Chinese' individuals. As this dissertation was written in August 2020, before the mass reporting of racism towards 'Chinese' individuals in March 2021, this dissertation will only touch upon this minimally.

**Word Count:** 11,976

## **Acknowledgements**

Firstly, I would like to thank all the participants who took part in this study, especially amidst the pandemic. You have been nothing but supportive of my project and I really enjoyed speaking to every single one of you. You have inspired me in so many ways that you cannot even imagine. I hope that my dissertation reflects your personal accounts and continuously encourages you to continue what you are doing. I wholeheartedly hope that this project will raise awareness of some of your experiences and educate them about the problematic use of such terminology and narratives.

Secondly, I would like to thank my supervisor for replying to my long and copious number of emails and for guiding me through the project, especially at the start when I changed the idea for my dissertation numerous times.

Thirdly, I am especially grateful for my family for providing me with mental support and for endlessly listening to me rant about my project.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

The 'Chinese' may be the largest, most complex and widely spread diaspora in the world (Watkins *et al.*, 2017: 2288; Pang, 2020: 3) but they are one of the United Kingdom's (UK) most neglected minorities (Knowles, 2017; Tam, 1998: 81; Groffman, 2018). However, since the COVID-19 pandemic, the 'Chinese' have become hyper visible as they are labelled "possible carriers of the virus" (Lai, 2020). Prior to sensational coverage spurred on by the pandemic, the quintessential 'Chinese' migrant fulfils the 'model minority' myth: one who "over-achieve[s] educationally ... relative to the white British population" and are "over-represented in professional and skills occupations" (Dai *et al.*, 2015; Parker & Song, 2007; Knowles, 2017: 5). Representations of the 'Chinese' as blueprints for 'success' renders their everyday experiences invisible as they are perceived to be self-sufficient. Additional to British society imaging a false pretence of the 'Chinese', "virtually every piece of research" highlights the dearth of knowledge about the 'British-Chinese' (Parker, 1998a: 67). In 1999, *The Chinese in Britain Forum* (in Chan *et al.*, 2007: 510) stated that British society does not "understand the UK Chinese people". Fast forward eleven years and the statement remains unchanged. The 'Chinese' continue to be hidden from the media (McNeice, 2016), the arts (Thorpe & Yeh, 2018; Yeh, 2018) and cultural and political life (Parker & Song, 2007: 1044; Pang, 2020: 5; Pang, 2020a: 6; Knowles, 2017: 4). As such, this research project aims to narrow the knowledge gap on the 'British-Chinese', particularly the so-called 'second-' and '1.5-generation' because research has largely focused on children (Dai *et al.*, 2015, 2016, 2018), the youth (Yeh, 2014; Watkins *et al.*, 2017) and the 'first-generation' (Pang, 1999). The use of inverted commas is to accentuate that these terms need to be scrutinised, which this project will further explore.

First and foremost, a clarification of terminologies is necessary. It is difficult to avoid identity marker terminologies, such as 'Chinese/Chineseness', 'British-Chinese' and 'Asians', which reduce individuals into predetermined categories. Generational terminologies such as 'second-' and '1.5-generation' are also various and simplistic (Bauböck & Faist, 2010: 168). The multifarious ways to define a generation have led to wide discrepancies, ranging from early teens to 40-year-olds (Kebede, 2010: 14). 'Second-generation' individuals are often defined as children born in the home country but also children brought to the host country

from an early age but there is no consensus for the meaning of “early age” (Bauböck & Faist, 2010: 168). Some have defined it as six years old, for others it is 12. Due to the disparities, I will view ‘second-’ and ‘1.5-generation’ individuals as separate. ‘Second-generation’ individuals will be defined as individuals born in the UK and have at least one foreign-born parent (Fung, 2008); these individuals are often called ‘British-born Chinese (BBCs)’. In comparison, ‘1.5-generation migrants’ spent time in their country of ethnic origin before migrating to the UK (Kebede, 2010: 18). Both ‘second-’ and ‘1.5-generation’ individuals fall under the umbrella term, the ‘British-Chinese’.

Due to the ‘British-Chinese’s’ invisibility in mainstream media and their subsequent (mis)representations, many ‘British-Chinese’ participate in digital ‘subaltern’ counterpublics to oppose traditional “interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (Fraser, 1990: 67). ‘Subaltern’ refers to marginalised members of society, such as ethnic minorities. Due to the imperialist and colonialist connotations of ‘subaltern’, I will use the term, marginal, instead (Squires, 2002). The more neutral term, marginal *alternative* publics (MAPs), will also be used as an alternative to ‘subaltern’ *counterpublics*.

Despite the problematic nature of these terms, they are utilised in literature and employed by my respondents (see Parker & Song, 2006; Dai *et al.*, 2018). To address this issue, I will use an etic and emic framework. Both perspectives are necessary to prevent an imposed etic approach, where a “researcher forces their own worldview onto the subject of their research” (Berry, 1999 in Beals *et al.*, 2020: 594). An etic approach examines the literature through an ‘outsider’s’ perspective, which is the dominant method of conversation around the ‘Chinese’. These etic categories will be explored in my literature review and an emic approach, an ‘insiders’ perspective, will be employed in the empirical chapters (Beals *et al.*, 2020). This framework is used to demonstrate whether dominant terminologies contradict or exceed the terminologies of my respondents, thereby problematising or promoting ‘normative’ terminologies. My own informed views, termed a derived etic approach (Berry, 1989: 727), will also be applied. I will draw from the fields of geography, sociology, anthropology and psychology due to the interdisciplinary and all-encompassing nature of identity formation.



I will begin with the literature review, which will investigate three dominant theories, identity, representation and MAPs, followed by a discussion of my methodologies. Then, in my empirical chapters, I will answer the following:

- 1) What representations have the dominant public sphere employed about 'Chinese' migrants in the UK?
- 2) What self-representations have the 'British-Chinese' constructed on marginal alternative publics?
- 3) Who are included and/or excluded from these marginal alternative publics?

### **1.1 Study Context**

Fung (2008) described 'Chinese' migration into Britain occurring in three waves but there are clear discrepancies and variations. The three waves principle merely serves to portray the general trend of 'Chinese' migration but does not account for migration for education or other purposes. During the First Opium War, many arrived in the first wave as seamen and later turned to the launderette and catering business. The second wave constituted of mainly working-class people from Hong Kong (HK) in the 1950s. A combination of their limited English capabilities and the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act engendered their entry into the catering trade (Parker, 1998: 95; Sales *et al.*, 2009: 49). In the 1970s, ethnic 'Chinese' migrants from Southeast Asia, such as Vietnam, arrived in the UK. The third wave occurred from 1980 onwards, amidst Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms, where migrants predominantly from mainland China arrived as scholars, professionals and illegal migrants (Sales *et al.*, 2009: 49). These migrants compose a small proportion of the heterogenous 'Chinese' population in the UK. The majority of the respondents' families in this research project migrated during the second wave.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

The 'British-Chinese' frequently struggle with their identities because they neither fit fully in the 'Chinese' nor 'British' narrative. Moreover, inaccurate stereotypes and their invisibility in mainstream media has further contributed to their identity crisis. Since the development of Web 2.0 technologies, which are digital spaces that "emphasise online interactivity [and] user-generated content sharing" (Mpofu, 2015: 85), MAPs served as a remedy. They provided a place for the 'British-Chinese' to gather, voice opinions and meet like-minded individuals. The current study will add to the scant literature regarding the 'Chinese' in the UK. Narrowing this further, few studies have concentrated on the online self-representations of 'British-Chinese' individuals except for the contributions of Parker and Song (2006, 2006a, 2007, 2009). Taking inspiration from Parker and Song, I will explore how individual and collective identity are negotiated on MAPs. Similar studies revolve around diasporic media (Shi, 2005; Volkova, 2020; Sun, 2005; Brinkerhoff, 2012); this literature concerns how migrants have maintained connections with their homeland. Brinkerhoff stated that (2012: 35) 'second-generation' migrants typically embrace their host country fully, because they have not inhabited their homeland thereby, participation in diasporic media is unlikely. Brinkerhoff did not refer to '1.5-generation' migrants, but it would be more typical for them to use diasporic media because of previous inhabitation of their homeland. The differences between the two generations entail that they must be viewed separately, which academia often fails to do (Kebede, 2010). I will continue using taken-for-granted concepts like 'Chineseness', but an emic perspective will be applied in my empirical chapters to understand the lived experiences of 'Chinese' individuals and as an attempt the decolonisation of an imposed etic. I will begin by discussing the theory of identity and how it is imposed by 'outsiders' and the 'self'. 'Self' in this context refers to those who identify as 'Chinese', both individually and/or collectively (Vathi, 2015: 39). Then, I will explore the dominant representations of the 'Chinese' and the role of MAPs.

### **2.1 Identity**

#### **2.1.1 'Outsider' identification**

Identity is society's way of categorising individuals into "manageable proportions" (Bee, 2004: 127; Nagel, 1994: 154; Goldberg, 1993 in Noble *et al.*, 1999: 37) because humans are "boundary constructing species" (Marotta, 2008: 298). Identity is as much of a personal project as it is an 'outsider' designation process. A collective identity assumes similarity in ancestors and histories between individuals (Hall, 1996), whereas individual identity recognises difference between people (Jenkins, 2004 in Vathi, 2015: 39). As a social construction, identities are often created by comparing oneself with others, both similar and different (Hall, 1996, 1997). Unsurprisingly then, the term 'Chinese' was invented by dominant groups to classify them as 'Other' (Ang, 2014). In America, "the feeling of being a Chinese comes from Americans. They view you as Chinese" (Wenjing, 2005: 401). However, this ethnic label is also utilised by ethnic 'insiders', allowing one to defy the boundaries imposed on and by us.

In migration studies, ethnic identity is considered the core of all identities (Brah, 1996 in Noble *et al.*, 1999: 30) because it guides the "fundamental human desire" to belong (Çağlar, 1997 in Vathi, 2015: 41; Lee & Kim, 2014: 98). Once one's ethnic identity is established, other complex identities follow (Vathi, 2015: 41). Yet, ethnic identity can be confusing because there is no identical 'Chinese' (Bee, 2004: 116). Gao (2018: 51) and Ang (2014: 1193) claim that a definition of the 'Chinese' is "undefinable" and "at best ambiguous and at worst confusing". This is consistent with Song (2020: 1179) who described 'Chineseness' as meaning different things to different people. This internal variation between 'Chinese' individuals is known as "intra-ethnic othering" (Marotta, 2008: 303). Further convergence led Parker (1998: 103) to recognise the difference in gender, sexuality and politics to one's 'Chinese' identity. Where Marotta (2008) differentiated between generations to demonstrate diversity amongst Italian-Australians, Poynting *et al.* (1999) showed the gendered experience of Australian-Lebanese and Lu and Wu (2017: 483) and Yau (2007) further differentiated the politics and ideology of HK and mainland 'Chinese' people. In order to acknowledge the multitude of 'Chinese' identities, I turn to the self-identification of individuals. Building on Noble *et al.*'s (1999) study, I will explore how individuals are able to navigate between different strategies of identification, including hybridity and strategic essentialism.

## 2.1.2 Self-identification

### 2.1.2.1 Hybrid identities

Identities are multiple, unfixed and unbounded (Bhabha, 1994). In fact, “we carry a bewildering range of different, and at times conflicting, identities around with us ... at the same time” (Mort, 1989 in Noble *et al.*, 1999: 29). It is a process of “becoming” rather than of “being” (Hall, 1996). Butler (1990 in Rose, 1997: 316) reaffirmed this as identities are never secure; they are only ever made more certain. This may explain why ‘British-Chinese’ individuals often occupy an incomplete belonging to the ‘British’ and/or ‘Chinese’ narrative (Sedmak, 2018; Dai *et al.*, 2018: 225), often termed an “in-between space” (Wang, 2016: 80) or third space (Bhabha, 1994). Vivero and Jenkins (1999 in Hoersting & Jenkins 2011: 19) coined those who occupy this space as “culturally homeless” because they lack proximity with one culture. Occupying this space is often viewed negatively, as one is perceived to experience continuous internal conflict with a lack of peace in either culture (Marotta, 2008: 305). Yet, this is questionable as it may be impossible to ever find peace in our constantly shifting identities.

For ‘British-Chinese’ individuals, strategic navigation between the host and homeland culture often occurs (Sedmak, 2018: 175; Spencer, 2014: 197). Ang (2003: 152) used a banana as an analogy to demonstrate the “porousness of [Chinese] identities”. A banana is white on the inside and yellow on the outside, which signifies that a person has the appearance of a ‘Chinese’ person but holds ‘White’ qualities. Although this term is commonly used derogatorily to label someone as not “Chinese enough” or “too Westernised”, Ang celebrated the symbiosis of ‘Western’ and ‘Chinese’ culture (2003: 152). To a certain extent, the use of colours, particularly yellow, to represent identity further contributes to its use as a racist remembrance of the ‘yellow peril’. It also perpetuates the notion that there are certain characteristics that one has to have in order to meet the ‘Chinese’ threshold. Although Ang’s (2003) image of a hybrid identity is easy to conceptualise, he glosses over how it can demonstrate that identities are constantly evolving and strategically navigated. Yet, Yau (2007) alluded that her ‘Chinese-Irish’ respondents felt pressured to identify with one culture, namely ‘Chinese culture’, because

being 'Irish' entails being 'White', thereby demonstrating that identity is not always strategically navigated but also imposed by society.

A problem with the aforementioned literature is that hybridity is "stuck in culture", failing to detach culture from ethnic identity (Anthias, 2001: 621, 637). This is problematic because the two terms are not synonymous. Culture is also a problematic concept where 'communities' are presented as static and homogenous (Abu-Lughod, 2008). Language is an example that demonstrates ethnicity and culture's interrelatedness, but not equivalence. The ability to speak a language fluently is often equated with ethnic identity, but one is not less 'Chinese' because they cannot speak 'Chinese' (Bee, 2004: 113). As such, different degrees of cultural practices are sufficient to make one feel 'Chinese' (Bee, 2012: 204; Hummell, 2014: 49). The various degrees involved to make an individual feel 'Chinese' demonstrates the distinction between culture and ethnicity. A further dimension to one's self-identification is strategic essentialism.

### **2.1.2.2 Strategic essentialism**

Identity is contextual and a state of becoming where individuals employ certain identities in different scenarios (Hall, 1996: 4; Anthias, 2001: 621; Easthope, 1998: 342). Strategic essentialism is one tactic to achieve this. A 'community' eradicates their internal diversity by stereotyping themselves and by promoting a specific version of their history, tradition and practice (Siapera, 2010: 154). For Wang (2007), those who identify with a 'Chinese collectivity' are "prey to ideological manipulations" because this collectivity, or so-called 'community', is based on imagined shared 'cultural' and behavioural traits (Anderson, 1983). This emanates from people craving for belonging (McLeod, 2000: 69; Wenjing, 2005: 397). Despite the problematic nature of essentialism, self-essentialism is a political strategy (Eide, 2016) to empower and build solidarity (Hall, 1996 in Marotta, 2011: 542; Noble *et al.*, 1999). This is opposed to top-down representations that essentialise the 'Other' with a motivation to oppress them. Self-essentialism is viewed as more justified because 'outsiders', the "unauthentic bearers of the community's identity" (Siapera, 2010: 151), are not speaking *for* the 'insiders'. Thus, Siapera (2010: 150) posited that essentialist regimes should derive from "within the community". Perhaps Siapera (2010) has offered a simplistic

binary between ‘outsider’ and ‘insider’ when in reality, a continuum exists. Some people fall in-between. Exploring identity as a representation can facilitate the understanding of this concept.

## 2.2 Representation

Representation is one of the most complex and debated terms, but it is commonly understood as an image of reality and a portrayal of “ideas, objects, places, or people” (Scott, 2009: 351; Kobayashi, 2020; Hall, 1996: 444). Thus, it requires *re-presenting* something that already has meaning (Hall, 1997: 6). Though the boundary between dominant and self-representations are not as distinct as perceived (Asen, 2000), I understand dominant representations as ‘outsider’ identifications of the ‘Chinese’ in mainstream media, whereas self-representations are self-identifications typically found on alternative forms of media, such as, ‘subaltern’ counterpublics. I will use a post-structuralist approach, where no representation reflects reality (McKee, 2003: 11). Rather, representation is a way people shape, organise and manage complexity (Aitken & Zonn, 1994: 6; Webb, 2009: 15).

The ‘Chinese’ are considered ‘subaltern’ due to their minority position in the UK. Though the term ‘subaltern’ has imperialist connotations (Squires, 2002), I will only apply it in reference to Spivak (1988). Due to the ‘Other’s’ perceived subordinate position in society (Calhoun, 2002), they are recognised as not possessing the “epistemic capital” and “political position” to have a voice (Mpofu, 2015: 85), rendering them to be spoken *for* by dominant groups (Spivak, 1988). In other words, the ‘Other’ is silenced, unable to create their own public identities (Herzog, 2011 in Ferrer & Retis, 2019: 3; Scott, 2009: 351) and leaving unnuanced stereotypes unchallenged (Parker, 2000: 5; Vecino *et al.*, 2015: 87; Mitra, 2001: 33). 19<sup>th</sup> century conversations about the ‘Chinese community’ were largely Sinophobic, including narratives of gangs, opium dens and the ‘yellow peril’ (Tam, 1998: 82; Yeh, 2014; Pang, 1999). Today, they are viewed as the ‘model minority’ (Stafford & Feuchtwang, 2011; Knowles & Burrows, 2018; Cole *et al.*, 2009) and “more likely to achieve higher success than other minority groups” (Chou, 2008: 219). There is robust literature that concerns the academic achievements of the ‘Chinese’ (Francis & Archer, 2006, 2013; Francis *et al.*, 2017;

Brooks, 2019; Watkins *et al.*, 2017) but there is a dearth of scholarship that moves beyond this representation. I aim to fill this gap and add nuance to the representations of the 'Chinese' community.

The label, 'model minority', misleads people into thinking that 'Chinese' migrants are self-sufficient due to the exaggeration of their success (Knowles & Burrows, 2018: 91; Pang, 2020: 4; Wong *et al.*, 1998; Groffman, 2018). This results in their needs and inequalities to be overlooked, which can contribute to further ostracisation (Sales *et al.*, 2009: 46; Chan *et al.*, 2007; Yeh, 2018). Many do not know that the 'Chinese' have suffered more racial incidents than any other ethnic group in the UK (Wang, 2016: 159). The frequent conflation with the all-encompassing term 'Asian' further merges different sub-categories of 'Asians'. In Britain, it is also archetypal to refer to 'South Asians' when addressing 'Asians' (Parker & Song, 2007: 1043; Yeh, 2014), further encouraging 'Chinese' invisibility. Yeh (2014) and Brooks (2019) also suggested the 'British-Chinese's' absence in the literature, especially in comparison to the 'Black-British' or 'South Asian British'. Notable exceptions are Dai *et al.* (2015, 2016, 2018) who studied the identity of 'BBC' children in Scotland and Yeh (2014) who researched how 'British-Chinese' young people redefined themselves through 'Oriental' club nights. Such invisibility and (mis)representations have sparked the desire to create self-representations on MAPs.

### **2.3 Marginal alternative publics (MAPs)**

The advent of new technologies for communication has translated into greater academic interest in minorities' use of Web 2.0 technologies (Holm, 2019). 'British-Chinese' frequent engagement with MAPs has allowed individuals to speak *for* themselves amidst the under-representation and exclusivity of dominant public spheres (Tam, 1998: 82; Weisser, 2008: 612). It must be noted that the term MAPs is taken from literature surrounding subaltern counterpublics, but I have modified it in order to ensure neutrality. hooks (1997) asserted that stereotypes, "however inaccurate, are one form of representation ... they are there not to tell it like it is but to invite and encourage pretense". In response to the stereotyping, self-representation on MAPs have allowed the marginalised to challenge and "invent and circulate" discourses to produce "oppositional interpretations

of their identities, interests, and needs” (Fraser, 1990: 67; Weisser, 2008: 612; Felski, 1989; Asen, 2000). They also seek to write themselves back into the mainstream, but by claiming this, Fraser (1990) assumed that minorities were involved in public conversations in the first place. Whilst Habermas (1989) claimed that public spheres were fully inclusive and “open and accessible to all”, Fraser (1990: 63) and Eckert and Chadha (2013: 929) illuminated that the voices of bourgeois ‘White’ males dominate. Subsequently, marginalised members of society, including women, people of colour, non-property owners and migrants are spoken *for* and therefore, stripped of their identity, cultural practices, rights and privileges (Squires, 2002: 448).

As mentioned, the term, counterpublic, is problematic and falls into a reductionist trap. It assumes an easy binary between the public and private though the lines between the two are perpetually shifting (Travers, 2003; Asen, 2000). Counterpublics also cannot truly claim to *counter* dominant discourses because it assumes the falsity of public spheres, which conflicts with post-structuralist beliefs. Thus, emphasis should not strongly be placed on *countering* dominant discourses as intercultural dialogue is also attempted (Souza *et al.*, 2018: 438). Squires (2002) suggested that one way to resolve the emphasis on *counter* is by employing different terminologies to recognise their different aims. For instance, “enclaves publics” are largely for oppressed groups to join “hidden spaces”, free from the wider publics’ visibility, whereas “counterpublics publics” are more visible publics that engage with social movement tactics (Squires, 2002). In contrast, Holm (2019) differentiated counterpublics by their inward- or outward-oriented goals. The former most closely aligns with Squire’s “enclaves publics”, where members can “formulate [their] interests and needs” in isolated ‘safe’ spaces (Holm, 2019: 18; Fraser, 1990: 66). The latter details minorities publicly agitating their voices to compete with dominant structures (Fraser, 1990: 68; Toepfl & Piwoni, 2018: 2014). Outward-oriented counterpublics correspond most with Squire’s “counterpublics publics”. It is equally about eradicating dominant discourses as it is about promoting inter-cultural dialogue (Fraser, 1990: 70). Eckert and Chadha (2013: 937) indicated the importance of inter-cultural dialogue in reducing racism between Muslims and the rest of the German ‘community’. However, I postulate that this inter-cultural dialogue must be productive in order to develop mutual understandings. Due to the discontentment with these suggested terms, I propose a more neutral term, alternative publics, as it



expresses its function succinctly as a platform for alternative viewpoints and its position as alternative to the mainstream. Alternative publics' aim may be to counter dominant publics but the word, alternative, does not assume this.

Despite the enthusiasm for alternative publics, participation does not guarantee decreased marginalisation and increased inclusion (Vrikki & Malik, 2019: 285). It “may offset -but not overcome entirely- discursive privilege” (Asen, 2000: 428). In fact, it may further encourage division between different groups and result in “audio enclaves” (Florini, 2015), which are spaces ‘Black-American communities’ gathered in the absence of the “White gaze” (Florini, 2015: 214). MAPs are audio enclaves for two reasons. Firstly, the interjection of voices on micro- and meso-platforms means they are largely ‘hidden’ from public purview (Bjola & Papadakis, 2019). Secondly, Lindridge *et al.* (2015: 285) opined that the formation of these digital ‘communities’ meant “little face-to-face” occurrences, which Spencer (2014: 227) aptly questioned - can online identities be substituted in the real world? The result of this is that the status quo remains uncontested; the mainstream and marginal continue to live in conjunction to each other, not with each other. Currently, the majority of research conducted on MAPs used by the ‘British-Chinese’ has focused on discussion forums, namely by Parker and Song (2006, 2007, 2009) and Yau (2007). In other contexts, Dekker *et al.* (2015) and Leurs (2015) explored the use of Moroccan discussion forums by ‘second-generation’ youths in Rotterdam, Netherlands. There is room for further exploration of different MAPs channels, such as podcasts and social media.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

This chapter reviewed the major contributions on identity, representation and MAPs. Identity is a continuously changing process that is deployed contextually. It is also multiple and fluid, allowing the ‘British-Chinese’ to strategically essentialise and employ aspects of their hybrid identities. Classificatory labels homogenise ‘Chinese’ individuals, but in reality, boundaries are navigable and flexible. The problematisation of ethnic labels will ensue in the following chapters. The lack of challenge towards dominant representations have sparked the rise of MAPs, allowing ‘Chinese’ individuals to develop and formulate their own

representations. However, it is unknown whether MAPs lead to decreased stereotyping and an increased mutual understanding.

## Chapter Three: Methodology

This section will explore the methodological triangulation approach (Madge, 2010: 174), interviews and visual and textual analysis, employed in this study. There is no single “best method” for a particular study (Payne & Payne, 2011). Using multiple methods will reveal different perspectives, thereby delivering a more comprehensive project.

### 3.1 Interviews

Interviews remain the most prevalent methodology in human geography (Hitchings & Latham, 2020; Janghorban *et al.*, 2014; Dowling *et al.*, 2016). Through the probing of open-ended questions, ‘British-Chinese’ individuals were able to expand on their opinions, thereby increasing the chances for new ideas to uncover (Valentine, 2008: 111). Moreover, through interviews, each individual is given the opportunity to share their diverse experiences, which are influenced by positionalities such as age, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality (Longhurst, 2009: 582). This method recognises the plurality of the ‘Chinese’ people.

Interviewees were recruited by searching ‘British-Chinese’ on Spotify and Instagram. I specifically searched ‘British-Chinese’ because searching a general term like ‘British-Asian’ would only reify etic constructions that homogenise all ‘Asians’. Table 1 summarises the eight virtual interviews that were conducted. All interviews were conducted synchronously except for Georgina, in which email exchanges occurred instead. All my participants identified as ‘British-Chinese’ or a ‘BBC’ and were between the ages of early 20s to their late 30s. This small-scale sample is unrepresentative of the ‘British-Chinese’ population, but each narrative is a springboard for unravelling the complexities underlying identity.

**Table 1 – Summary of interviewee respondents**

#### Podcasters

Name	Podcast	Identification(s) <sup>1</sup>
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<sup>1</sup> Based on interviewees’ own identifications

Vivian Yau	But Where Are You From?	Second-generation BBC
Natalie Cheung	Yellow Bee Pod	1.5-generation BBC
Johnny Luk	The Upside of Being British Chinese	Second-generation British-Chinese
Daniel	Asian NoMaD	Second-generation BBC
Georgina Ma	Chinese Chippy Girl	First-generation BBC

### Instagrammers

Name	Instagram Account	Identification(s) <sup>2</sup>
Tracy Cheung	@abritishasianstory	Second-generation BBC
Georgina Ma	@chinesechippygirl	First-generation BBC

### #humansofChinatownLondon project

Name	Identification(s) <sup>3</sup>
Kenneth Lam	Second-generation BBC
Jenny Lau	British-Chinese

The setting of interviews, including the environment and platform, impacted the interview process and data generated. As all interviews occurred in the interviewees' respective homes, this may have contributed to their ease. In terms of platforms, interviews occurred over Google Meeting, Zoom, WhatsApp and email. Voice calls ranged from 15 to 30 minutes, whereas video interviews lasted 45 to 80 minutes. One exception was a 90-minute voice call. Perhaps, the video function generated a greater sense of humanness because of the visibility of social cues and facial expressions. Encouraging noises were used in video calls to demonstrate active listening, but video lags often made them feel like interruptions. Instead, nodding proved more effective during video calls. Furthermore, some interviewees asked me to send them questions beforehand. Whilst this may have invoked ease and thereby facilitated fruitful discussions, it could have affected the data generated due to a preparation of answers beforehand. Additionally, because some interviewees were

<sup>2</sup> Based on interviewees' own identifications

<sup>3</sup> Based on interviewees' own identifications

sent questions and others were not, simply because they did not ask, a risk of inconsistency may have surfaced. Nonetheless, interviews were semi-structured so diversion from questions were typical. Other sources of discomfort in virtual interviews could have been the awkward pauses and connection delays but the informality of the interviews seemed to ease interviewees.

Interviews were transcribed. The inclusion of “nonverbal actions, gestures, and facial expression” in square brackets, and “loud exclamations” in bold in transcripts generated a more comprehensive account of the interviews (Longhurst, 2009: 582). Codes were then assigned to the transcripts by identifying categories and patterns (Cope, 2010: 442; Benaquisto, 2008). An initial analysis, using descriptive codes, which are words directly taken from the respondents were applied. Upon further reading, analytic codes were added. These more closely corresponded to the wider literature and research questions (Cope, 2010: 447). Some analytic codes included, ‘motivations to start podcasts’, ‘self-essentialisation’ and ‘Western representations’.

Traditional research is generally from the researcher’s perspective, subsequently positing interviewees as a “repository of answers” (Hiller & DiLuzio, 2004: 3). To prevent the (re)production of political inequalities and exclusion, a constructivist approach was used, viewing interviewees as integral to data production. Co-production recognises that both interviewers and interviewees play a role in constructing knowledge. I sent drafts to my interviewees and they provided me with feedback. Resultantly, an alternative discourse, which ‘best represents’ the lived experiences of my interviewees, will be produced as opposed to a discourse solely for academic purposes (McDowell, 2010: 165; Hiller & DiLuzio, 2004: 4).

Undeniably, interviews were time-consuming as it required heavy planning, listening to podcast episodes, analysing Instagram posts, formulating questions, back and forth communication with interviewees and transcribing (Longhurst, 2009: 580-581). Nonetheless, the in-depth data generated nullified its limitations.

## 3.2 Visual analysis

### 3.2.1 Documentaries

In geography, linguistic methods are common, but visual methods offer novel ways of generating data (Crang, 2002: 653). Our constant contact with visual screens renders the digital “integral to the way people in the 21<sup>st</sup> century understand the world” (Jacobs, 2016: 453). Visual representations can unravel power relations (Aitken & Craine, 2008: 251), thus, using this method can expose how dominant groups have excluded minority voices. The visual materials I have chosen to analyse are photographs and documentaries. The three documentaries I watched are summarised in Table 2. I chose these documentaries based on the availability of videography produced on ‘the British-Chinese’.

**Table 2 - A summary of the documentaries watched**

<b>Documentary</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Director</b>	<b>Ethnicity of Director</b>	<b>Narrator/ Commentator</b>	<b>Ethnicity of Narrator</b>
Meet Britain’s Chinese Tiger Mums (MBCTM)	2012	Hannah Berryman	British	Hannah Berryman	British
The Best of British Takeaway Chinese (TBBT)	2017	Sam Bailey	British	Tom Kerridge & Cherry Healey	British
A Very British History (AVBH)	2020	Andy Richards	British	Shu Lin	Chinese

Despite documentaries’ perceived ability to capture “authentic voices and lived experiences”, it is significant to explore how the director has decided to represent ‘British-Chinese’ subjects through inquiring the camera operator, the company which produced the film and how shots are edited (Friend & Caruthers, 2016: 34, 36). However, visual methods are not standalone methods (Aitken & Craine, 2008: 260), documentaries need to be supplemented by text (Rose, 2001 in Garrett, 2010: 522) to situate the context.

### **3.2.2 Photographs**

Photographs from #humansofChinatownLondon were analysed. The hashtag was created by the Instagram account, @chinatownlondon. Analysing photographs reveal how the photographer wanted to portray his subjects. Similar to documentaries appearing as 'reality', photographs are often heavily edited, thereby only showing snapshots grounded in time and space (Banks, 2001: 54). The positioning of the subject and the lighting also affects the portrayal of subjects.

### **3.3 Textual analysis**

#### **3.3.1 Instagram posts**

Supplementing photographs, Instagram posts were also analysed (refer to figure 1 for the breakdown of a post). @abritishasianstory and @chinesechippygirl's posts normally consisted of text as opposed to photographs. The caption, main body, comments and "Stories" were examined. Instagram "Stories" are photos, videos or text that are only visible for 24 hours. The audience is more likely to remember a post because the combination of images and text is "more memorable than either alone" (Logaldo, 2017: 254). This might be because captions "normally explain what readers cannot see for themselves in the picture" (Logaldo, 2017: 256). Captions have the potential to make users feel more connected to the account they are following (Lufkin, 2019), thereby (re)creating Anderson's 'imagined communities' (1983). I analysed recurring patterns in the posts, including 'educating the wider public', 'engaging with other like-minded people' and 'identity construction'. Analysis of certain words, such as personal pronouns, also have the ability to frame topics in specific ways (Bainbridge, 2010: 230). Therefore, unpacking and analysing text helps researchers understand how meaning is created (McKee, 2003).

**Figure 1** – A breakdown of an Instagram post from @chinesechippygirl (2020)



### 3.3.2 Podcast transcripts

Podcasts are extremely useful for hearing the experiences of ‘British-Chinese’ podcasters, especially as the content produced is “raw”, “honest” and “confessional” (Vrikki & Malik, 2019; Kinkaid *et al.*, 2019). The podcasts I listened to were: *Yellow Bee Pod* (YBP), *The upside of being British Chinese* (TBC), *Spill The Cha* (STC), *Chinese Chippy Girl* (CCG), *Asian NoMaD* (AN) and *But Where Are You From?* (BWAYF). Episodes from each podcast I found most pertinent were semi-transcribed. On the transcripts’ first reading, I applied descriptive codes. Then, I applied analytical codes. Themes such as ‘motivations to start podcasting’, ‘topics discussed’ and ‘accessibility (intra- or inter-ethnic)’ were extrapolated. When transcribing, the speakers’ tone, rhythm, volume and speed (Duffy *et al.*, 2016) were considered. Where text-based forms of knowledge production fail to show the speaker’s intonation and emotion, using podcasts to generate texts alleviated this setback (Kinkaid *et al.*, 2019: 4). The ability to hear speakers’ emotions is a reminder of one’s personhood, which is often neglected in etic constructions of minority groups.



### 3.4 Ethics

Ethical issues were warned through digital consent forms. These forms briefly outlined my project, asked for permission to record interviews and recognised interviewees' ability to withdraw at any point. The forms also promised their anonymity, but interviewees gave me verbal consent to use their names. Secondary online research is an unobtrusive method because individuals are unaware of the researcher's presence, thus, they cannot alter their behaviours (Payne & Payne, 2011). However, they also raise ethical problems because of the researcher's ability to "lurk" in the online world, without the researched knowing (Eynon *et al.*, 2017: 25). Nonetheless, because my research occurred on public platforms, "there is less obligation to confidentiality" (Madge, 2010: 180). Creators would not have provided personal information, such as their names, if they wanted to remain anonymous. The promotion of their social media accounts also signifies that their information was put 'out there' to be seen.

### 3.5 Positionality

People have multiple identities, which influence our perceptions and biases during research (Bourke, 2014). Thus, objectivity can never be entirely maintained (Ratner, 2002). Yet, developing reflexivity is important for understanding how this has shaped my project. In fact, Hall stated that "you have to position yourself somewhere in order to say anything at all" (1990 in Bourke, 2014: 3). Big "P" and small "p" positionalities are often differentiated by academics (Hitchings & Latham, 2020: 393). Big "P" positionality is how our personal characteristics affect the research process, whereas small "p" positionality describes how we present ourselves to the interviewees. In turn, this affects interviewees' behaviour towards the researcher. My small "p" positionality as ethnically 'Chinese' positioned me as an 'insider'. Song and Parker (1995 in Wang, 2016: 108) expressed the benefits of being an 'insider' in their study as it enabled them to build rapport with their respondents. Yet, being an 'insider' does not mean my experiences are the same as my respondents. We may share similar world views but "claim[ing] to know their worlds" would be incorrect (Beals *et al.*, 2020: 599). Furthermore, I am equally the researched as I am a researcher. Thus, I am both

'inside' and 'outside', negotiating between an etic and emic approach, which may explain why I found it challenging to strike a balance between socialising and research.

## Chapter Four: Dominant representations

This chapter will discuss the public sphere's representations of 'Chinese' migrants in the UK. The public sphere examined here is mainstream 'British' media, namely films produced by the British Broadcasting Corporation. It is typically known as the BBC, but in order to avoid confusion with the term, 'British-born Chinese', I will shorten it to the Corporation. Although the Corporation is a 'British' company, 'Chinese' migrants were allowed to speak *for* themselves through interview segments. Yet, their freedom to speak is limited by where and when the documentary film makers point their camera and "press the record button" (Sacchi, 2015: 2). Decisions on how 'Chinese' migrants were framed were already made for them.

Although documentaries aim to "tell stor[ies] about real life honestly" (Aufderheide, 2013: 1), it is impossible to capture the essence of "real life" with a camera. Films are mere snapshots into the protagonists' lives. When combined with the Corporation's claim that the films are factual, the layperson perceives them as 'real'. This has grave implications for the 'Chinese' as "representations affect the ways in which individuals are perceived" (Baldonado, 1996), which may subsequently trickle down to peoples' interactions with them. Additionally, the techniques implemented in the documentaries further enhanced their sense of "authenticity". The target audience was non- 'Chinese'-speaking viewers because subtitles were added when 'Chinese' was being spoken. Firstly, the use of foreign languages persuaded the audience of its 'authenticity' because the 'White' male is not speaking *for* the 'Other'. Secondly, the use of archival material, raw video and first-hand interview footages, as opposed to actors, scripts and artificial sets, added to the 'authenticity' illusion. The use of interview footage in these documentaries promoted the perception that 'Chinese' individuals collaboratively produced the films and to a certain extent dictated how the 'Chinese' were represented. For instance, AVBH was narrated by Shu, a 'BBC'. By allowing her to speak, alternative conceptions of the 'Chinese' that go "beyond food/takeaways/catering" occurred (@dejashuu, 2020). Thirdly, the camera angle contributed to the sense of 'reality'. In all three documentaries, the side-on angle positioning of the camera was frequently used, thus contributing to a sense of naturalness because interviewees did not look straight into the camera. It also allowed interviewees to

conduct daily activities whilst conversing, adding to the perception of 'reality'. The use of handheld camera techniques to create a 'shaky' effect in MBCTM also added to the veneer of 'authenticity'.

I will now discuss the dominant sphere's representations of the 'Chinese'. Despite including 'Chinese' perspectives, these documentaries still succumbed to stereotypical narratives: the 'Othering' of 'Chinese culture' and the 'model minority' myth. However, one merit is that the inclusion of 'Chinese' voices demonstrates the recognition of the heterogeneity of 'Chinese' people.

#### **4.1 'Other'**

'Chinese' individuals were constructed as 'Other' in MBCTM, TBBT and AVBH. These documentaries take interest in the behaviours, histories, and lives of 'Chinese' individuals in the UK. This interest is demonstrated by the "tourist gaze", where one is virtually transported into the lives of the 'Other' (Urry, 1990; Gibson, 2006: 172). As tourist experiences are "out of the ordinary" (Urry & Larsen, 2011: 12), these documentaries allow one to escape from one's quotidian routines and venture into the 'exotics' lives. There are multiple tourist gazes, including the camera, the narrator and the audience.

The storyline of the three documentaries posited 'Chinese' individuals as 'Other'. In TBBT, the 'Chinese' subjects had to prove to Tom Kerridge, an English Michelin-starred chef, that they were the best 'Chinese' takeaway. Metaphorically, this implies that the 'Other' has to prove their entitlement in the UK and appeal to the "White gaze". Similarly, Natalie reflected that some 'Chinese' individuals felt they needed to prove their worthiness as immigrants. As a lot of the food was foreign to Tom, he applied his tourist gaze to judge the contest. In a similar vein, MBCTM's Tiger Mothers' practices were completely foreign to the tourist gaze (Hubbard, 2012). The camera followed Hannah, the narrator, and her "White gaze", thereby guiding the audience through the 'Other's' lives (Huang & Lee, 2010: 240). Some typical practices of Tiger Mothers for their children include being top of the class, having no grades lower than A's and having their days filled to the brim (Hubbard, 2012). These practices are foreign to Hannah as she was shocked when Sally said one's life should

be spent 80 per cent studying and 20 per cent for enjoyment, whereas Hannah's ratio was 50:50. Likewise, AVBH gave insight into 'Chinese' migrant experiences. It was another narrative which reaffirmed that the 'Other' has had to assimilate in the UK, rather than the UK's employment of strategies to welcome the 'Chinese'. However, the name of the documentary suggested a marriage between the 'Chinese' and 'British' due to the incorporation of the 'Chinese' in the fabric of 'British' history. Nevertheless, 'Chinese' and 'British' were used dichotomously elsewhere.

The use of subtle language, such as 'we/us' and 'them/they', reinforced divisions. This was employed by the protagonists and narrators to differentiate between the 'East' and 'West'. For Shu (AVBH, 2020), 'we/us' referred to the 'British-Chinese community' and 'them' to the 'British'. She frequently self-essentialised by expressing the commonalities between 'Chinese' migrant families. When Shu was shown a TV show that mocked 'Chinese' people, she felt deeply uncomfortable that 'Chinese' people's inability to pronounce certain words were sources of entertainment. Recognising herself as 'Chinese', she was offended by the presentation of her 'community'. In MBCTM, 'Chinese' and 'Western' parents were differentiated. Vivian and Kate acknowledged that they were "Chinese parents" and spoke of their "Asian way" of educating. Kate expressed that "Chinese parents give more guidance and rules", implying that 'Western' parents are more liberal. Michael, Kate's 'British' husband, reaffirmed this. Kate wanted her daughter to be a lawyer or doctor, whereas he was a believer in "as long as she's happy". The juxtaposition of 'Chinese' and 'Western' practices is evident. In the film, 'Western' practices correspond with laziness and being undisciplined, engendering the perception of the superiority of 'Chinese' practices. The binary of 'East' versus 'West' is most apparent when the interviewer asked, "what's it like a Chinese, Taiwanese lady married to a Geordie?"; Michael responded, "opposites" (MBCTM, 2012: 00:09:32). These binaries perpetuate the differences between 'Chinese' and 'Western' cultures. The term, Tiger Mother, also presupposes that mothers assume the primary responsibility for their children. This gendered division is obvious between Sally and Steeve, her husband. After work, Sally helped Matthew with his homework, whereas Steeve gardened (MBCTM, 2012). The documentary intended to evidence this 'Chinese-style' parenting, where their subjects had to fulfil this stereotype. This documentary characterised this parenting style as something determined by one's ethnicity, even though not all

'Chinese' parents are Tigers. Although Steeve, who is also 'Chinese', played along with Sally's parenting, he was easier-going and said Matthew "will be what he wants to be" in the future, which is similar to Michael's outlook.

The failure of marriage between 'Britishness' and 'Chineseness' was also evident in TBBT. Annie used mushrooms from China, in which Tom said it "doesn't look like [the] classic British mushroom... It's very authentic looking" (TBBT, 2017: 00:16:16). Tom called it 'British' mushrooms, demonstrating its contrast to 'Chinese' mushrooms. Annie also claimed to be using 'Chinese' ham, in which Tom responds: "Chinese ham is actually Spam ... I never did it in Chinese sauce, so this is quite interesting for me" (TBBT, 2017: 00:55:43). Whilst Tom claimed that there is a 'British' mushroom and 'Chinese' sauce, he stated that there is no 'Chinese' ham. Also interestingly, Annie was sometimes subtitled when speaking English. Perhaps, the Corporation thought that her foreign accent would be unintelligible without textual aid - an example of 'Othering'. TBBT and AVBH also highlighted how 'Chinese' food was once considered exotic. In AVBH, 'Chinese' food was presented as an adventure and a treat <sup>4</sup> (2020: 00:14:48). Thus, 'Chinese culture' continues to be the spice that "liven[s] up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture" (hooks, 1992: 21). Sweet and sour sauce was previously considered "ridiculous", but now "we know it's not ..." <sup>5</sup> (AVBH, 2020: 00:15:52). 'We' corresponds to the 'British' and may reflect the toleration of the 'Other'. This is the acceptance granted by the majority group for minorities to live the way they want (Verkuyten *et al.*, 2019: 9), as opposed to individuals' desire to learn about the practices of the 'Other'. Again, the language of 'us' versus 'them' is discernible.

#### **4.2 Stereotypes and the 'model minority' myth**

Stereotypical narratives dictated by both the individuals and directors were rampant in the documentaries. The 'Chinese' were portrayed to academically excel. They do the best in GCSEs, achieve more A\*s and are more likely to go to University than other ethnic groups in the UK (MBCTM, 2012: 00:03:38; AVBH, 2020: 00:42:03). Sally summarised this: "we are

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<sup>4</sup> Said by a 'White' woman being interviewed

<sup>5</sup> Said by a 'White' woman being interviewed

Chinese, we have to be [the best]" (MBCTM, 2012: 00:03:52). This narrative, as promoted by the documentaries, attributes getting good grades to the essence of being 'Chinese'. Yet, Watkins *et al.* (2017: 2289) professed that the 'model minority' myth is a "product of the migrant experience" whilst Wang (2016: 226) attributed it to the 'Chinese' values of discipline and filial piety. This terminology is problematic because it exerts pressure onto the 'British-Chinese' to fulfil this myth (Francis & Archer, 2013). The exhaustion of this expectation was expressed by Vivian's son whose favourite part of the day was going to bed. Georgina felt pressure to match the description despite being "terrible at maths". The 'model minority' myth also fails to completely fit in a UK context, "that's a very American term that we just copied and pasted" (Natalie). This inappropriate transfer evidences a monolithic construction of 'Chinese' people in etic perspectives (Francis *et al.*, 2017: 2332). Furthermore, this terminology erases the racial experiences of 'Chinese' individuals, despite the 'Chinese' experiencing the most racial abuse than any other migrants in the UK (Knox, 2019). Racism was not explored, except for a short clip in AVBH. Whilst the children and mothers in MBCTM played to the 'model minority' myth, the documentary only engaged with three families, failing to represent the whole 'Chinese' population. Another popular narrative in AVBH and TBBT was in reference to takeaways (Chau & Yu, 2001: 116), but TBBT's portrayal can be attributed to the documentary's role in a food and drink series. Nonetheless, this stereotype is problematic due to the increasing diversification of the 'British-Chinese' rendering such representations obsolete (Parker & Song, 2007: 1044). In fact, many 'second-generation' migrants have moved into more professional jobs (Francis & Archer, 2005) and thus, no longer work in the catering industry.

Stereotypes were subtly embedded through music and footage. The use of 'Chinese' sounds as the backdrop for scenes were common (Chen, 2015: 117). 'Chinese' music styles are heterogenous, but instruments such as gongs, drums and the flute are typically associated with China (Top China Travel, 2020). High shrills and a polyphonic harmony, where one can hear different instruments being played together, are typical features of 'Chinese' music (Nguyen, n.d.; China Highlights, 2017; Werbock, 2013; Purcell, 1966: 1). Alongside 'Chinese' music, footage of Chinatown was shown, which is the archetypal context for discussions of the 'Chinese' (Santos & Yan, 2008: 883). Figures 2, 3 and 4 exhibit the classic depictions of Chinatown due to its easily recognisable features, including Chinese

characters, red colours, banners, gates and ceramic tiles (District of Columbia Office of Planning, 2019: 9; Kiyomi, 2013: 72). One narrator believed that the “heart of the Chinese community” was in Chinatown (TBBT, 2017: 00:16:58) but today, most ‘Chinese’ migrants no longer reside in Chinatown (Knowles, 2017: 17). Furthermore, Chinatown has become more pan-ethnic; it is not solely ‘Chinese’ (@chinatownlondon, 2020). These footages were not necessarily related to the specific narratives but displayed a commodification of ‘Chinese culture’. For instance, the food competition’s setting in Chinatown honed the perception that Chinatown is a “Gourmet Republic” (Tsu, 1999), a commodity to be consumed. As takeaways are often not located in Chinatown, the food competition to decide the best ‘Chinese’ takeaway is therefore independent from this setting. Additionally, clips of Chinese New Year celebrations and dragons reified the commodification of ‘Chinese culture’. Through persistent stereotyping, “conventional ways of thinking of the Other” are naturalised (Mitra, 2001: 32).



**Figure 2** - A screenshot taken from AVBH of Chinatown (2020: 00:22:55)



**Figure 3** - A screenshot taken from MBCTM of Chinatown (2012: 00:17:50)



**Figure 4** - A screenshot taken from TBBT of Chinatown (2017: 00:15:05)



### 4.3 Heterogeneity of 'Chinese' migrants

Another representation employed in these documentaries is the heterogeneity of the 'Chinese' population in the UK, including their diverse generations, origins and migration trajectories. An acknowledgement by the documentaries of the 'Chinese' people's diversity is an improvement from other dominant representations (Watkins *et al.*, 2017: 2288). In traditional mainstream media settings, minority groups are silenced (Squires, 2002: 448), but the inclusion of 'Chinese' voices in these documentaries partially allowed their entry into the dominant sphere. In AVBH (2020: 00:20:54), a 'Chinese' man differentiated between "the Chinese in England" and those in China, which demonstrates the internal variation between 'Chinese' people. TBBT acknowledged the variety of origins of the 'Chinese' chefs, a potential factor in their different cooking styles. With regards to generational differences, AVBH differentiated between the 'communities' of the 'first-' and 'second-generation'. In MBCTM, all the mothers understood that they were brought up in a different environment to their children. All the mothers grew up in their respective ancestral homelands before migrating to the UK. Kate mentioned that a four-year-old child in the UK is only just "ready to learn academically", whereas in Taiwan, this child would already be able to do maths (MBCTM, 2012: 00:51:54). These documentaries display a better comprehension of their lived experiences by allowing the 'Chinese' to speak *for* themselves.

### 4.4 Conclusion

This chapter enlightened the dominant representations of 'Chinese' migrants, where 'Chinese culture' was 'Othered' and stereotypes were reinforced. However, the heterogeneity of the 'Chinese' population was also recognised. Although the documentaries allowed 'Chinese' individuals to speak *for* themselves, it was in a mediated environment and reflected the Corporation's ideals.

## Chapter Five: Self-representations

Using an emic approach, I will use my respondents' 'insider' knowledge to guide discussion. York and Tsang (in Liang, 2013) believed that the present is the perfect time to develop a "comprehensive British Chinese identity" because numerically, there are enough 'BBCs' to leave a social dent. As a 'British-Asian', "no one will ask you" for your opinions (Tracy) and one will remain marginalised if one is not "responsible for their own image" (Zurawski, 2016). As such, platforms which enable the voicing of minorities' opinions are crucial. I will discuss three representations that the 'British-Chinese' have constructed: firstly, that they coalesce as a 'community', secondly, that they inhabit an in-between space and thirdly, that they have individual experiences.

### 5.1 A 'community'

As belonging is a "human need", building solidarity as a group was crucial for 'Chinese' individuals (Warner, 1994 in Kebede, 2010: 21; Hoersting & Jenkins, 2011: 18; Jenny). Due to the dispersed locations of 'Chinese' individuals, they often grew up isolated from one another (Vivian, Natalie, Johnny, Daniel). Resultantly, Johnny "crave[d] to find out more about [the] Chinese community". Self-essentialisation allowed individuals to participate in 'Chinese', 'Asian' and 'East-Asian' 'communities' based on their shared nationhood (Anderson, 1983). As Noble *et al.* (1999) claimed, self-essentialisation is a tool to build empowerment and solidarity, whereas 'outsider' essentialisation is oppressive.

All respondents believed the existence of a 'Chinese community', regardless of their inclusion in it. Interestingly, my respondents only essentialised their 'Chineseness', not their 'Britishness'. Anderson (1983) postulated that most members of the 'community' "will never know, let alone hear of their fellow-members", but these individuals identify with one another due to their perceived shared interests and characteristics. For instance, @abritishasianstory and @chinesechippygirl shared experiences of racism (figures 5 and 6). Out of 21 posts analysed, @abritishasianstory tagged all posts with #stopracism. For @chinesechippygirl, 5 out of 21 posts were tagged with #saynotoracism. Anderson's theory was palpable when my respondents referred to the greater 'Chinese community'. The





*Crazy Rich Asians* (CRA) and *Parasite* were celebrated for increasing the visibility of “Asian faces, image and cultures” (@abritishasianstory, 2020; YBP, episode 12). Though these films were unspecific to the ‘British-Chinese’, they welcomed these representations most probably due to the “massive misrepresentation” and invisibility of ‘Chinese’ people (Vivian, Georgina). Aligning with this macro-group demonstrates the power of numbers. When a multitude of voices come together, the ‘Other’ is more likely to be heard and acknowledged, thereby influencing wider publics (Weisser, 2008: 616; Mitra, 2001: 43). Furthermore, the use of these ethnic terms may be an attempt to (re)claim them. For instance, an etic construction of the term ‘BBC’ often presumes that individuals are from HK due to the UK and HK’s colonialist relationship (Pang, 2020: 4), but Natalie, Johnny and Daniel highlighted migrants’ diverse origins. Furthermore, the ‘British’ use of the term ‘Asian’ generally refers to ‘South Asians’ (Watkins *et al.*, 2017: 2288) whereas my respondents understood it to refer to ‘East Asians’.

Coalescing with people of similar experiences generated a sense of belonging. Yet, finding “a single tangible issue” to unite over was difficult (Johnny). This may explain why ‘second-’ and ‘1.5-generation’ individuals gathered around food, culture and their upbringing (YBP, episode 12). The ‘Chinese community’ are also still relatively young compared to other diasporas (Tracy). Therefore, they struggle to coalesce around more substantial topics that “move beyond food and maths” (YBP, episode 12). Furthermore, internal variation within the wider ‘community’ exists, leading to the formation of smaller ‘subcommunities’. For instance, an interviewee felt that mainland ‘Chinese’ people were not as Westernised and as such, they tried to “separate ... from them”, demonstrating “intra-ethnic othering” (Marotta, 2008: 303). Due to the possible ramifications, I will not name this interviewee, but this comment demonstrates that this interviewee has a greater affinity towards being ‘Western’.

## **5.2 The “bridge between two”**

Another representation conveyed was my respondents’ hybrid identities. All identified as being both ‘British’ and ‘Chinese’ and the “bridge between two” (Tracy, Daniel; TBC, episode 1). When individuals identified as purely ‘British’, they were questioned by others,

which insinuates that ‘outsiders’ might associate ‘British’ with ‘Whiteness’.

@abritishasianstory found it “offensive” when others questioned her ‘Britishness’ because she is “just like any other British person”. Similarly, CCC established her own right to be ‘British’, having a ‘British’ birth certificate and passport, “just like any other White ... or Black British person” (episode 1). Nonetheless, many felt that their ‘Chineseness’ stemmed from their appearance because their lifestyle, behaviour and upbringing were inherently ‘British’ (Kenneth; AN, episode 1). For others like YBP, she was confused what being ‘British/Chinese’ meant and what their associated traits were (episode 11). As she struggled more with her ‘Chinese’ identity, she felt more ‘British’, demonstrating how ‘cultural’ traits are perceived to guide ethnicity.

Respondents strategically navigated between cultures, allowing them to “switch on or off” certain identities (Noble *et al.*, 1999: 42). Goffman (1956 in Hurley, 2019: 4) summarised that identity is both a conscious and unconscious performance, sometimes used to achieve an objective or deceive others. Natalie could not be her “full British-Chinese self at work” but could do so at home. Perhaps, she felt she had to “act White” to belong at work. Similarly, Vivian and her sisters felt that in certain scenarios they had to prove they were ‘British’. For example, they made an effort to talk to shopkeepers, using “proper English” and British slang like “cheers” (BWAYF, episode meet my sisters). Especially during the pandemic, YBP felt that due to the mass racism towards ‘East Asians’, she had to conceal her ‘Chinese’ appearance. Johnny also navigated his ‘Britishness’ when running for Parliament. He felt the need to reassure voters that he was both ‘British’ and ‘British-Chinese’ to aid his journey into politics. However, when in HK, Johnny “no longer [is] an ethnic minority”, thereby allowing him to navigate more of his ‘Chineseness’.

@abritishasianstory also has two personalities: an ‘Asian’ and ‘Western’ one, resulting in her feeling like “two different human beings sometimes”. Her ability to be more ‘Asian’ and ‘British’ at different times demonstrates the navigation between identities, though it is a confusing.

Figure 7 hones the idea of hybridity. The main body’s palette represents the amalgamation of different cultures and its associated diversity. The bright colours used in this design to conceptualise hybridity also illuminates the positivity of multiculturalism,

which is similar to Ang (2003)'s banana analogy. Compared to the often-pejorative portrayals of being in-between, where people have been called half-breeds, mongrels and mutts (Marotta, 2008: 295), @abritishasianstory celebrated being the "bridge". Alongside Vivian, Daniel, and Georgina, this post also highlighted the significance of 'cultural' factors for identity construction. Many of the hashtags in figures 5 and 6 also centre around culture, including food, language and fashion. In fact, @abritishasianstory tagged #chineseculture in 20 out of 21 posts. This demonstrates that individuals perceive cultural factors as informing ethnic identity, thereby supporting traditional conceptions that synonymise culture and ethnicity.

Figure 7 - @abritishasianstory Instagram post, 2020



### 5.3 "We are individuals"

Podcasters, Instagrammers and #humansofChinatownLondon contributors stressed their individuality. Tracy said her account shows "who we are, we are individuals". This back-and-forth use of language between 'we/us' to 'I/me' reflects the "classic case" of identity confusion experienced by those living in-between (YBP, episode 11). Although experiences are relatable, because "we all come from [varied] walks of life", one 'BBC' podcaster does not speak *for* the whole 'community' (Vivian). For instance, an individual living in London and one living in 'White' suburbia have different experiences (Vivian, Johnny). Furthermore, "there's no such thing as having too many voices" (BWAYF, episode

Meet Daniel York Loh). Dissimilar to traditional academia which homogenises individuals born in the same generation and 'second-' and '1.5-generation' individuals (Kebede, 2010), this study demonstrates their uniqueness. Individuals' experiences and perspectives are so varied that only by having a multitude of voices can nuances be teased out. Unlike many 'BBCs', YBP did not grow up in a takeaway. Daniel "felt like he almost belonged" when he went to China when he was 15 years old (AN, episode 1), whereas Johnny felt equal in HK. In other words, Daniel did not feel the same extent of belonging as Johnny alluded to. Albeit being both '1.5-generation' migrants who lived in HK previously, Johnny felt equal when he returned, whereas Jenny felt like an outsider. Her barriers were the lack of fluency in Cantonese and not having "Hong Kong "taste, customs and behaviours".

Identity construction is both about coalescing with others as it is an individual process. Referring to figure 7, the use of 'I/my' indicates her personal journey. For Vivian, it was only when she turned 29 years old that "she really identified with being Chinese". Daniel concurred that with age "you're more aware of yourself and your culture". However, the process of self-identification does not stop at a certain age but ensues. My respondents continue to educate themselves about their identity through asking questions, forming 'communities' and reading about the experiences and self-expressions of other 'Chinese' people on MAPs (Wickberg, 2007: 182).

Hall (1997) expressed that stereotypes strip people of their individuality. My respondents were aware that 'Chinese' people are perceived to be quiet, but it would be wrong to assume it was an innate characteristic. It is as much about one's personality as it is a 'Chinese' stigma of "making a show of yourself" (Vivian). In fact, Vivian, Tracy and Georgina said they were not shy people. By acknowledging these stereotypes, one can (re)gain their individuality and challenge these narratives. Yet, whilst 'Chinese' people's individuality should be appreciated, Daniel warned that self-stereotyping and being internally racist could negatively impact the 'community's' reputation. As such, thinking about the larger 'community' should be integral to individual actions.

Looking specifically at #humansofChinatownLondon, this project epitomises individuality as every photograph captures a different story. Figure 8 depicts a 'Chinese'



man in an unrecognisable area of Chinatown. The archetype of Chinatown is often adorned by red lanterns and huge gates, but this unrecognisable background suggests an alternative side - one that moves beyond “commercial” and “Gourmet Republic” narratives (Tsu, 1999; Kenneth), which is “not what Chinatown is really about” (Jenny). The blurred background also allows the audience to focus on the human rather than its backdrop. The subject’s posed positioning also shows that this photograph merely represents a snapshot in time and therefore is a small representation of his everyday life. Similarly, the author condensed one to two hours’ worth of interviews to a 300-word caption (Jenny), thus, it cannot fully capture one’s experiences. This is only problematic because the funder of #humansofChinatownLondon, Shaftesbury, insisted that the project depicts reality: “what and who Chinatown really is”<sup>6</sup>. However, in actuality, ‘reality’ can never be captured. The photograph is captioned: “I refuse to adopt an English name”. This may insinuate that he is unwilling to drop his ‘Chinese’ roots, but simultaneously, not having an English name means full integration could never occur. The juxtaposition of a ‘Chinese’ and ‘English’ name also suggests their polarity. It is interesting to note that this project was funded by a ‘British’ agency, but a ‘BBC’ and a ‘British-Chinese’ were commissioned to participate for ‘authenticity’ reasons (Jenny). Despite commissioning ‘insiders’, this project ultimately had to fulfil Shaftesbury’s economic motivations, which may explain why rent payers were heavily featured.

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<sup>6</sup> In an interview with CGTN (Limam, 2020)

**Figure 8** - A picture of Chuen Fat Lam, a human rights lawyer as part of #humansofChinatownLondon



#### **5.4 Conclusion**

The 'British-Chinese' involved in the current study presented themselves as a united 'community', often emanating from their desire to belong. Their hybrid identities frequently placed them in-between 'Britishness' and 'Chineseness' and allowed them to strategically move in-between the two. Simultaneously, a 'Chinese' individual cannot speak *for* another 'Chinese' person as their experiences vary massively.

## Chapter Six: Inclusions/exclusions

Using an emic approach, this chapter will discuss the inclusions and/or exclusions on MAPs, including the self-representations and platforms itself. Inclusion and/or exclusion is dependent on the MAPs' inward- and/or outward-orientated goals, but my respondents' MAPs were generally both a 'safe' space for the producers and audience to express their opinions and a space to trigger inter-cultural conversation. Contrary to mainstream media's exclusivity, MAPs are "self-generated and self-policed" (Parker & Song, 2006a: 581), thus, they have easy entry and exit barriers and are non-hierarchical (Galston, 2002 in Brinkerhoff, 2012: 85). I will discuss those who are included and/or excluded, firstly in podcast narratives, followed by Instagram posts.

### 6.1 Podcasts

The presence of podcasts on digital platforms enables global access. On face value, these podcasts potentially involved everyone, regardless of background, gender, religion and sexuality. Two giveaway signs of the openness of participation are the use of English as the main medium and the informal tone and conversational nature of the podcasts. For many podcasters, their initial intentions were to reach other 'British-Chinese' and 'British-Asians' or those who could relate (Vivian, Natalie), but this has now expanded to a more general audience, mainly for educational purposes.

Despite the success of podcasters to gauge a largely 'Chinese' audience, non-mainstream podcasters found it difficult to enter the mainstream. Podcasts are the "training grounds for agitational activities" (Fraser, 1990: 124), but their ability to influence the wider debate surrounding identity and representation (Kinkaid *et al.*, 2019: 9) is contentious. Perhaps the term, audio enclaves, is fitting for the platforms used by the 'British-Chinese' in this study. Sahoo and Shome (2020: 4) praised the ability of new technologies to create online 'communities', which is significant for the excluded. The podcast 'communities' created generally consisted of 'Chinese' people, which may heighten exclusion from the mainstream. Although many of the narratives were specific to the 'British-Chinese' experience, Vivian's podcast reached a global 'Chinese' audience in Australia and Japan. This

is evidence of Anderson's imagined 'community' where 'Chinese' people coalesce with others in their nationhood due to a perceived shared culture. Additionally, Vivian and Natalie also mentioned that their podcasts were directed at ethnic minorities more generally. This is most likely a result of the perceived shared experiences of exclusion in the UK (Kelly, 2003: 127). For Natalie, Johnny, Daniel and Georgina, their podcasts aimed to educate 'non-Asians' about the experience of 'BBCs' and to generate inter-cultural dialogue (Perlatto, 2015 in Souza *et al.*, 2018: 438). Natalie wanted her podcast to be "open", "accessible" and "useful for everyone", highlighting her inclusionary mindset. When podcasting, Daniel reminds himself that he needs to explain "subjects or issues or terminologies that might not be as widely known unless you are BBC" so that his narratives are understood by all. 'Chinese' terminologies were also explained by all podcasters. Particularly at present, generating inter-cultural dialogue is critical due to the mass racism towards 'East Asians' during COVID-19 (Vivian, Tracy). As Eckert and Chadha (2013: 937) posited, inter-cultural dialogue is significant for addressing racism. However, only some dialogue occurred due to the confinement of podcasts within friendship circles (Vivian, Daniel). In fact, Vivian's 'White' friends felt her podcast was 'anti-White' and excluded 'White' individuals. Perhaps, this 'anti-White' sentiment arose from the occasional use of Chinese words and the speaking of her experiences as a 'British-Chinese'.

Compared to mainstream podcasters, marginal podcasts have a smaller audience, but interactions with the audience are more frequent (Markman & Sawyer, 2014: 23). For instance, as a result of the podcasts, a 'community' of "listeners, guests, content providers, and other podcasters" was created (Markman, 2012: 557; Vivian, Natalie, Daniel, Georgina). These 'communities' were initially formed on the podcasts but honed on Instagram. As most podcasters had Instagram accounts, further engagement with one another occurred through private messages and the comment section on posts. The participatory culture of podcasts allowed individuals to simultaneously be producers and consumers of content (Reichel, 2020). As such, audience members' narratives were sometimes featured on podcasts. My respondents ensured podcasts were a comfortable setting for listeners. The sense of comfort invoked in the listeners was perhaps induced through using proximal instruments, such as microphones and earphones (Eckstein, 2014 in Vrikki & Malik, 2019: 282). These instruments can seemingly minimise the space between the

podcaster and the audience, generating a “sense of closeness and intimacy” (Gallagher & Prior, 2014: 276).

As audio enclaves, these podcasts were exclusionary in the sense that people needed to actively search for them or rely on recommendations. Resultantly, these podcasts may struggle to reduce power inequalities of the mainstream. Johnny highlighted that protesting through podcasts is insufficient, institutional change is necessary. Most recently, BWAYF (episode Petition raised in Parliament!) started a petition to oppose the ‘British’ media’s use of pictures of ‘Asians’ in news coverage about COVID-19, which was subsequently raised in the House of Commons. Although this petition did not start as a result of the podcast, it helped her gain followers on her Instagram, where the petition was circulated. Thus, the use of MAPs to increase her following provided her with the means to attempt to influence the public sphere.

## 6.2 Instagram

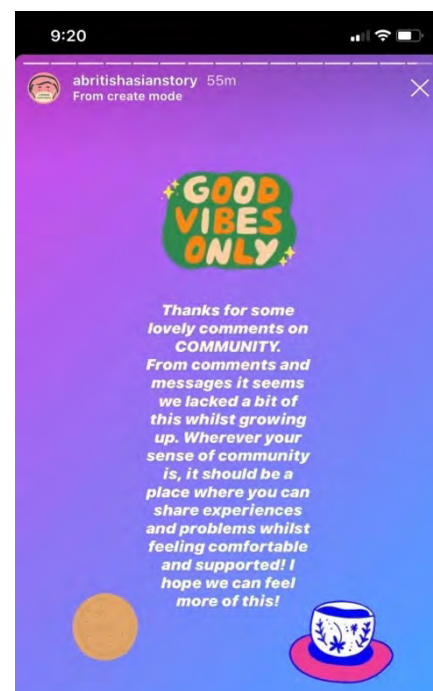
The publicness of the accounts, @abritishasianstory, @chinesechippygirl and @chinatownlondon, allows everyone access at any time and location, adding to its inclusivity. These accounts represent MAPs that closely aligns with Squires’ “counterpublics publics” (2002) because they aim to engage with the wider public. Yet, #humansofChinatownLondon is perhaps more successful in achieving this due to its launch on the official @chinatownlondon account, which had 33,000 followers at the time of writing. Comparatively, the other two accounts had fewer followers. Kenneth reaffirmed that #humansofChinatownLondon’s goal was to reach “as wide ... an audience as possible” because it endeavoured to increase the numbers of individuals visiting Chinatown. Thus, the hashtag aimed to target a diverse range of people. The ability of Instagram users to comment and tag their own posts with the hashtag ultimately manifests the participatory culture of social media. Initially, there were only 16 pictures associated with the hashtag, but at the time of writing, 105 posts were found, indicating participation by other like-minded individuals.

Comparatively, smaller accounts like @abritishasianstory and @chinesechippygirl are not as able to reach as wide of an audience as #humansofChinatownLondon.

@abritishasianstory primarily engages with ‘British-Chinese’ and ‘British Asian’ individuals but she wants to expand it to ‘British’ people. This was made explicit when she asked people to share their “interesting experiences ... in the UK”. In fact, many ‘non-Asians’ have messaged her saying that they related to her posts but do not fit into her audience demographic. This might allude to her audience feeling that they have to be ‘Asian’ to participate in the conversations. @abritishasianstory addressed this and highlighted the inclusivity of her account, as seen in Figure 9. Perhaps one felt this because the topics can be exclusive to ‘British-Asian’ experiences. In one instance, she wrote directly to ‘Asians’ through using ‘we’ language: “we have all become a part of this crafted model minority ...”. Nonetheless, Tracy claimed that she was not “specifically targeting Asian people” but people who can relate to the content. Figure 10 also illuminates that @abritishasianstory aimed to create a sanctuary and inclusive ‘community’ for her audience. Her definition differs from Anderson’s imagined ‘community’. Compared to the emphasis on having perceived shared attributes, @abritishasianstory’s ‘communities’ are spaces where one can share their experiences without judgement. However, as figures 9 and 10 were posted as “Stories”, a feature of Instagram which disappears after 24 hours, many audience members miss out on seeing this information.

**Figure 9** - A screenshot of @abritishasianstory’s Instagram story (2020)

**Figure 10** - A screenshot of @abritishasianstory’s Instagram story (2020)



@chinesechippygirl is participatory in that it aims to connect with ‘non-Asians’ to inform them about experiences of a ‘BBC’. She encourages audience members to contribute by asking viewers questions. Comments on her posts evidences the ‘safe’ space created for minorities to speak about their experiences. For instance, her audience members felt ‘safe’ enough to post publicly about their feelings towards the controversial subject of China’s National Security Law in HK (see figure 11).

**Figure 11:** A post by @chinesechippygirl that shows a small section of the comments of her audience members (2020)



However, whether these representations can progress into more mainstream channels is doubtful. Tracy recognised that online platforms merely prompt people to explore topics but if they are not “making any changes, then ... I can’t help you”. This also applies to ethnic ‘insiders’. Parker and Song’s (2006: 582) respondent said that “BBCs never feel inspired to do more than they need”. Online platforms can inspire and help “people navigate in their minds what they can do” when they go off social media but applying it to ‘reality’ is the difficult part (Tracy).

### 6.3 Conclusion

This chapter showed that the representations on MAPs generally seek to include a wide audience base. It was not exclusive to ethnic ‘insiders’ but sought to generate inter-

cultural dialogue. However, it often failed in terms of its counter-hegemonic potential because these audio enclaves are merely “training grounds” (Fraser, 1990: 124), but its success and/or failure is wholly dependent on individuals’ goals. Nonetheless, MAPs are more inclusive than traditional media discourses because everyone is allowed to participate and voice their opinions.



## Chapter Seven: Conclusion

This paper took a post-structuralist stance and has enlightened alternative representations of the 'British-Chinese' to fill the absence of 'Chinese' voices in mainstream media. I employed an etic and emic framework to problematise labels such as 'Chinese/Chineseness', which forces individuals into fixed categories. Such conceptualisations are (un)representative of identity as a lived experience. As identity is a process (Hall, 1996), it is continuously being developed as demonstrated by the 'British-Chinese' in this study. They often gained more clarity about their identity as they got older but also through interacting with like-minded individuals on MAPs. Their sense of belonging is heavily informed by coalescing with 'community' members.

This research project has shown the public sphere's representations of the 'Chinese', including the 'model minority' myth and 'Chinese' culture being 'Other' to 'British' culture. Although integration into the public sphere is rare (Fraser, 1990), the 'Chinese' subjects of the documentaries were able to speak *for* themselves, whilst being policed by a 'Western' company. Their partial inclusion into the dominant sphere enabled a representation that showed the heterogeneity of 'Chinese' people. 'British-Chinese' individuals created self-representations on MAPs to present their 'community', to demonstrate the fluidity of their hybrid identities and to express their individuality.

Although self-representations enable minorities to voice their opinions and meet like-minded people, it has the potential to further shelter them from the dominant sphere. In this study, MAPs demonstrated the characteristics of audio enclaves but in order for the 'British-Chinese' to destabilise the status quo, narratives need to reach the mainstream. MAPs often tried to engage with the wider public, but the primary consumers of these representations were 'Asians' or those who related to the narratives. When 'White' people engaged, they were often friends or friends of friends of the podcaster. On Instagram, 'White' people questioned their ability to participate in the conversation. However, entry into MAPs was globally accessible.

By shedding light on the self-representations of some 'British-Chinese' individuals, hopefully it has inspired others to evaluate stereotypes, to recognise the heterogeneity of the 'Chinese' and to welcome alternative representations. Through the exploration of the 'British-Chinese' beyond stereotypical representations, I hope any preconceptions of the 'British-Chinese' have deviated from the shy, smart and successful 'Chinese' person working in your favourite takeaway.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: The original research proposal

**Working Title:** *Contesting the silence of the “model minority”: An exploration of how British-Chinese use counter-publics to construct “identity”*

#### Aims:

- To bring awareness to and capture the voices of Chinese migrants (British Chinese)
- To move away from the (mis)representation that the media frames Chinese migrants as unproblematic, integrated into society and/or for consumption (catering trade)

#### Objectives:

1. To highlight the ways in which the experiences/ perspectives of Chinese migrants are represented on the Internet -> particularly the way the fact that they ‘belong’ to takeaways and catering business & and are an integrated community (Parker, 2009; Yeh, 2014)
2. To move away from the ‘victim’/‘villain’ framing of migrants and emphasise their role in making a voice for themselves / show their everyday lived realities
3. To demonstrate that ‘Chinese culture’ is not a homogenous
  - a. To show that variations between migrant generation exists
  - b. By showing the representations that Chinese migrants display, it shows that their experience of ‘Chineseness’ & identification of being Chinese is heterogenous
  - c. Often framed in academia and public that Chinese migrants live Chinese lives

#### What I am adding to the literature:

- A new approach towards data collection – I will look at different types of social media (Instagram and Facebook) to investigate this
  - o Main contributors to this research → (Parker & Song, 2006; 2007) use public discussion forums ([www.britishbornchinese.org.uk](http://www.britishbornchinese.org.uk)) to collect data on British Chinese migrants & use of interviews/focus groups
- Trying to address the gap of the lack and (mis)representation of the Chinese in London, particularly the youth (children and young adults) (Knowles, 2015; Yeh, 2014; Dai *et al.*, 2016)
  - o ‘The Chinese are both one of the UK’s neglected minorities, and one of its fastest growing population’ (Knowles, 2017)

- The media often only brings attention to the Chinese in London post-newsworthy events e.g. Dover incident (2000), SARS epidemic (2003), Morecambe Bay (2004), COVID-19 (2019), annual Chinese New Year celebrations
- Particularly the youth (Yeh, 2014)
- Often portrayed as the model minority & integrated into British culture through academic and economic means but such criteria does not equate to integration & feelings of belonging
- By looking at Chinese migrants' own representations, it will show how British Chinese migrants negotiate their everyday experiences and identities in different contexts (Dai *et al.*, 2018)
  - Also dependent on age
- Through these representations and through engagement with other BBCs in forums, they construct their identity in relation to others (Dai *et al.*, 2016)
- Ethnic labels come from either co-ethnics/the majority group -> can change over time (Song, 2010)

### Research Questions:

1. How has the British media represented 'Chinese migrants' and their 'culture' in London?
  - a. What is the public imagination of these migrants?
  - b. HSBC 'Eels' Ad
  - c. Discourse analysis of British newspapers (Use Nexis database using key terms 'Chinese', 'migrants', 'immigrants', 'London' over a certain period).
2. What methods have Chinese migrants employed in effort to negotiate their own representations?
  - a. BBC: A Very British History
    - i. Unclear boundary whether it is a 'Chinese' representation or 'Western' because a British Chinese narration but a BBC production
    - ii. Interview with the narrator
  - b. Visual and discourse analysis of Instagram: #humansofChinatown
    - i. Photographer and commentator= migrants
  - c. Discourse analysis of posts in Facebook groups for British Born Chinese
3. Through claiming their own agency on online spaces, has this shaped and negotiated their identities as 'Chinese'/'British'/'Chinese-British'?


- a. Has claiming their own agency disrupted or supported public imaginaries of Chinese migrants in London?
- b. Has claiming their agency supported/challenged public imaginaries of Chinese migrants in London?
- c. Do online spaces allow BBC shape and negotiate their identities?
- d. Discourse analysis of forums in Facebook groups for BBC
- e. Interview with BBC production narrator

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic the topic and design of this dissertation changed significantly from the original proposal submitted in February 2020. As a result the proposal included here, which was written in May 2020 is very brief.



**Appendix 2: An example of a signed consent form**

UCL DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY



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**Interview Consent Form**

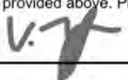
**Contesting the silence of the "model minority": An exploration of how British-Chinese use counter-publics to construct "identity"**


**Purpose**

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research study. This project is being conducted by Anabel Lee from University College London. I am exploring the use of online spaces used by British-Chinese to speak about their experiences and that of their "communities" in the United Kingdom. Findings from the research will solely be used for academic purposes and will only be used in my project. Information from the interviews will be anonymised, unless you have specifically given me permission to use your name. I would also like your permission to record the interview and to use your interview for my research. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

If you require further information, please do not hesitate to email me or ask me before the interview. Thank you.

Your signature will indicate that you have decided to volunteer as a research participant and that you have read and understood the information provided above. Please keep a copy of this for your records.

Signature of participant  Date 14 June 20

Signature of researcher  Date June 11, 2020

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### Appendix 3: Research diary

Date of entry	Discussion of task/supervision	Task completed
March 27, 2020	Met with Pooya and discussed the viability of initial research project. We discussed the blurred boundaries between 'insiders' and 'outsiders' as well as what my project would contribute to the literature.	
March 30, 2020	Changed dissertation topic because I felt that my initial research project on the relationship between COVID-19 and representation of 'Chinese' migrants would be too negative.	
April 20 <sup>th</sup> , 2020	Worked on new dissertation proposal. Had meeting with Pooya to discuss it. He had a few methodological worries.	
May 19, 2020	Worked on new dissertation proposal. Need to dive more into the literature and situate it in ongoing debates.	
May 27 <sup>th</sup> , 2020	Had a meeting with Pooya to go over dissertation proposal. Need for further literature engagement.	
June	Listened to podcasts, scrolled through Instagram accounts and organised interviews & wrote questions for interviews.	
June-August	Conducted interviews, textual and visual analysis of Instagram posts and watched documentaries. Transcribed interviews and podcasts and coded them. Found this to be very time-consuming. I think the process would have been faster if I took notes the first time I listened to the podcasts	August, 2020
July 3, 2020	Complete introduction, literature review & methodology chapters by July 3, 2020.	July 3, 2020
August 4 <sup>th</sup> – 6 <sup>th</sup> , 2020	Rewrote methodology and introduction after receiving feedback. Restructured and rewrote literature review because there were too many concepts I wanted to go through. Concept were challenging to grasp. Often, I found myself contributing to the essentialising of identities. This was the hardest part of the research process.	August 6, 2020

August 6 <sup>th</sup> , 2020	Emailed Pooya with regards to his edits on my literature review and methodology including the relationship between culture and ethnicity & the problematisation of identity terminologies.  Struggled to find what type of methodology podcast analysis came under. Looked at sonic geographies & discourse analysis.	
August 13 <sup>th</sup> , 2020	Complete Chapter 4 by August 16 <sup>th</sup> , 2020. Found it challenging to find similarities in films because they were different narratives.	August 16 <sup>th</sup> , 2020
August 17 <sup>th</sup> - August 22 <sup>nd</sup> , 2020	Worked on Chapter 5. Gave myself a deadline of August 22 <sup>nd</sup> .	August 22 <sup>nd</sup> , 2020
August 18 <sup>th</sup> , 2020	I had two parts to my Chapter 5 question but found that this made it very difficult to structure and made the chapter feel very long, so I took out the second question and tried to weave the important elements of British-Chinese's motivations to use subaltern counterpublics into the main part of the chapter.	
August 22 <sup>nd</sup> , 2020	Emailed Pooya because I found it challenging to remain sensitive to Chinese people's self-identification and how it is used in the literature. I didn't want to impose identity onto my respondents. He suggested that I look into etic and emic perspectives. After looking into this, I found it a lot easier to structure my dissertation and I found it easier to problematise terminologies while using it.	
August 23 <sup>rd</sup> , 2020-August 25 <sup>th</sup> , 2020	Complete Chapter 6. Would have benefited from me asking the interviewees whether they wanted to be included within mainstream channels/ whether they were happy to be sheltered.	August, 25 <sup>th</sup> , 2020
August 26 <sup>th</sup> , 2020	Write conclusion.	August 26 <sup>th</sup> , 2020
August 27 <sup>th</sup> , 2020	Re-wrote literature review. I felt that it wasn't analytical enough. Would be more efficient if I wrote a 3 sentence summary after reading literature.	August 28 <sup>th</sup> , 2020

August 28 <sup>th</sup> - September 13 <sup>th</sup> , 2020	Editing dissertation. Hand in on September 13 <sup>th</sup> , 2020	September 13 <sup>th</sup> , 2020
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## Appendix 4: An example of a coded interview transcript extract

Interview 3: @abritishasianstory – Tracy Cheung

Zoom

Video Call

1:13:25

Date: June 18, 2020

I: I think that one speaks more truth about Chinese people than Crazy Rich Asians.

T: Yeah, yeah. Crazy Rich Asians is quite, I think it's a good start for people to engage with you know, Asian culture cuz it's quick, it's you know, sassy, it's fun and it's relatable. It's desirable, you know. It looks really luxurious, so it's a good start.

I: Yeah, do you think there is a Chinese community in the UK?

T: Um, yes and no. Um, I mean, do you think so? Coming from, you wasn't born there. You weren't born there so what do you think. Do you think there is one?

I: I think it depends on the generation. I think before, there was a tighter knit community within Chinatown cuz I think that's where lots of people settled but then now, I think Chinese people are quite spread out so I don't think there is a one necessarily now. But before there was?

T: Yeah, I think, I think there is because um, for example, I don't personally feel it now because when I was a child and when I went to Chinese school, I think there was a sense of community and there was a community there because I grew up in Nottingham and um I went to Chinese school then and there was a big community of Chinese people in that area and there would be like, you know, um, Chinese parties, and there were you know, the parents, you know, they came on Sunday dropped their children off, they would go to you know, yum cha in you know, Nottingham um city centre, you know, places there. And then there would be like events going on um, but that was when I was younger. Now, that community is not there because the school is no longer there 39:45 so people don't really have that hub and the reason to gather. Um, but I wasn't brought up in London, so I don't really know the Asian community in London but I'm sure it's much bigger. Cuz, for example, um, in Chinatown, I think it's in Chinatown, there's a Culture Exchange company and a lot of older generation of

Representation of Chinese people in the West

Community

Community

- Dependent on age
- Dependent on Chinese school -> host events
- Location

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the Asian aunties and uncles go there, like they go on weekdays or everyday and then they take part in dancing, or you know, cultural activities you know and have lunch there. So there's a community there, it's just that I'm not part of it. so, that's why I do not have that sense of community.

I: What about in terms of the first generation, who many could not speak English?

T: Yeah, it's really important, particularly for them, the first generation that migrated. They want to feel, you know, at home. I know it sounds it sounds ironic because they migrated to UK and they don't feel at home, but it's important that the lifestyle they chosen to the UK also involves a cultural um, you know heritage and history because they can't speak English so it's important they have the connection there. And then, for the younger, like, for our generation, it's important if we have it, it's to understand what our parents are like, you know, in a cultural sense. Understand who we are supposed to be. So it's really important.

I: What's the one thing you want people to know about British Asians or British Chinese people?

T: Sorry can you please repeat it, I didn't catch it.

I: What's the most important thing people need to know about British Asians?

T: Oh, um (.) //

I: It's a really difficult question.

T: Cuz, personally for me, I want people to know that I'm a, I'm an individual, I'm passionate about a lot of things. I'm not your typical timid Asian 42:15 which I don't even think a lot of Chinese people are. There's not a lot of timid Chinese

Community

- Generation
- Language

Representation of Chinese people in the West

Recognition of being an individual

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people, they're just quiet, more quiet, it doesn't necessarily mean they are timid if they're quiet. I'm just a more outspoken person and um, (.) people don't really think that of um me, because I'm outspoken but I also have a quiet side. But, for me, for me, I think if you don't voice out your opinion, no one is going to ever going to ask you 42:43 for certain things, so um (.) I think being a British Asian or Chinese or Vietnamese or Malaysian whatever, you have to. It's important for you to know your cultural heritage and history. The most important thing about us, is that we are part of two cultures. We are not one or the other [gestures hands], we are part of two. So, we need to know what our history is, in order to define our identity. Um, so for people who you know, the most important people that I want people to know is that our history is part of our past, you know, it's part of our culture, but it's not who we are, you know. For example, like you know, Vietnam was colonised by the French. That's not what a British Vietnamese person is, that's not who they are. American war with Vietnam, that's not who they are, that's part of their history. What they're building now, and what they're building in the future, that's who they are. So it's this is such a crucial message, because that is why in Coronavirus, a lot of Asians are being attacked you know, because of the misunderstanding 43:56. People see Asian face, and they think they're from Asia, they brought the coronavirus over. That's not the case, because people are lacking in knowledge about, you know, British Asian or Asian American whatever. Um, so people need to know that we are who we are, we are individuals. Our history doesn't define who we are, it's just part of our past. [nods]

I: That's very well put! [Laughs]

T: [Laughs] I just put words together.

I: It's very inspirational.

T: When I was younger, I was very quiet. // I was scared to even like talk to a waitress or something because I was so in my head, but um, yeah, now, now I've

Identity  
- Age

Appendix 5: An example of a coded Instagram post from @abritishasianstory

add as a supplement to the visual aid of the posts.

@abritishasianstory

Posted 8 weeks ago:

caption:

Identity is so important to shape who we are as individuals or as a group, it's part of our sense of belonging and worth. Though cultural trauma and migration has led to generations of suffering. I've suffered for sure, did you? This part 1 of the 2-part conversation on how we've suffered and how we're healing from it.

When our ancestors migrated to the West for a better life, they brought their cultures and ethics with them but probably didn't think that their kids would encounter our mountains of identity issues. Of course, we still grew up and become 'normal' human beings but the mental effect is rippling.

Family members were the people we socialised with the most as a kid and some were detached from their cultural side. Don't get me wrong, absolutely respect that it's their choice and perhaps being Asian just wasn't their thing. But for someone like me who had a lot of curiosities about the world I was unwilling to just settle. It also meant that I suffered guilt, shame and bullying for trying to deal with my identity as I was stuck in-between wanting to know more about my heritage and history and then peer pressure from those just wanting to 'fit in'. After a while, I thought why can't we love all sides of our cultures?

Then outside factors, growing up in the 90s meant no internet, only the negative stereotypes (if any at all) on TV and of course wide-spread racism even if casual. All of these things added to an already difficult internal journey.

I'd love for you to explore this with me, did you find it difficult to discover your identity and what factors around you supported your growth?

was a response from audience.

#asianproblems #identitycrisis #growingupasian #eastasian #southeastasian #britishbornchinese #britishasian #culturaltrauma #culturalheritage #culturalhealing #immigrants #racism #selfdiscovery #asianrepresentation

Individual and collective identity construction  
Sense of belonging and worth  
Personal suffering  
Conversation (possibly two way dialogue)

self-essentialising

our  
"their" (in reference to ancestors)  
Identity is an issue  
Feeling of not being "normal"  
Has mental repercussions

self-essentialising  
construction of identity

Their family = British?  
Interaction with mostly family  
Thinks they should care more about culture  
Her own personality

Importance of culture to identity.

Suffered from guilt, shame and bullying  
Being in-between → Hybrid  
Wanting to fit in  
Want to embrace multiple cultures  
"Our"

Context affected her identity journey  
Stereotypes & lack of representation on TV  
Casual racism

construction of identity.  
- Lack of representation in western media

A conversation → interaction with audience  
Speaking to wider public more generally about identity  
Want some sort of support

more central than just E1SE Asians.

"Asian"  
"Representation"  
Culture is a big part of her identity  
Experiences of racism

self-essentialising  
Importance of culture to identity

hashtag → find like-minded people / generate more views.  
Informatory

Lack of positive "Asian" representations in "our" media & education systems  
Lack of community to share experiences and discuss difficulties with  
Lack of information on speaking about culture  
Peer pressure and guilt

Rep. in W. media & education  
Lack of platforms to connect with like-minded others.

yellow: bright  
blue: sad

A sequel possibly because there is so much context to cover.  
lines may signify confusion  
girl looks upset.  
maybe to represent her.



## Appendix 6: An extract of a coded podcast transcript

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Surprising -&gt; sister thanked her for having her on because they don't normally speak about this. They are related but never really talked about their experiences growing up.</li> <li>- We always have these thoughts but we don't talk about it</li> <li>- Ethnic identity is always changing through talking to other ethnic minorities</li> <li>- Being Asian in the UK= unique</li> <li>- Typically invites guests onto her podcasts</li> <li>- Focuses on East and South Asian communities</li> </ul>	<p>conversation not always discussed with sister. quiet?</p> <p>E and S Asian</p>
<p>Ep 4: Resurgence of Xenophobia and Racism related to COVID-19</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Didn't want to talk about this topic at first because don't think she's had the experience and don't want to speak on behalf of people</li> <li>- Micro aggression race fuelled to violent acts</li> <li>- Recognises that just because you are of Chinese descent it doesn't mean you have any relation to china</li> <li>- Calling Chinese virus - can really spur on violence and aggression</li> <li>- 31:37 have to make sure she says hiya and heya so they know that I am from here -&gt; similar to vivthediv</li> </ul>	<p>Don't want to speak on behalf of others</p> <p>No affiliation to china. Hybrid</p> <p>chinese association to virus</p> <p>Proves that she is British.</p> <p>other communities</p>
<p>Ep 7: Fetish and Swedish (with Evelyn Mok)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Asian American has a huge community - jealous of it. different from Swedish and Asian in the UK</li> <li>- In media (film, TV) there's no room for nuance (18:30) - parents want children to be an engineer, doctors, tiggermum. stereotypes do come from sort of truth. I recognise that I do play in it.</li> <li>- Who is the receiver of your jokes/ your ideas. Evelyn Mok- comedian. If it's an Asian audience, they understand OUR culture. vs with British, you have to explain the context.</li> <li>- Growing up in a diaspora, you feel invalidated -&gt; being a third culture kid. You're not Swedish enough, you're not Chinese enough, not feeling 100% comfortable enough.</li> <li>- Exoticisation of east and se Asian women -&gt; their portrayal in Vietnam war/ Korean war, women were portrayed as needing to engage in sex work. men who go to SE Asia who are poorer, marry women and bring them back to the UK. SE Asian= portrayed as submissive and demure towards men. Asian women= their own category of porn. women are very submissive.</li> <li>- Animosity between Asian countries -&gt; don't want to treat Asian countries as homogenous. so many diff experiences.</li> </ul>	<p>Being brought up by Chinese parents</p> <p>Exoticisation of E &amp; SE Asian women -&gt; submissive</p> <p>Not belonging</p> <p>comfort.</p> <p>Asian comm. = self-not homogenous.</p>
<p>Ep 11 Get to Know Me - Answering your questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- He has her British side and her Chinese side - she wants to balance the two out (ep 11)</li> <li>- When was the last time you saw an East or SE Asian on mainstream British media (ep 11- 3:32) - I only hear it because I was looking for it</li> <li>- Her podcast wants to highlight East and SE Asian diaspora - no longer live in their homeland.</li> <li>- In order to represent them well, I need to diversify ethnic groups &amp; go beyond asking friends/ people I already know (5:46) - capture their wide experiences.</li> <li>- Many of her guests = Chinese or Philippines but she recognises she needs to move beyond this.</li> <li>- Need a wide range of experiences in order to truly represent East and SE Asian</li> </ul>	<p>British vs. Chinese side -&gt; want to balance them.</p> <p>Lack of E/ SE Asian in mainstream British media</p> <p>Diaspora go beyond her current circles</p> <p>Authenticity?</p>

- motivations for starting the podcast.
  - Features of hybridity
  - western rep. of Asians / stereotypes
  - self-rep. of Asians.
  - Results of podcasts
  - Experience as a BBC → similar → diff.
  - Devt. of identity
  - Authenticity of podcasts
  - cultural components.
- Podcasting techniques