

Un-racialising the coronavirus epidemic

As Southeast and East Asians living in the UK, our thoughts are with the residents of Wuhan who have already experienced a month of isolation, separation from their families, emotional and financial insecurity, and witnessed the tragic deaths of neighbours, colleagues and loved ones. Lunar New Year is meant to be a joyful celebration, but currently 45 million people are under [lockdown](#).

The coronavirus epidemic is a tragedy that should have prompted global empathy and solidarity alongside collaborative action between governmental leaders and health bodies. This has not happened.

Instead, as Southeast and East Asians living in the UK, we have been appalled by the racialised coverage of European, British and Australian media outlets including Le Courier Picard's '*New Yellow Peril?*' [headline](#), the casual racism in the form of [memes and jokes](#) shared on social media platforms, and the [subtle and blatant changes](#) in the way people have begun to treat us on public transport, sidewalks, and workplaces. The [first violent hate crime](#) related to the virus was recorded this weekend, where a man was robbed and left with a broken nose to the shouts of 'Coronavirus! Coronavirus! Ha, ha!'.

Still seen as 'other', regardless of whether we were born here, we only need to cough to see that we continue to live in a culture and system of [orientalism, sinophobia and racism](#), which instrumentalises violence towards non-white bodies. Asians are currently being framed through the oldest orientalist trope - as dirty and diseased, in the same way that we were treated during [SARs](#), the same way Ebola was portrayed as a 'Black African disease', the same way Muslims are stigmatised as 'terrorists' and Black Jamaicans are deported for being 'criminals.' Our everyday lives bear the shadow of a long history of British rule, in which citizenship and immigration law and practices have evolved to systematically take away the rights, livelihoods and homes of people of colour. As Gary Younge describes - 'This is not a glitch in the system. [It is the system.](#)' Seeing the way that people are responding to the coronavirus epidemic as a joke is part of this very same system.

Here's a few things you can do to un-racialise the epidemic:

1. Show some compassion. Lives have been lost, families are grieving and China is in lockdown. From [writing a love letter](#) to Wuhan and [mixtapes celebrating Wuhan musicians](#) to [organising aid](#) and supporting [Chinese Against Racist Virus](#) to writing to your MP to ask what the UK is doing to support in the provision of urgently needed resources, there are many ways to respond other than masked Chinese cat memes.

2. Moving away from anyone who you think 'looks Chinese' on the bus is racist and won't help you as viruses are indiscriminate. The ['super spreader'](#) who brought the first cases of coronavirus to the UK turned out to be a white British man back from a business trip via a skiing holiday in the French Alps.
3. Call out the racialisation of this epidemic in your news streams, social media platforms and in your conversations. Share the abundance of writing on this topic, including the links on this post so you don't have to do the labour. Support wider [decolonisation efforts](#), including a total reform to the way history, politics and citizenship is taught at schools.
4. Share the human stories from Wuhan, from [first hand perspectives](#) to how people are continuing to [live their lives](#) ingeniously. Counteract the stereotyping and dehumanising scaremongering with reminders of our shared importance for life, family and community.
5. Gather. Asia Art Activism invites you to [Unapologetic Coughing](#), a performance and discussion on the coronavirus epidemic, led by Young Sook Choi, on Sat 7th March.

Asia-Art-Activism

and our colleagues,

Chinabot

Eastern Margins

Indigo Magazine

Bitten Peach

Lazy Native

Global Voices Theatre

Disapora Disco

Batubalani

Van Thanh productions

Khai, Rumah

Moi Tran, East Asian Ticket Club

Jennifer Lim, Moongate Productions

Candace Chan, Lucy Davies, Royal Court Theatre

BEATS, British East Asians in Theatre & the Screen Industry

BEAM, British East Asians in Media

Kumiko Mendl, Artistic Director, Yellow Earth Theatre

Daniel York Loh, writer, actor, Chair - Equity Minority Ethnic Members Committee

Diana Yeh, Senior Lecturer, City University of London

Shzr Ee Tan, Senior Lecturer, Royal Holloway, University of London

Sepake Angiama, Artistic Director, Iniva

An-Ting Chang, music & theatre director and artist

Jodie Gilliam, producer

Ruth Holdsworth, producer, curator

Migrants in Culture

Healing Justice

performingborders

Foreign Actions Productions

Art in the Age of Black Girl Magic

Black Blossoms

Lesbians and Gays support the Migrants