

# In a Divided Time...



Affirmation  
Solidarity  
Understanding  
Empathy  
Peace

Give

Connection  
Dialogue  
Curiosity  
Gratitude  
Love  
Care  
Listening  
Hope

a Chance



Visual Design by Eira Kien  
Editing by Olia Zhang, Erica Hu

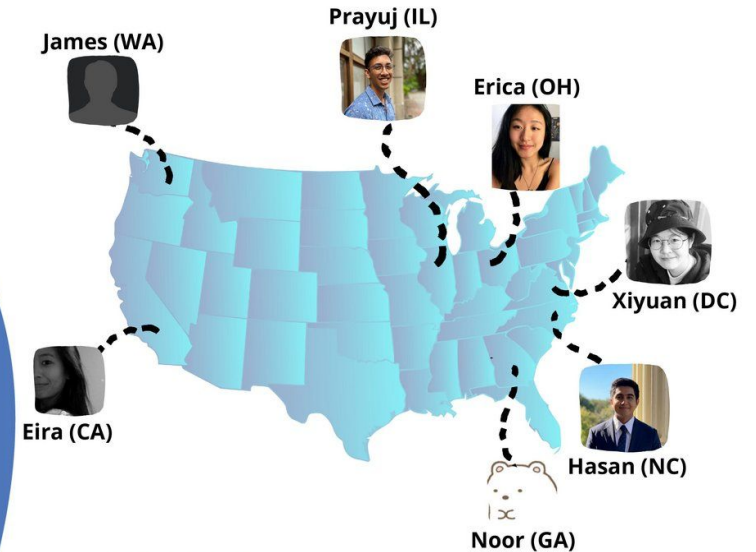


# Preface

In Justice Is Global's US-China Cooperation deep canvassing project, we spoke to tens of thousands of people in Wisconsin.

In this collaborative zine, we share our stories and art, and revealed how we addressed concerns and strategies on building international solidarity. This zine envisions a path toward global cooperation by using creative story-telling to feature voices in the face of US-China political tensions. By showcasing individual stories, the personal stakes, and actions taken to help cultivate a more sustainable future between the US and China, the zine becomes a container of hope and a space for call-to-actions. Humanizing personal struggles against the backdrop of escalating conflicts can help us see that our commonalities will always be bigger than our differences. This zine encapsulates the concept of migrational paths and that we all come from different senses of home, irrespective of how we conceptualize our national identity.

# Our Contributors



**122,368** Calls

**3,092** Contacts

**608** Completed Conversations

**48%** movement Rate

**45%** Persuasion Rate

## Special Thanks To Our Entire Deep Canvassing Team:

Abigail, Angelina (Yajie), Anthony, Ariel, Avni, Daphne, Duane Paul, Eira, Emma, Erica (Man), Hasan, Jace, James, Noor, Olia (Qiaoqian), Oscar, Prayuj, Stacie, Xiyuan, Yuwei, Christine, Tom, Sandy, Toby, Adam



# Table of Contents

## 1. Voices From Deep Canvassers

*Three Takeaways* (Memo) pgs 4 - 5  
Prayuj

*People First, Talking Points Last* (Story) pgs 6 - 7  
Hasan Pyarali

*Untitled* (Story) pgs 8 - 9  
Erica Hu

*The Root of All Problems* (Poem) pg 10  
Erica Hu

*Build Longer Tables, and Shorter Fences* (Story) pgs 11 - 12  
Eira Kien

*Interview* pgs 13 - 16  
Xiyuan Wu

*All We Want, Baby, Is Everything* (Essay) pgs 17 - 22  
James Durkee

*Personal Stake* (Interview) pgs 23 - 24  
Noor H.

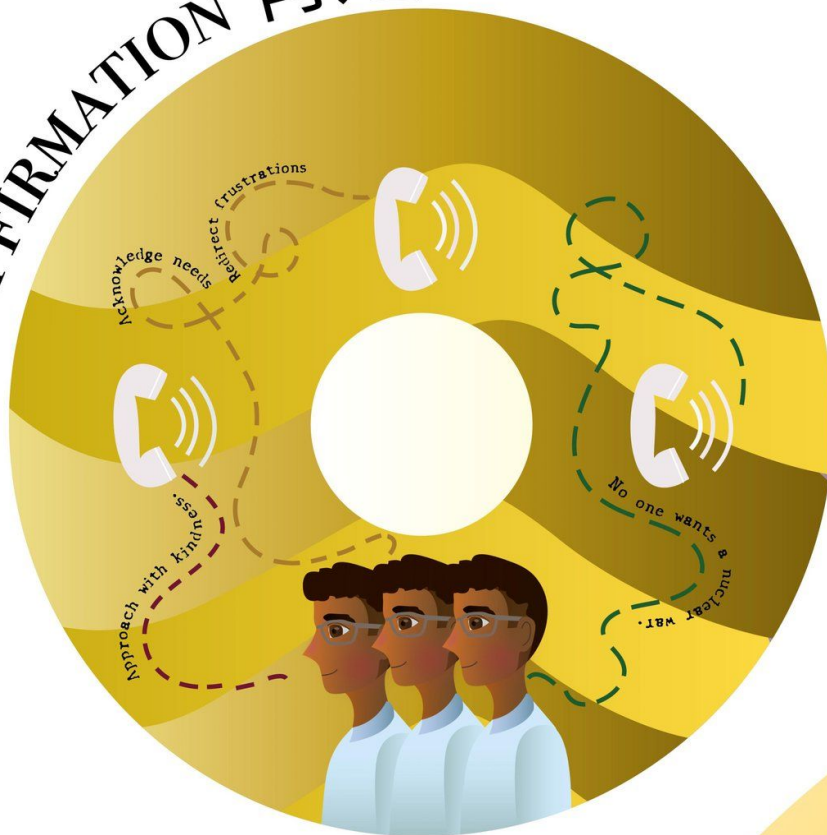
*Closing Notes* pgs 25 - 26  
Olia Zhang

2. Resources pg 27

3. Join Justice is Global pg 28



# AFFIRMATION 肯定



## Three Takeaways

### 1. Approach people with kindness.

Across my approximately fifty extended conversations, I encountered people with wildly diverse political views and who were immersed in every avatar of media ecosystem. I called only one county per shift, but it sometimes felt like hopping on the phone transported me into a multiverse where any combination of narratives could be accepted as reality. As difficult as it was initially to engage with some beliefs, the calls taught me to trust in the practice of compassionate curiosity. Open-ended questions that shied away from judgment but created a safe space for people to express their views were illuminating: gentle prods like “what do you mean by ‘we can’t trust China’” or “can you tell me a little more about why you say that China is our enemy?” helped build trust across my conversations and made people more receptive to hearing my own stories and perspective in turn.



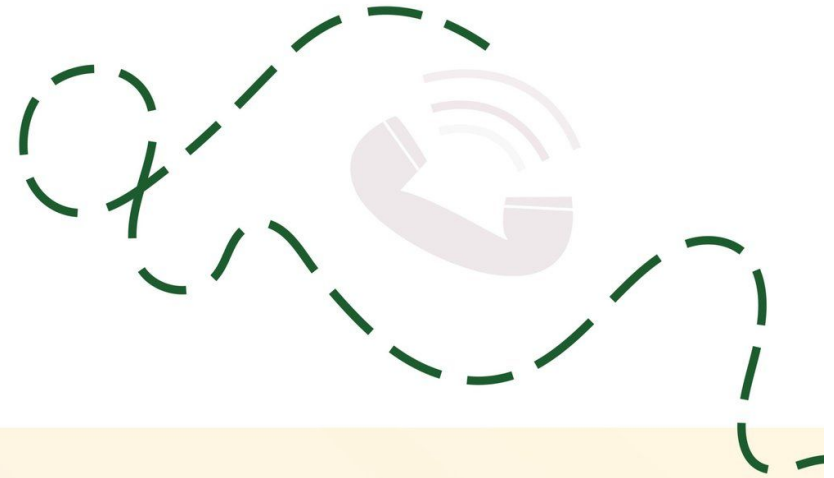
## PRAYUJ (he/him)

Prayuj is a writer and video producer who works at the intersection of journalism and policy in the U.S.-China think tank world. Most recently, he was a Fulbright scholar in Taiwan, where he researched international education as a tool of soft power. His goal in all his projects is to democratize foreign policy and give people the tools they need to understand the world around them. He speaks and writes Chinese, Hindi, and Urdu and is learning Japanese.



## 2. Acknowledge people's needs but redirect their frustrations

I came into calls expecting to hear many regurgitated conspiracy theories and right-wing talking points. But it immediately became clear that for many people on the phone, their misgivings about China were rooted in reality and even resonated with me. Relatable concerns about high prices, a gutted domestic manufacturing sector, and a general sense of "we have so much to work on in our own country" were ubiquitous. I saw an opportunity to affirm people's frustrations while outlining a solution alternative to alienating China or isolating the United States. I connected with one man who paid \$1208 in health care every month and lamented, "but the government somehow has money for wars." Another man reflected on his time in corporate America, where corporate leaders receive \$3 million annual bonuses apiece even as his own children were paying off student loans well into their forties. So many conversations centered around a sense of scarcity: the lack of PPE at the start of the pandemic; the difficulty of buying a house even after bidding \$30,000 above asking price; the shortage of cars because of clogged up semiconductor supply chains. The key was showing people that a world of greater cooperation, rather than one of apathy or hostility toward cooperation with China and other countries, could address these concerns. China didn't have to be a scapegoat or a villain in the story: it could be part of a comprehensive solution that prioritized domestic reform like progressive taxes and increased investment in our public services.



## 3. When it comes down to it, nobody wants a nuclear war.

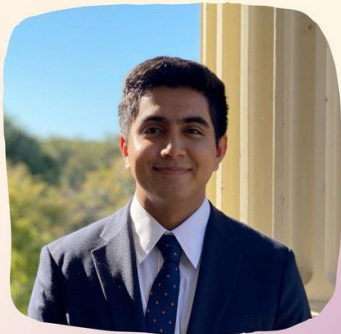
Most people I talked to on the phone had legitimate criticisms of China's political system, threatening behavior toward Taiwan, and disinformation campaign on the war in Ukraine. But I wanted to encourage people to resist the cathartic temptation to punish China through tariffs and disengagement that would not solve these problems. And that resonated with people: the idea that punitive and isolating measures increases the likelihood of conflict with a nuclear power connected a lot with people. Many people on the phone agreed that we can't ignore a country as large as China, and that we are in a better position to achieve positive outcomes through cooperation and negotiation than through alienation.

# People First, Talking Points Last

Sunday night I picked up the phone to speak to voters expecting to hear the same talking points I hear on television.

When they answered I asked how are you doing a she replied, "I've had better days but thank you for asking" I proceeded to ask why and she told me for the past 5 years her grocery bill has kept going up and today she paid one hundred and twenty dollars for groceries that were a little over half of that years ago. She told me how she saw her state dismantled by corporations shipping jobs overseas promising new one, she told me how her friends and family farms were decimated by the trade war with China, and finally she told me about the wrongs she has suffered as a woman in working America where she is almost always guaranteed to earn less than a man would. This sparked a realization in me that I still carry with me today. That was that despite her being a white person in Wisconsin she was still suffering from the inequalities and hardships in society. She had still been denied the right to Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.

This denial that she suffered is what brought me to politics in the first place. From a very young age it was made apparent to me that I was going to be denied my right to enjoy the freedoms I was constitutionally guaranteed because of the color of my skin and the religion I practice. When I would go to the airport, school, and even grocery store I was reminded of that fact. That is why I never felt connected to America or thought that I would even have a future here. But in 2018 after I saw the multicultural, multi gendered, and multi generational movement that learners like brought Ilhan Omar, Rashida Talib and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez to Congress I saw that despite being denied I too now had a chance. When speaking to this woman I felt many of the same challenges she felt and resonated with her in that she, despite being more privileged than me, still was not free. Then I began to tell her how violence and prejudice has denied Asian Americans of their rights in America and she, like me, understood the cause and immediately agreed.



## HASAN PYARALI (he/him)

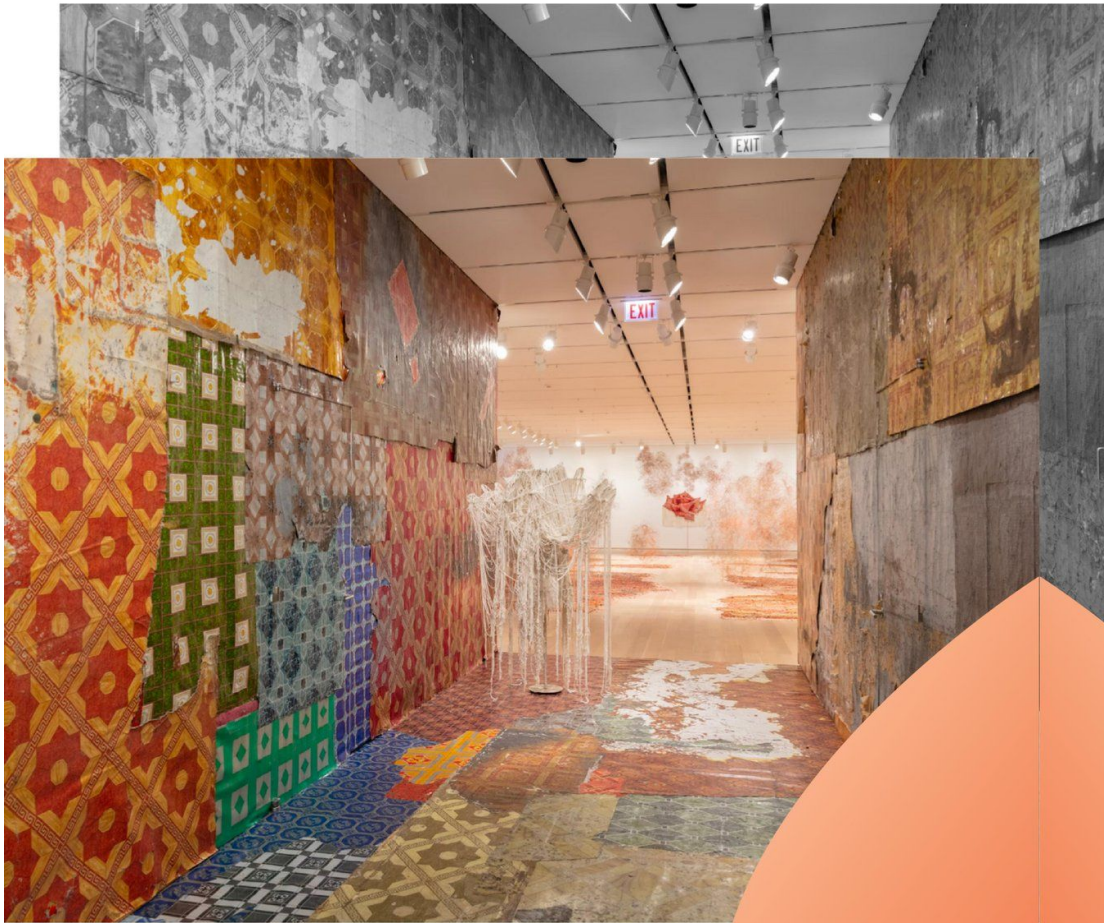
I am a Sophomore in college studying Political Science and Economics at Wake Forest University. I joined Justice is Global to further the mission for working people at home and across the globe.



**Then like a lightbulb we collectively agreed that cooperation across all lines of humanity is what is needed in order to combat hatred in the world**

In order to have better jobs with higher pay we need solidarity, in order to combat climate change we need solidarity, in order to lower the bill at the grocery store we need solidarity. That's the conclusion we came to, that in order for us to advance we need solidarity with the people of China and people all across the world. Our enemies are the corporations and political system which rewards poverty and violence but our fellow citizens are our closest allies and we should hold them to that esteem.

# UNDERSTANDING 理解



Whenever I raise my pen, memories travel back to the years I spent with my grandparents in their one-story apartment in the city of Wuhan.

As a little girl, my grandpa's study was my favorite place to be. The walls were covered with bookshelves, on which the gilded spines and yellowed page oozed an alluring mystery of a thousand unknown worlds. I went back to the study even more in my early teenage years, munching away my grandma's best afternoon dim sum with a book in hand as daylight faded into night. On weekends, my grandpa took me hiking in nearby mountains for "inspiration hunts." We improvised free verse and sang like bards as we reached the summit, photographing Eurasian magpies, cobblestones, and sakura petals with our words.

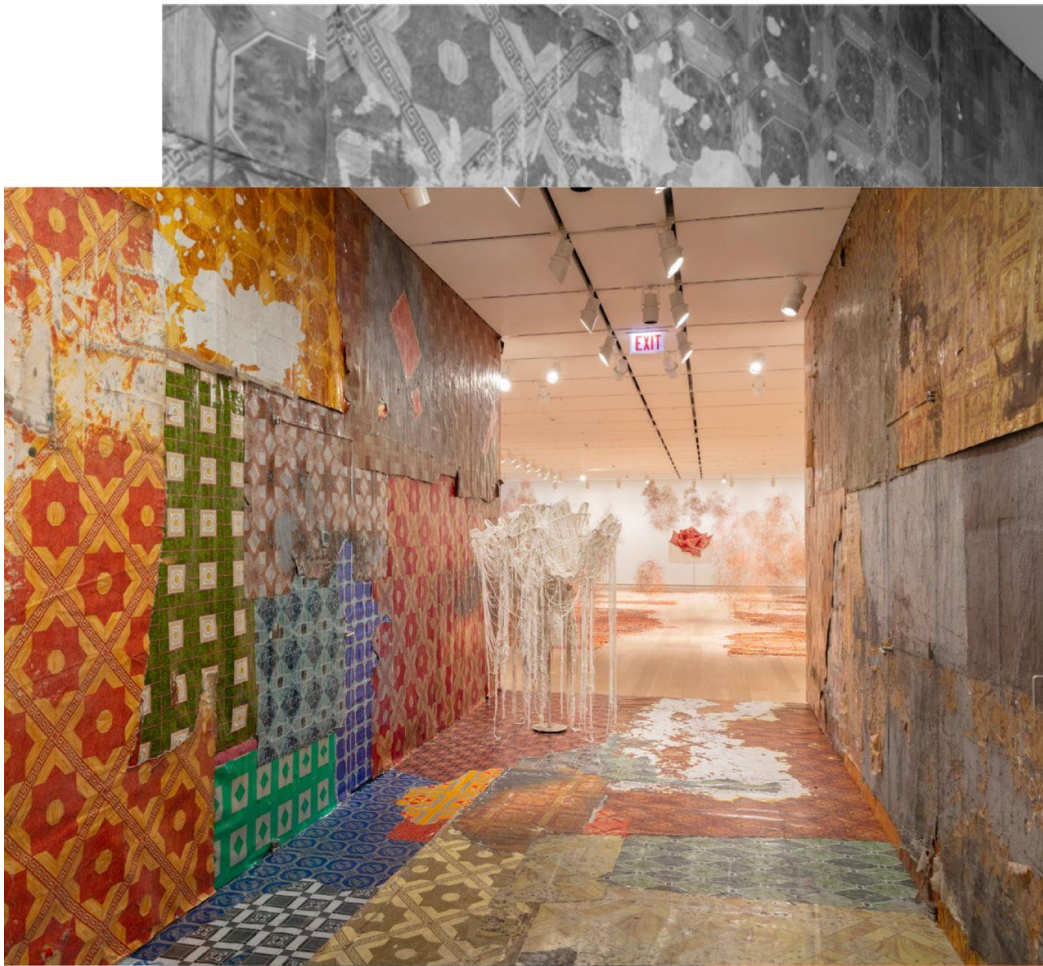
When my grandparents' health deteriorated and became too ill to take care of me, my parents sent me away to live with different relatives during different times. My entire life, I've never stopped leaving behind the familiar: leaving relatives who take me in and treat me as their temporary child, leaving temporary "siblings" and temporary "homes." I've never gotten used to leaving for it always hurts so much. Four cities and three provinces later, I immigrated to the United States at the age of 14 to live with my aunt and uncle. Having lived in places with different socio-economic foundations, I had become aware of the vast difference and growing tensions between China and the West at a young age. Surviving the ever-shifting environment, I found my haven in words, the portal to my grandpa's study -- the only place I could ever call home.



**ERICA  
HU** (she/her)

Erica Hu researches China-Africa relations. She loves taking photos, reading and writing poetry, hot-sauce cooking, spending time with friends, and all the little moments to cherish.





From one country to the other and one culture to the next, I begin to notice, through my maturing eyes, ways in which my personal struggles with assimilation and self-affirmation mirror the bigger political landscape. My writing, mostly in forms of poetry and nonfiction, increasingly explores identities, family histories, and cross-cultural place-making. Often, the bigger societal issues -- such as the rising US-China conflicts, the silencing of the Chinese American voices, the escalating racism towards AAPI minorities -- have no simple solution. Nevertheless, one attempts to shed light on the circumstances, to overthrow what's there, to anatomize the past and empathize with the present, to liberate and not to oppress.

In college, I study Creative Writing and Economics with a focus on International Relations and History. The combination of these disciplines deepens my devotion to honor human experiences beyond numbers. My time of arrival in the U.S. marked China's growing developmental influence and outreach in African countries with the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative. The common Western narrative usually labels China's involvement as "neocolonialist" and "exploitative" among other negative perceptions. By doing so, the common narrative obstructs an alternative understanding of the consequences -- a vantage point from those that are living the experiences. This often hinders the public, who are most susceptible to mainstream bite-size information, from drawing sound judgments on international affairs that ripple into other aspects of human lives, thus escalating existing misunderstandings and conflicts.

# The Root of All Problems

I fear cloudless skies and the realism they erode into the eyes --

predictable like the ceiling I used to stare at  
when my parents bellowed and ruptured everything that  
breathed.

Sprawling limbs on the floor, playing possum -  
I grew so tired of the physics  
of constancy. How can one hold on to anything?  
At which threshold,  
a heart opens?

And the fruit of brokenness lives  
to pay the price of maturing; the price of luck.

[Closes eyes.]

I fear waking in a world where no history looks like me.

Everything vogue in my culture has been stolen  
by translation, beaten to pieces across  
the Xeno-Pacific weathering.  
The rest begs to be understood, but  
can't dance to the tempo of othering.

The delirium of war and peace  
still hasn't recovered from the looting of 1860.

*I fear... I fear a world where no goodness wails like mine.*

Like my grandma's dialect, bejeweled with a twang,  
loud and grainy, the whole country club stares daggers at her  
happiness.

Instead of saying "hold your head up,"  
she now confuses  
death with floating.

*I fear I swallow and listen and swallow and listen too much, words become*

silence, the kind that does not take up space,  
but faith.

And my idealism rises, like a red sun  
that never touches the ground.

Meanwhile, the shape-shifters take forever  
to undress on the soapbox, magnifying their ignorance.

[Opens eyes.]



**EIRA  
KIEN**

(she/they)

Eira is an abolitionist artist from the Vietnamese and Chinese diaspora, and is based in Tongva lands (so-called Los Angeles). She is focused on practicing collective care, sustainability, and accountability.

## Build Longer Tables, and Shorter Fences



*"I want to tell you something.  
I've been having a hard day, with a lot of nerve pain.  
But hearing a kind voice helped."*

An elderly man said this to me, in his gravelly, soft-spoken voice. We were finishing up our deep canvassing conversation, and I was surprised over the connection that formed between us. I remember certain details of our discussion: I asked him about his experiences with marginalized communities, and he admitted that he had no exposure to them. He said he didn't even know what "marginalized" meant. When I shared that it involved people excluded from mainstream narratives and resources, who were in powerless positions, he was receptive. So I drew connections of the difficulties those communities face, with my own Vietnamese and Chinese diaspora, and the current pandemic.

There were moments in this project where detailing my own experiences to predominantly white communities became hard to do. Here I was sharing intimate stories, and then patiently listening and empathizing with people who to them, my communities are invisible. Oftentimes, before revealing my own ethnic background and lived experiences, I'd hear voters discuss how they refuse to work with China. That they will not buy anything made in China. That COVID was China's responsibility to solve. Or some shared view points on how governments have lost our trust, that the authoritarianism in the Chinese and US governments are not acceptable. Added to that, was how the human rights abuses of the Ughyurs and countless communities the US has harmed made the idea of cooperation unlikely. It was a balance of finding common ground, and establishing healthy boundaries while building connections.



With the aforementioned caller, who I will call David, I recognized what was important to me. It is ultimately to build solidarity while having a firm stance on shared values. When before I was frustrated over having to humanize myself to the voters we called to have them be empathetic, I felt a renewed sense of focus on what empathy entails. That I can have empathy for AAPI communities alongside all those impacted from global issues, while also having empathy for those resistant to cooperation after uncovering what is behind their fear, anger, and mistrust.

When David told me how much talking to me mattered, I understood. It mattered to have him listen to me as well, and for him to share that piece of him with me. That when he said he felt "alone", it signified he also could empathize with communities that are forcibly isolated. That the pain he felt with nerve endings, can parallel with the pain harmed by targeted policies. So, we ended the call with David thinking cooperation should happen, specifically with grassroots communities involved.

I heard many life stories in this project. For many calls, similar to David, I was reminded of the idiom "build longer tables, and shorter fences". There were some callers that were staunchly opposed to working together, some with valid concerns. And there were others that were open to what the possibility of solidarity can offer.

# 带着感激和爱继续 KEEP FIGHTING WITH



## Interview

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### XIYUAN (she/her)

Xiyuan identifies herself as a feminist, bisexual, and cis-gender woman. She just finished her Master's of Arts in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. Born and growing up in China, she is interested in local and transnational feminist movements and their overlap with postcolonialism and anti-capitalism. When she's not working on her school work, you can find her reading novels, taking photos, watching movies, and trying different kinds of sweets and desserts, especially those containing dark chocolate.

What made you get involved in this US-China Cooperation Deep Canvassing Project?

Angelina (Note: one of the Team Leads in the project) contacted me first, and she told me about the Deep Canvassing project. She says it's about talking to the American people on the phone and educating them on the importance of the U.S.-China relationship and cooperation. And when I heard that it is about making phone calls, it made me think of a CSA webinar I attended before. A student guest speaker mobilizes the Chinese students to join the union by making phone calls. She said it was a very effective method. Also, I don't have any experience in calling people to ask them to donate money or vote. So I want to use this opportunity to challenge myself. In addition, because of covid, I felt that I didn't have much chance to use English besides in classes. So I thought This might also be an excellent opportunity to practice spoken English. And then, the deeper consideration is that because of the pandemic situation, there are Asian hate sentiments. So if I can even just change one person's mind, I would say that it is a meaningful thing to me.

是什么让你报名参加  
Justice Is Global 深度  
对话项目的?

之前我先联系Angelina。她跟我说这个工作是和美国民众打电话，然后教育他们关于中美关系、中美合作的重要性啊。我一听到打电话这个，就想到了之前参加过的一个CSA（中国留学生及行动者网络）的讲座，是说有一个同学ta打电话去动员中国的留学生参加工会，说还是一个非常有效的一个方法。我之前没有做过任何打电话让人家捐钱呀或者是让ta去投票什么的这方面的事情。然后我一听说哎是打电话的就想锻炼一下自己。而且因为疫情，我感觉我除了每天去学校跟别人说一说英语以外，我平时自己私下里面跟同学聊天什么的也没有什么机会用到英语。然后我就觉得这可能也是一个练口语的好机会。这个是就是比较实际的考虑。再深层次的考虑的话，最近不是新冠疫情吗，我也知道有这个Anti-Asian hate（对亚裔的仇视）。我就觉得能改变一个人的想法，是一个人的想法，（这）是挺有意义的一件事情。

## What makes you get involved in this kind of political organizing?

As a feminist, I think I should participate more in political issues. Also, there are not as many women who are active in the political sphere, but a lot of issues are related to gender and women. So getting involved in political organizations it's a very important approach for me to speak up as a feminist. I also wrote articles and essays in my school about human rights and other issues related, which is also a way to speak up. But I think if I am in a political organization, Sometimes you can see the effect quickly. You're directly involved, and you can meet other people who do the same thing. So mentally, I feel more effective than being an activist in academia.

## 是什么让你想要去参加这样的政治性的 Organizing (组织) 活动?

作为一个女权主义者，就应该多参加政治性的问题。因为我觉得就是本来女性在政治方面的发声就非常少。但是有很多问题其实跟女性相关的。我觉得是一个非常重要的发声手段。像比如说我在我在学校里面写文章也写关于人权、性别相关的话题，也算是另一种发声手段。但是我觉得政治组织里做事情，可能会更直接一些。就是能有时候能很快见到效果，认识很多在做类似事情的人。感觉参与组织比在学界更加有效一些。

## Was there a dialogue that was especially memorable?

Yeah, there is an old grandfather. He didn't really know much about it. About China-US relations and so on, but he had a friend who was doing business in Hong Kong. So when I told him I wanted to promote is US-China corporation, and so on and so forth, he said he understood. His impression of China was still stuck in Mao Zedong and the economic reform era (Note: around 1978) etc. He may not have realized that recently the tension between China and the United States has been very serious. He may not even know Trump and all these messy things about demonizing China. But he has his own theory to understand my point. He said people are like trees. Each tree has a different environment for its growth, and each tree ends up with different fruits and leaves are different. But we are all trees, and we all need sunlight and soil, and we are all connected. And then I think this is a very vivid analogy. I've never thought of using plants to describe people. But when he said that, I felt that it was very interesting. At first, he gave a 6 on the scale, I think, and then later, he changed it to 7 or 8.

## Do you feel like anyone changed their point of view after talking to you?

Yeah, it is such a process! Sometimes I feel nervous about sharing with them my feeling during the pandemic. For example, I feel isolated, etc. At first, I felt nervous because I was afraid people would attack me or argue with me. But actually, most people will say that they feel sorry for that, and then they might be more aware that if the China-US relationship is better, it will improve the lives of Asians. Share my own experiences; it's very effective, I think. It's probably more effective than even the others.

## 有产生让你特别记住了的对话吗？

有一个老爷爷，他其实也不是很了解中美关系什么的，但是他有一个在香港做生意的朋友然后我就跟他说了，我想推动是中美合作什么的。然后他一听就表示非常理解。他对中国的印象还在就是刚刚建国或者刚改革开放什么，什么毛泽东那个年代。他可能还没有意识到就是最近中美关系非常僵，然后还有川普这些乱七八糟的事情。然后他就说，我觉得我们人就像树一样啊，虽然每个树有不同适合他生长的环境，

每个树结束的果实还有叶子都不一样，但是呢，我们都是树。我们都需要阳光和土壤，我们都是就是 connected（连接起来）的。然后我觉得这个比喻很生动形象。我从来没有想过去用植物来形容人，但是他这么一说我觉得很有意思。对然后他本身也是（在1-10对中美关系合作的支持度自我评估尺度）给了6分吧可能，后来到了7分还是8分。

## 你觉得有人在和你对话后改变了想法吗？

嗯，这是一个过程。有的时候我对分享我在疫情当中的感受觉得很紧张，很怕有人会不会来攻击我，或者跟我吵架。但大多数人其实会说，他们很抱歉听到我的感受，而且他们说聊过以后他们会更意识到中美关系好起来会改善我们亚裔的些生活。我觉得就是这样分享自己的经历是有效果的。可能比其他（方式）甚至都会更有效率。

## What kind of advice would you give to people who are just starting deep canvassing?

I think the first thing is to be mentally prepared. Calling people is energy-consuming. To reduce this kind of consumption, doing more practice will be helpful. Maybe you can practice by yourself or with other people, and be more familiar with the script we have. And then relax. I think Yuwei did it well. When she found out that this was too consuming and she may not be able to continue to do it, she just said it. That is if you really just can't do it. Don't hold on to it. If you constrain yourself, the result may not be very good as well... Yeah, I would say stop when you need to stop.

## 你作为前辈 canvasser，对于一些刚刚开始 deep canvassers有什么建议？

我觉得首先就是要做好心理准备。打电话是个有一些累的过程。energy consuming（消耗精力）的。为了减轻这种这种 consuming（消耗）呢，我觉得可以，  
○多自己跟自己练习。比如说我们准备好的一些可能的应对方式和回应。再多看一看，平常跟小伙伴可以多练一练，就可以没有那么紧张。然后就放松。然后我其实觉得Yuwei她做的挺好的就是当他发现这个东西实在是太消耗的时候，她就提出说，她（目前）可能不能继续做。所以说如果自己真的就是做不了的话，也不要硬撑着，因为如果那样可能效果也不是特别好。就是其实不让这一次（耗尽精力），在需要停的时候停下来。



How was the experience of deep canvassing calling? How does it make you feel and what is your stake in this?

I think there are pros and cons to doing this. I knew the phone call was going to be exhausting, But it's just...I didn't know it would be this tiring. I feel like every time I finish a phone call. I had to rest for several hours before doing other things and recovering from that state. Partly because I have to think about what to say in the script, and English is not my native language either. I'm just a little nervous about speaking English. And then there's another thing. I don't know what the other person's reaction would be. Many people are straightforward about their anger. When a person heard that I was talking about China-US relations, he expressed his anger and his views and hung up the phone. I felt speechless and suffocated that he didn't even give me a chance to argue back. If there were a very good conversation, I would feel better, but the conversations were often incomplete.

I would feel a little bit frustrated. The good thing is that sometimes you can accomplish some complete conversations, and then you think you are doing something very meaningful. Also, during the debrief, I can share my experience with the group. I can tell them I met this and that kind of strange person. Then I feel more relief, and it is quite good.

做这些对话的经历有对关于你个人和这个话题的联系的观感有影响吗?

我觉得有利有弊吧。因为我其实之前知道打电话就像很累的事情，但是我没有想要会这么累。就我觉得我每次打完电话之后，我都要休息好几个小时才能从那个状态里面缓过来。一方面是因为要想好什么样的稿子要怎么去说，然后英语也不是我母语。就是我在说英语这方面会紧张一下。然后还有就是，不知道对方那个人的反应是什么样。等我打到后面，好多人就是直接听到我是说中美关系的，ta就表达一下ta自己的非常非常愤怒的一些观点然后就把电话挂掉。然后我就觉得你都不给我反驳的机会，ta就直接挂。我就觉得非常无语，就很憋得慌。

也有非常好的对话。但很多时候就对话其实是incomplete（不完整）的，我会觉得有一些有不爽。但是比较好的方面是，确实有些时候可以完成一些完整的对话，就会觉得，自己做了非常有意义的事情。就是在打完电话后的debrief（小结）的时候也可以跟大家说，啊我今天有没有遇到了奇葩的人，就觉得比较解压，就还挺好。



# All We Want, Baby, Is Everything

I'm a debate coach by trade, a word that here means something like career or craft but today more often conjures thoughts of cheap Chinese goods, closed and decaying factories, and corporate executives eager to relocate production from one corner of the globe to another whenever their only true master—the law of profit—dictates, consequences for the people they employ and communities left behind be damned. It's an emotionally resonant set of images, capable of provoking strong negative feelings about the kind of world we live in. But it's hard to live with despair alone, so people look for relief wherever they can find it.

One form this takes is nostalgic fantasizing: daydreaming that somehow, someday we can return to an easier time, when the economy worked for everyone and America's dominance was unquestioned. Of course, it's doubtful that this time ever really existed, but that fact alone hardly changes the way people feel. This is one of the core insights upon which the deep canvassing strategy is built: when it comes to influencing belief, emotions and stories exert more power than information and arguments.

At first glance, this way of thinking would seem to be at fundamental odds with my vocation. Competitive academic debate is a game of arguments. It asks students to engage with issues that are far removed from the realm of their personal experience. One of the core mantras of the debate community is Readers Beat Talkers, an expression meant to remind participants that building knowledge about the topic is a key component of competitive success. Winning cases are made up of data and quoted expert testimony not emotional narrative. Debate also places a lot of value on confrontation and logical aggression. In his reflections on what separates champion competitors from the merely good, Scott Deatherage—the late former coach at Northwestern University—offered up another of debate's mantras. "Don't ask," he instructed, "argue." In the battle of ideas, offense is more important than defense. You should anticipate your opponent's premise and work to undermine it from the start.



## JAMES DURKEE (he/him)

A working class son of the Pacific Northwest, James has lived all over the United States and in a couple of big cities in China. Before being forced to return to America during the pandemic, he worked as a debate coach and spent the rest of his time reading, traveling and mixing killer cocktails. These days he's back in America, trying to make sense of his new life as an exile in the land of his birth.



Some critics see everything that's wrong with American politics in debate. It reduces real-world problems to mere abstractions, tactically shuffled around in a game played for fun. Rounds are binary, zero-sum, and winner-takes-all. Sure, this competition incentivizes debaters to conduct a lot of research about the world, but it's less about learning and more about weaponizing information for an intellectual war where truth doesn't matter as much as technique. In the heat of battle, when debaters are confronted with compelling evidence against their case they don't back down and revise their opinions. They follow the code of Slim Charles and dig in. If it's a lie, then they fight on that lie, but the main thing is that they continue to fight. In this way, debate is both a mirror reflecting a world riven by partisan jockeying and training that sustains it.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, there was a time when I received any non-debate colleague or friend that dared to suggest anything along these lines as if they'd just challenged me to a duel. Our community had its share of problems, of course, but who did these outsiders think they were? Why did they assume they had either the knowledge or standing to lob such accusations our way? Whether or not they were looking for a fight, they got one. Lately, it's easier to contain my impulse to lash out, restraint I owe in part to the hospitality and patience shown to me by communities where I was the outsider who knew little but felt and said much.



Midway through the last decade, I took a job coaching in China. It started as a temporary gig, but then I fell in love and decided to stay. Like countless travelers before me, I became enamored with the beauty of Chinese culture and cuisine, both famously tracing their roots back thousands of years but totally new to me. I was also attracted by many of the marvels that have emerged in the Middle Kingdom only recently—to the benefits that come with living in a country that spent the last 20 years investing in infrastructure instead of Iraqi death. On one level these benefits, like China's nation-wide network of high-speed rail, were material and practical conveniences, essentially luxuries. But they also lent life a palpable, ambient feeling of optimism. The sense that things could and would continue to get better was contagious. It was all very encouraging, of course, but that doesn't mean life was always easy. Still, I was happy to get lost in a country that spoke a different language, with the experience of being made uncomfortable by a place that regularly defied my expectations and challenged my beliefs, and with the work of finding and building community with people despite these differences. Any time I considered leaving China, these factors worked to pull me back in.

I was also pushed to stay abroad by news of what was—and wasn't—happening back home. Living overseas meant that I had no choice but to watch things develop from afar, a spectator to America's political dramas. The show wasn't inspiring. I saw a society that not only failed to build high-speed rail but had hardly any hope for correcting its mistakes. I saw one the wealthiest countries in history confront multiple crises and prove incapable of implementing policies to do much of anything about them. I read plenty of practical suggestions about how we might improve things—how we might meaningfully address the suffering caused by growing income inequality, soaring housing and medical costs, epidemics of drug overdose and gun violence—only to turn around and read that, thanks to America's worsening and partisan divisions, none of them seem were politically viable. If, as all these reports made it seem, Democrats and Republicans have come to see one another less as colleagues with different opinions and more as enemy combatants, each side believing the other is on a mission to destroy the country, there seemed little reason to be optimistic about the future.

All of this made me think again about what critics have said about debate. From across the Pacific, I watched with particular befuddlement as the nationalist framing promoted by Trump—epitomized in his campaign promise to recapture lost American greatness but already telegraphed in prior conspiracies about Obama's birth certificate—was embraced by his opponents in their desperation to explain and avenge Hillary's defeat. Conspiracies about Russia's army of election-meddling bots and Trump's ties to Putin captivated the Democratic public by repeating the same narrative that Birtherism delivered to conservatives: the president has no legitimate claim to lead because he's not really one of us, an invasive threat to our community, and we will be safe if—and only if—we expel this outsider. Worse, it seemed the emotional attraction of this story rendered both variations immune to empirical refutation among believers. I saw in this repetition and resilience additional symptoms of a diseased politics where information is wielded as a weapon in a binary contest and winning is all that matters. When conspiratorial combat supplants collaborative deliberation, when stories and emotions routinely triumph over logic and facts, academic debate starts to seem irrelevant at best and maybe even complicit with the disease that's killing us. This possibility left me, like many coaches of my generation, feeling a different kind of lost.



The emergence of COVID-19 sure didn't help. For one thing, I was on a trip to the states when the border closed, suddenly separated from the life I'd spent years building. For a while I did my best to stay connected in anticipation of my return, riding out what I hoped would be a short stint as an exile in my own country. I spent a lot of quarantine time searching for any shred of news about when China would reopen for travel. Instead, I found eulogies about the death of US-China relations and horrifying articles that not only predicted a 21st century rehash of the Cold War but seemed to relish the prospect. More immediately, the rapid spread of cases and deaths brought me face to face with yet another crisis about which America could seem only to fight. As the pandemic worsened and time once again began to stretch, it all became a lot more personal and a lot more real. The connections to my old life grew harder and harder to sustain. Already worrying about the possibility that I'd lose everything I loved about my life in Asia, I watched my father load up on digital misinformation and refuse to get vaccinated. It meant living every day with the fear of his imminent death. Compounding things, it also meant living with my own inability to change his mind. Was I unable to persuade him *despite* my background in debate or *because* of it?

There was at least one silver lining amongst all these dark clouds. At the start of the pandemic, one of my old debate buddies—now a professor of Chinese history somewhere on the East Coast—started a podcast about Asian American politics and culture. I decided to listen. One week they had a guest on to talk about the advocacy work he was doing to try to avert this Cold War before it got going, and about deep canvassing, a new method of persuasion that had shown promising ability to convince people across deep political divides. I listened as he described an approach that seemed to draw a radical contrast with my growing doubts about debate. Convincing people is less about combat and more about building connections. It's about creating a space where people feel recognized rather than judged. We should have compassionate conversations centered on the empathetic exchange of stories, especially stories built from the lived reality of both canvasser and canvased. The cone of curiosity should replace criticism. Since emotional reality matters more than empirical reality, we should emphasize feelings instead of facts. Don't argue, affirm.

Impressed by his appearance, I decided to follow this guy on Twitter and eventually signed up to work on one of his campaigns. By this time, I'd read up a little more on deep canvassing, hopeful but still full of doubts. A lot of what I read sounded good, but did it actually work? I knew I had plenty of personal stories to share with people about China, that I could talk very passionately about what we stand to lose if these countries turn their backs and stop engaging, but then—lots of people have sad stories about lots of things in 2022, and I'm a perfect stranger, so why would they care to listen to mine? Would they even pick up the phone? Assuming they did answer and that this strategy could work, I wondered whether someone with my background in debate could do it correctly. Would I be able to resist the temptation to get drawn into argumentative back and fourths? Finally, although I was confident that a policy of enmity towards China was just about the worst idea imaginable, I worried that no amount of compassionate conversation could convince people, that the combination of national and partisan divides would prove insurmountable.

My experience with this project answered many of these doubts. Many people in Wisconsin were willing to talk to strangers about US-China relations, sometimes at considerable length, to listen to our stories and to share stories of their own. Deep canvassing does have the power to cross partisan divides and change how people feel about this issue. As we talked to people with identifiable allegiances to both parties, our conversations revealed a unity of feeling that all this talk of national division tends to cover up: anxiety and anger about growing material precarity, institutional decay, constant conflict, and leaders who spend their time hunting scapegoats—other parties, other countries—instead of working together to address the myriad crises hurting us all. This emotional unity is the basis from which a more just global future can and must be built. But that doesn't mean it'll be easy.



For one thing, these calls offered plenty of reminders that nationalism is a seductive and politically powerful story to tell. It gives leaders an easy way to bring disparate groups of individuals together against a common enemy, real or imagined, and to shift blame away from their own failures. This is another unity obfuscated by our charged partisan atmosphere. I talked to many people in both parties that believed America's policy towards China changed dramatically when Biden took over for Trump. The reality, of course, is that there's far more continuity than difference. For all his campaign talk about being the anti-Trump, President Biden has decided to leave the bulk of Trump's antagonizing tariffs against China in place. Foreign policymakers from this administration continue to repeat the mantras developed by the last, insisting that "the era of engagement is over." Midterm candidates in both parties are pinning their electoral hopes on the faith that bashing China will help them win. Even some progressive-minded folks have been tempted by this strategy, by a fever dream that imagines enmity towards China can be embraced as a way out of our partisan deadlocks and the misguided belief that it might be worth it if it makes action on other progressive priorities politically possible.

All these fantasizing hinges on having a selective memory about the 20th century, one that looks back, and sees all the reforms and investments passed when Congress was motivated by a shared desire to defeat the Soviets, and hopes to return. What such Cold War nostalgia wants us to forget is the reality that bipartisan consensus turned the world beyond America's borders into a virtual and an actual killing field. Arms races by the superpowers held the world hostage with the constant threat of atomic annihilation while wars fought by proxy destroyed countries and killed millions. Although I wasn't alive back then, the legacy of all this violence is something I encountered first-hand when traveling in Cambodia and Korea, Laos, and Vietnam. In the cost-benefit language of policy debate, the progressive benefits of sacrificing internationalism for domestic reform only outweigh the costs if you discount the humanity of people that live and die in foreign lands (or ignore it altogether).



Another problem is that anger and anxiety doesn't automatically lend itself to progressive causes. Often these emotions compel people to abandon political participation, to escape instead into the many distractions and pleasures consumer capitalism has to offer. Monsters occupy the space they leave behind. As one colleague described it, the problem is that "plenty of people, animated by anger, anxiety, envy and the general feeling that the 'system is rigged against them' are acting on pessimistic and nihilistic beliefs that no amount of effort can salvage the decline of a certain vision of America. These people see the most extreme and destructive measures to tear down what already exists as the only way to purify the world, as the only way forward. They are like villains in superhero movies that aim to destroy everything and start from scratch." The series of mass shootings in recent weeks are tragic evidence in support of her point.

But my colleague's characterization is also an important reminder of modes of persuasion that, for all its merits, the discourse around deep canvassing might cause us to overlook. Non-personal stories, like the fictions offered in cinema, give us coordinates we use to interpret the reality around us—lived or not. These stories demand critical analysis not unconscious affirmation. It's worth remembering that superhero movies are not just highly profitable modes of entertainment. They are ideological products and prophets of the very culture we are trying to transform, which raises questions about whether they offer a good mental map for thinking about how to build a progressive internationalist future.



The *Joker* gives us the quintessential depiction of a nihilistic, destructive superhero villain. He just wants to see the world burn. But shouldn't we see Batman—and the Gotham institutions that fight the Joker's terror by allowing a billionaire vigilante to be outside (and above) the law—also as villains? Consider the way Christopher Nolan's Batman movies encouraged us to view the "War on Terror": sure, America invaded Iraq on a completely fabricated pretext, killed hundreds of thousands of civilians, broke international laws about detention and torture, unsigned the ICC and passed the "Hague Invasion Act" to preemptively prevent any effort to hold the leaders responsible for these atrocities accountable, but that's alright because the world needs a force that's above and outside the law to keep the real bad guys at bay. Is it any surprise that a public inundated with threat constructions about foreign menaces and the Manichean allegories of superhero films starts to see the "rules"-based international order imposed and enforced by exempting American violence from all rules as the lesser evil? When America is Batman, foreign policy becomes a series of spectacular blockbusters in the glorious Department of Defense multiverse: the villain changes (Soviets, Terrorists, Russia, China...) but the heroes remain the same.

There's a broader lesson here. As we seek to build a better world, we should be careful to not let our thinking get boxed in by the stories we tell ourselves—about ourselves, about deep canvassing as a method, and about the people we are trying to reach. Over the course of this project, we talked to people that identified with both parties, including many who voted for Trump. They weren't all that villainous and many were far more persuadable than I ever expected. Still, I sometimes heard fellow canvassers write these people off ahead of time, repeating the very assumptions about partisanship and persuasion that deep canvassing was designed to overcome. The danger in thinking this way should be obvious: we might preemptively discard rhetorical strategies that are useful and potential allies in the process.



After reflecting on my conversation with my colleague, I started to rethink the story I'd been telling myself about debate and deep canvassing. About how and why I'd pit these two methods against one another in my head, and about the implications using this dichotomy to narrate my experience might have for others. We don't have to see these two approaches as mutually exclusive enemies in competition. Despite all their apparent differences, the truth is they have a lot of things in common. For one thing, deep canvassers are hardly the first folks to recognize the persuasive power of emotion and personal connection. As any novice debater should be able to tell you, Aristotle long ago figured out that logos alone doesn't work. You must be able to understand your audience, cultivate credibility in their eyes, and tap into the passions that drive their decision-making. Ethos and pathos are essential. More seasoned competitors will tell you that their experience in debate confirms Aristotle's thinking, that the best evidence alone was never enough to win, that they drew upon all the available means of persuasion to build connections and convince their judges. This is something progressive internationalists taking up deep canvassing should keep in mind.

It's also important to pay attention to the difference between what happens inside a single debate round and everything that goes on between and around them. This is something that critics of the debate community miss. Participation in this activity demands collaboration with teammates and learning to communicate with people that come from different backgrounds. Preparation for new topics trains debaters to be literate consumers of media and fosters curiosity about the world outside their immediate community. In my case, it took me from a small exurb on the Pacific Coast to college in the Midwest, nearly every one of our 50 states, and all over East Asia. Ultimately, it brought me to this project.

My personal journey gave me an abundance of stories I could use to convince Wisconsinites that cooperation with China is better than confrontation. But the movement for a progressive internationalist future faces long odds if it depends on the lived experience of canvassers alone. Many of the people on our project arrived having spent time in the Middle Kingdom, but the majority did not. Some had experience in the Midwest, but again many did not. To overcome this limit, we did research and shared it with each other. We educated ourselves. We read about Wisconsin, about what their farmers grow and where they sell it and how they were doing lately, about other industries and how they were impacted by the tariffs, about the specific communities we were calling, and about China. All this factual investigation helped canvassers build confidence and revealed unforeseen possibilities of connection. It didn't mean that we spent our calls bombarding people with facts, it just helped us ask better questions and tell better stories. And it worked. Readers beat talkers.



# Personal Stake



So for the personal stake, I think the biggest word for me was "global justice" and just the global aspect of it.

And I think something that's always really frustrated me, living in the US, is that people aren't the most conscious or socially aware or understanding on what cooperation means and how that looks like. And just living in alignment with other people. And I feel that this sounds cheesy, but sometimes when you're sitting and you're seeing the news and then you're organizing and the more you're organizing...you're having these developed thoughts and theories and feelings, but [focusing on] the core.

[And you think]: "This is all so, so stupid. This is all so stupid." Like the antagonism between the US and other countries without that, like, cooperation is so ridiculous because I think about my grandparents and them growing up, back home in our home country, in the villages. [They were] so critical over cooperation, cause in their time there weren't really borders that existed. And so understanding different cultures, understanding different dialects and languages that was just a customary way of life and it's just really important to give respect to that.

I think that's what really brought me to that, because I felt like I didn't really see a genuine initiative that was focused on global justice, in cooperation. So that was what motivated me to join because I think that's been a question I've been thinking about for a while.



## NOOR (they/them)

Noor is from Atlanta, and they are passionate about maternal and infant health for Black, Indigenous, and Brown communities. They hope to become a physician who can become an advocate for patient populations. When they have time, they love learning about ancestral healing practices and how it intersects with medicine—especially in birthing communities! They hope to incorporate birthing justice and radical community care into the work they do as an organizer and in their medical career.



I come from a background of working on global health and health disparities. And so I think, you know, we can be really focused on like everything that's happening in the US, which is important, right? What's happening in the diaspora, but there are so many other lessons that we can take from other homelands and other home countries and just like other experiences. And so I think white supremacy, when it comes to lack of global cooperation, reminds me of colonization. It reminds me of imperialism and just a new context. So I think I just wanted to expand my experience with that and how that looked like. Especially as a person that comes from a community that's very traumatized by imperialism and by colonization. Just the amount of atrocious US policies that traumatized everyone.

In the Middle East, it's so common to have like friends that either were born and lived there, or just lived there at some point in their childhood, like relating to the experience of "Yeah, I hate the sound of bombs".

That's such a surreal experience to have, and to share with like other people. So I feel like, I don't know if that quite makes sense, but I just, really hate that and I wouldn't wanna wish that on anybody else. And I also know so many other communities, even if I don't know what their equivalent of that trauma is.

I just, I don't. I don't agree with it. So I feel like the six weeks of calling has helped me really dive into, what is propaganda? What does propaganda look like, on the micro-level, and how does it come out? And the more you speak with the person [you realize how much of propaganda] is against global cooperation.



[So you wonder about] in what ways does that kind of stay clenched onto them? And then what are the ways that you can kind of like peel off the tentacles? Or you can peel off a claw, one by one, and actually have a conversation where it's asking what are your deep fears? Because everyone, everywhere, has a deep fear of that.

But how is that being capitalized on how are you being taken advantage of by US government politics to serve whatever propaganda? Because at the end of the day, they don't, they don't really care about you. They don't care about your meat products. They don't care about your revenue. They just care about like how much money you're bringing to the state, but they don't actually care about you.

And people that, in this example in China, are a lot more likely to care about you, even if there's like a language barrier than people [such as US politicians] that are supposed to be representing you. And I think people in the US don't know that. It's not until you leave the US that so many non-Western cultures are just, even if I don't know you, if I don't understand the language, I'm gonna stop and I'm gonna ask, are you okay? Do you need help? Is everything okay? And, yeah, I don't know. That's just kind of just how I feel what was my personal reasons for it.



# Closing Notes



## OLIA ZHANG (she/her)

Olia (Qiaoqian) Zhang is an organizer and storyteller based in Brooklyn, New York. Olia grew up in Xiamen, China, and misses tropical island living. She has coordinated progressive education, mutual aid organizing, international solidarity, and community art programs locally and globally, and aspires to continue to advance social-environmental justice with creative approaches. Their academic concentration is on global social movements, education & labor equity, and creative arts.

I was very close to giving up adding any personal writing to this collection.

(Eira, the zine’s wonderful designer, said that those who came from China may have the most stake in this project, so she wanted to make sure to include my voice. I wrote this with so much appreciation for Eira’s reminder.)

Back when the project started, I asked Sandy, the manager of the project, if I can make a little project featuring the people we gathered through the deep canvassing project, and she not only offered moral support but also maneuvered the time and material resources needed to make this happen. Then one amazing canvasser after another said yes to joining the efforts, and brought to you this basket full of generous sharing and courageous caring.

Facing the reality of the political systems, I often feel speechless, or even worse, voiceless. Seeing the recent turns of events with grassroots movements in China and pandemic lockdown, I struggle to not feel distracted and worried and often have trouble coming up with coherent writing. Even though I’m thousands of miles away from where it’s happening in China, my home country that I haven’t stepped foot in for more than a thousand days, I’m a few taps away from learning the overwhelming reality of the chaotic and restrictive Covid-19 lockdown going on in cities and villages in China, that are stopping people from having basic food and medical needs met. A few days ago, the lockdown in Shanghai has just been lifted.

Looking back, I see that in reaching out to people to discuss US-China Cooperation, the deep canvassers want to address many targets, the more noticeable ones are the China-bashing nationalist and scapegoating narratives, harmful foreign policies made by US politicians, and racially targeted violence that left me feeling speechless in rage. But there are also “softer” targets that we have been trying to understand and detangle: the attitudes or habits that deny or ignore the importance of the relations between two countries with the world’s largest military and economies. Or the opposite side of the spectrum is the deterministic and opportunist view that wars and disasters are unavoidable, and that decoupling, punishing, and even aggressive attacking will be the way to go.

I know that when these geopolitical conflicts and racial profiling play out in everyday life, they look like a breeding ground for paranoia and fears. When “Wuhan virus” or “China virus” were coined and used over and over in the narratives about the virus, no science or logic can spare the fear and hatred behind the framing of an “enemy”. I hear canvassers tell me that someone they called said that one of the high school students they teach asked to have her photo taken down from the school’s website, with the fear that they may be targeted with an Asian-looking face. My heart ached. When I was a student at the beginning of 2020, that hiding tendency drove me to cancel some of the most important meetings I needed to have with my college advisors and classmates, with the fear that taking the subway in New York invites danger. After all, nearly everyone I talked to with a supposedly Chinese-looking has experienced direct violence - being shoved, pushed, pointed at, or quietly avoided in public spaces like the public transit system.

The idea that “the other”, such as the people or forces from another country, is an enemy because the country is not on good terms with one’s own is not unfamiliar to me. Before I came to the US for college, my father sat me down unironically to make me promise that I will never become a spy against China and that I’ll never find a boyfriend from Japan. In his and perhaps many others’ worldviews, the foreign country that made a bad name in past wars, present tensions, and potential future conflicts should only be feared, treated with, and forever guarded against. Having conversations with strangers about US-China relations encouraged me to talk to my father about the narratives about the “other” as the enemy, and maybe one day we’ll find more common grounds.

Looking back at the project, I feel immensely lucky to have found a group of people that encourage me to turn to feelings and acts of hope, action, and communication. I want to thank them, and applaud them for confronting and tackling the layers and layers of complex personal and political interests and struggles. So with my feelings and barriers in mind, I think you, the reader can probably understand, why I so deeply appreciate the community of deep canvassers this project gathered, and why I insist that you hear their voices, and understand their stories, and so maybe you’ll join us.

Or maybe you already are “one of us”, who tries to make the world to be a more just and equitable place.

# Resources

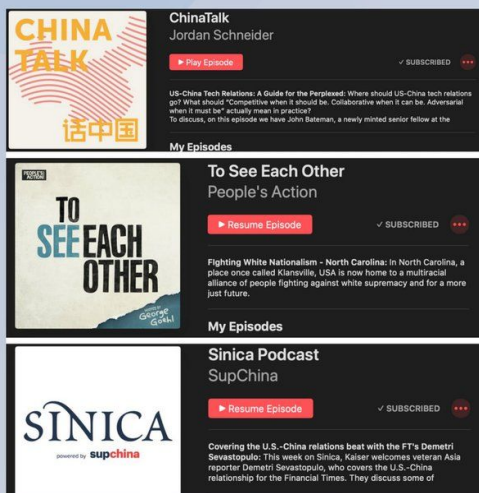
## Articles

1. "Don't assume Russia and China are on the same page. The US can work with China"  
- Tobita Chow & Jake Werner (4/2/2022)
2. "How China Threat Narrative Feed into Anti-Asian Racism"  
- Justice is Global (2021)
3. "A Year In, Biden's China Policy Looks a Lot Like Trump's"  
- Jennifer Conrad (2021)

## Documentaries

1. When Titans Clash (2021) by CNA
  - a. EP 1 - Pride & Shame: The Roots Of US-China Tensions
  - b. EP 2 - The Real Losers Of The US-China Trade War
  - c. EP 3 - A US-China Tech War: The True Costs
2. In The Same Breath (2021) directed by Nanfu Wang

## In English:



## Podcasts

## In Mandarin Chinese:



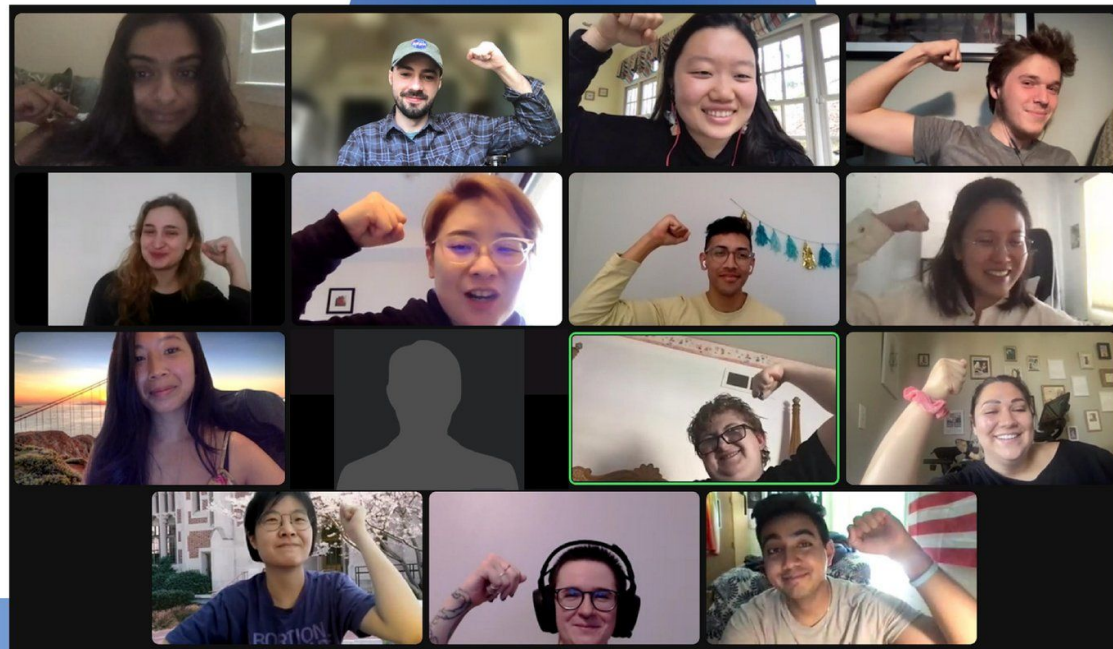
Podcasts (in Mandarin Chinese)  
不合时宜 The Weirdo

<https://tinyurl.com/TheWeirdoPodcast>

Recommended  
Resources for Readings  
on China by themes:

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