During my 10-week internship at National Asian Pacific American Women’s Forum (NAPAWF), I spent most of my time working on a research project to study the journalistic narratives of Chinese-language newspapers in the US on social justice issues – in other words, how these newspapers address the political needs of marginalized populations among their readers. The propose of this study is to use Chinese-language newspapers as an example to highlight the broader landscape of ethnic media in the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community and clarifies the types of strategies that should be engaged to better serve AAPI women. By the end of the internship I generated two pieces of writing for this research project:


In the brief, I pointed out that the Chinese-language newspapers fail to meet the gender- and class-specific political needs of Chinese American women. While these women are disproportionately affected by limited English proficiency (LEP) and expected to rely more heavily on Chinese-language newspapers for information, the newspapers erase their voices and stories. The newspapers stay mostly silent about violation of labor rights, which disproportionately affects working-class Chinese immigrant women. The newspapers seldom touch on intimate partner violence (IPV), a prevalent issue that haunts Chinese immigrant families and Chinese immigrant women in particular. The Chinese-language newspapers also reinforce the “model minority”
narrative by distancing and erasing AAPI, especially AAPI women from broader civil rights struggles in the US.

I also found out that limitations in newspaper circulation and coverage as well as insufficient investment in journalistic production further prevent Chinese-language newspapers from better meeting the needs of their women readers, who are disproportionately affected by LEP. According to my analysis of the previous literature on Chinese-language media and US Census data, Chinese-language newspapers are yet to reach areas with high percentage of Chinese speakers with LEP, nor are they giving adequate coverage to areas with the enormous growth of Chinese speakers with LEP. It is also very expensive for Chinese-speaking populations outside of the traditional gateway Chinese immigrant cities to access Chinese-language newspapers. Moreover, Chinese-language newspapers mainly serve as advertisers for Chinese ethnic business and thus allocate very limited resources to journalistic productions and developing independent ethnic journalism. It is, therefore, very hard to expect publications that prioritize the needs of business clients over readers to address the needs of more marginalized readers, including women readers.

At the end of the research, I proposed several strategies to transform the current landscape of AAPI ethnic media to address linguistic barriers and information gap faced by the AAPI community and called for more efforts from AAPI advocacy organizations in building relationships with AAPI ethnic media.

(2) An op-ed “‘Rising American Electorate’: the Dilemma of AAPI Voters in Obtaining Political Information” written based on the brief described above. In this op-ed, I addressed the awkward situation faced by AAPI voters in their decision-making process:
mainstream English media remain linguistically inaccessible to many AAPI, while at the same time AAPI ethnic media largely fail to identify and provide political information important for AAPI voters. I stressed the urgency to address the linguistic barriers faced by AAPI voters, especially as the 2016 elections are around the corner.

In addition to the research project, I also proposed to translate fact sheets and organization history into Mandarin Chinese and did some administrative tasks like phone banking. I also had the chance to attend many intern training events and even rallies. On June 27th, my colleagues and I drove all the way from New York City down to D.C. for the rally in front of U.S. Supreme Court for the Whole Woman’s Health vs. Hellerstedt ruling – the absolute highlight of my entire internship.

In the process of finishing the research project, I encountered lots of challenges. Thanks to liberal education, I have some decent writing and research skills that I applied to my research. However, as someone whose primary training is in science, I found it particularly challenging to work independently on a social science/humanities research project – I have never been exposed to the topic of media studies, nor have I wrote any policy-focused paper.

In the beginning, narrowing down the topic was particularly difficult: no one at NAPAWF has done prior research on Chinese-language newspapers, and no one was sure what to expect for the research outcome. I started the research project as a field study – I spent quite sometime during my first two weeks in New York City visiting Chinatown areas to observe how the Chinese population access media information and trying to gather useful information from the Chinese-language newspapers for analysis. This approach, however, quickly proved to be unfocused and therefore not very helpful to
narrow down the topic, and I had to give it up. It was not until the fourth week of my internship when I finally become specific enough about my topic and narrow down my research method to the literature review.

I was also in frequent moving between New York and DC. After spending the first two weeks of my internship in New York, Miriam Yeung, my supervisor and the executive director of NAPAWF, started her sabbatical. My research project and I were thus handed over to Nimra Chowdhry, my supervisor in DC office. Two weeks later, Nimra was on leave of absence, and I was transferred back to New York and stayed there for another two weeks before going back to DC again.

The process to gather information was also not very easy. I was unable to find comprehensive archives of Chinese-language newspapers published in the US. There have been little efforts to preserve these newspapers – another proof that Asian Americans including Chinese Americans are relegated to the footnote of history. There is also a significant vacancy in the academic research on this topic, and academic publications were not very accessible during my internship.

I have to admit that it was not within my capacity to overcome all the challenges in the research project, but I did cope with some of them by making the most out of the silver lining. While I felt slightly tired traveling between New York and D.C. during my internship, I tried my best to build friendships and attend as many networking events as possible in both cities. I also got to enjoy both cities as much as I could. Despite the fact that information gathering gave me a hard time during my research, I took time to contemplate on how information accessibility intersects with reproductive justice and what information accessibility means for immigrant communities. My challenges also
provided an excellent opportunity for me to reconcile myself. As a perfectionist, I always hold very high standard for myself, but such practice is more often than not counterproductive. I kept telling myself that my training was primarily in science so these challenges were expected and out of my control. Holding on to this mindset, I managed to finish all the assignments without disappointing myself.

Other than the research project, I also struggled with and worked longer than I expected on translations. In Mandarin Chinese, there are little vocabularies to talk about reproductive justice and social justice in the US context. As I proceeded with translation, I was establishing the vocabularies in my native language at the same time. This was the moment where it dawned on me how linguistically exclusive most advocacies in this country are. In the past, I have encountered many difficulties when I tried to talk to my parents about my social justice involvements at school. At the time I thought it was the disconnection of context that created the difficulties, but now I know there is more: language can also determine the accessibility of ideas, and the fact that most advocacy work is done in English means they remain largely inaccessible to people who have limited English proficiency. These barriers disproportionately impact AAPI community, where 1 in 3 AAPI have limited English proficiency. However, during my internship, I barely encountered AAPI organizations that provide multilingual services or generate multilingual content – everything was managed and done in English. This also makes me question, in our current system where organizations are the primary agents for social movements and advocacy, how do we address the gap or the discrepancy between the organizations and the population they are advocating for? What can organizations do to minimize that gap and remain reflective on their advocacy? How do we make sure people
are not excluded from the movement based on their identities? Most full-time staff at AAPI organizations I encountered during the summer are native-English speakers. Although being a non-native English speaker, I also got to enter the space because my English proficiency can carry me through college-level writing classes. But what about those who cannot express themselves as freely in English? How carefully are we listening to their voices?

I do not have an answer to these questions. As a result, I don’t think I can become a full-time advocate without solving the representation issue first. However, because this RRASC internship at NAPAWF greatly boosted my confidence in my networking, communication, and writing skills, in the future I will actively seek out professional opportunities that allow me to work at the intersection of science and policy. It is a broad field and I would argue that science policy issues like agriculture, science education, bioethics, etc., are reproductive justice issues too.

To future interns at NAPAWF, I would say, be reflective, be outspoken, and be yourself. NAPAWF is a place full of heartwarming people who will never hesitate to help and support each other – I appreciate all the mentorship and friendship I harvested during my time there. NAPAWF is also a place for personal growth, so take advantage of that and grow in the way you want! It is important that you persist to bring in your own perspectives. At this moment, AAPI identity and AAPI movements are undergoing massive destabilization and reconstruction – each and every AAPI voice will be part of the history and should be equally valued, so don’t trivialize your own voices without trying to speak up first! Last but not least, always maintain a decent level of self-reflexivity – a temporary stop for reflection gets your further!