

## Asian celebrities against racist attacks on the pandemic

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### Body

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NEW YORK (AP) — Actress Olivia Cheng recently volunteered in Vancouver, where she said she saw a man stop with his car next to an old Chinese woman, roll down the window and yell "This is your fault!" before throwing trash at the woman.

The incident infuriated Cheng and was also one of the reasons he feels it is so important that Asian celebrities use their voices and speak out against attacks on the Asian community, which authorities say have increased during the coronavirus pandemic.

"I don't think we can pretend this isn't happening," Cheng, who performs in CBS All Access's "The Stand," said in a recent interview with The Associated Press. "For now, it wouldn't be unwise to be a little more careful, perhaps using companionship systems when possible to go out and buy food if you don't feel safe."

The FBI reported an increase in hate crimes and harassment against Asian Americans since the COVID-19 outbreak, which first appeared in Wuhan, China, late last year.

Some people have blamed China and Asians in general for the spread of coronavirus. President Donald Trump himself has sometimes called it the "Chinese virus."

In New York, state attorney general Letitia James created a helpline to report harassment and other types of hatred aimed at specific groups. Some of those incidents have been filmed and posted on social media.

The protagonist of "Tigertail" Tzi Ma said he has been the victim of such harassment. He was recently entering a supermarket in Pasadena, California, when a man in a car confronted him.

"He saw me right in the eye and said 'you should be quarantined,' and he left," said the veteran actor, who was born in Hong Kong and moved to the United States as a child.

"Obviously I was very angry, I felt a cold running through my body and I started yelling at him, but I was too far away to listen to myself."

Actor Alain Uy, from Hulu's forthcoming premiere series "Marvel's Helstrom", feared from the outset that such incidents would occur after the virus spread.

"Once this outbreak happened in Wuhan, like we all said 'OK, we know what this is going to mean,'" said the Philippine-born actor.

"Crazy Rich Asians" director Jon M. Chu said he has felt he should be more careful than usual.

"It's very sad when I feel a little weird when I go for a walk around the block," he said.

"The Real" co-host Jeannie Mai, who has Vietnamese and Chinese ancestry, recently revealed that she first needed someone to review her social media to erase racist comments.

"The Good Doctor" actor Will Yun Lee even gets nervous about taking his son to the supermarket: "My wife is Caucasian, but my son is half Korean and half white. But it looks very Asian."

Ma and other celebrities have decided to speak up and work to combat ignorance and harassment. Ma joined actress Celia Au and other celebrities and influencers in the recent "Wash the Hate" campaign created by IW

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Group, a marketing agency focused on Asian Americans. The public service announcement shows Ma, Au and others washing their hands and reminding people that hygiene, not xenophobia, is the way to fight the virus.

"If I can start the conversation, why not?" said Au, who was also born in Hong Kong. "If we don't talk about it, then there will be no talk of this at all."

For Cheng, the recent anti-Asian wave revived painful memories of his childhood in Edmonton, Canada, where she was the victim of an attack as a teenager.

He found a whole series of attacks posted on the internet. "I had to stop looking, " he said. "He relived all those feelings again, of being a girl and not being able to do anything."

Mai said it is not only important for Asian stars to speak out against these attacks, but also for people of other races.

"These are conversations we should have with our children in the house. You have to, even if you're not Chinese. You should explain to them that this is terrible, that racism is sprouting in this pandemic," he said. "Talk about it with your children. Have this conversation with your friends. If one of your friends says, 'this Chinese virus is crazy', say 'no, in fact, it's called COVID-19. It's not the 'Chinese virus'. Just correct them."

This month, Bill Maher, host of the HBO show Real Time wit Bill Maher, defended the coronavirus from calling the coronavirus the "Chinese virus", when compared to the Spanish flu.

"Even if people say it's innocuous and came from China, it's the background," Lee said. "Certain people will take those (racist) tones and attach them to them."

There is also concern that anti-Asian-American sentiment will translate into a setback in Hollywood following the recent success of Asian stories.

This year, the South Korean film "Parasite" won the Oscar for Best Picture, and Chinese-American director Lulu Wang took the Independent Spirit Award for her film "The Farewell". "Crazy Rich Asians" was a box office success in 2018 and last year Sandra Oh became the first Asian woman in 39 years to win the Golden Globe for Best TV Actress for the "Killing Eve" series.

"I'm worried that it's going to impact our opportunities so soon after we finally feel like we're making progress," Cheng said. "Will this make us go backwards I don't know how many steps back?"

Ma said the only way forward is to keep telling diverse stories.

"You mustn't give in. We'll keep moving forward. And I hope one day people will say, 'You know what? Not only do I accept the differences, but also the fact that we look a lot alike.'"

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