In recent years, student activists have made headlines by accusing peers, institutions and celebrities of engaging in cultural appropriation - the selective taking of a culture other than one’s own. I investigate the views of group members whose cultures are often appropriated, by examining how Chinese and Vietnamese students decide whether a potential act of cultural appropriation is harmful or helpful.

Research Questions

• Under what conditions is an action interpreted as cultural appropriation and does it always carry a negative connotation?
• How do interpretations of cultural appropriation differ across Asian subgroups?

Methodology

Vignette Survey

• Primary Vignettes
  - 3 x 3 design – three levels of two dimensions, race of the appropriator and culture appropriated

Figure 1 | Example of Primary Vignette

V3.W.C: Hannah is a white restaurateur who has opened a new restaurant in New York City that serves Chinese cuisine. Hannah is not of Chinese descent, but the items on the menu include traditional dishes.

• Secondary Vignettes
  - Additional information about appropriator’s relationship with culture

Dependent Variable

• Interpretations of cultural appropriation

Figure 2 | Five-point Likert scale measuring dependent variable

Conclusions

• Any race/ethnicity, even minorities, can appropriate
• History may play in how members perceive the taking of their cultural products by non-members
  • Chinese have a longer discriminatory history than the Vietnamese in the USA
• Some mediums are appropriative in nature
• Respect is a necessary condition for avoiding accusations of cultural appropriation
• There are ways to engage with a culture in which everyone benefits

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