

A Bio Lab in Chinatown

Ananda Gabo



A bio lab in Chinatown

WHAT DOES A BIOLOGY
LAB LOOK LIKE IN
CHINATOWN MALL?

茶
店

TER
BASE



WHO WOULD IT BE FOR?
april. 16.
6-8 PM A DIALOGUE
in ACTION



Community biology is a practice that democratizes scientific inquiry by creating opportunities for the public to engage, learn, and contribute to research. In doing so, it actively protests against the current models of life sciences and its high barriers of participation. In building an accessible body of knowledge that exists in the commons, community biology includes and honors ancestral knowledge in research that is relevant or borrows wisdom from those sources. Science can be exclusionary to ideas that don't fit into their models of knowledge production, which sometimes can be harmful or dismissive as they "other" alternative processes of research. This is understandable as pseudoscience and misinformation can be harmful, but how can we create better relationships between ancestral knowledge and maintaining a scientific practice?

On April 16th, 2019 in the basement of a mall in Toronto, a dialogue entitled "A bio lab in Chinatown" was held at a small community arts center in the heart of Chinatown. It was an open invitation shared through networks of community arts organizations and the turnout held a small but diverse handful of disciplines. These social media posts are an example of science practiced outside of academia and how science can be shared amongst communities.

From biologists to food writers and community activists and artists (and often a combination of more than one discipline) we discussed our relationships to the practice of science not only within the realm of academia but also within activism and the arts as well. And from this conversation, Pàocài Bio was born—now a series of workshops that teaches microbiology techniques through an East Asian lens while creating new bodies of knowledge of ancestral technique and scientific wisdom to pass on to future generations in the form of zines and artifact making.

Pàocài Bio is more than just a workshop series, it is an active dialogue as a tool for research in exploring what it means to incorporate scientific and ancestral knowledge. The goal is to familiarize participants with relatable subjects (such as food and fermentation) and then study them on a molecular level. This project is independently funded. The list of our workshop topics so far include:

- Intro to Chinese Fermentation
- Intro to Traditional Chinese Medicine, Food as Medicine
- Intro to Public Health, What is COVID-19?
- The Living Brushstroke, Intro to Agar Art

Each workshop lives on our publicly accessible Google Drive where research papers are stored related to workshop topics. On occasion where there is specific knowledge, zines are produced for each workshop as a takeaway and for participants to use for note taking. Pàocài Bio is on Instagram @paocaibio, including links to resources and zines.

With the COVID-19 pandemic preventing in-person workshops, a branch-off project was cultivated. *Culture*², a virtual conference, enabled the continuation of dialogue, and a new journal of the same name has been launched. The conference archive and journal details can be found at: culture-culture.com/conference.

