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# Stanford Journal of Asian American Studies 2015-2016

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# A LETTER FROM THE SJAAS EDITORIAL TEAM

Dear Readers,

We are pleased to present the first dual publication of the *Stanford Journal of Asian American Studies*. Split into two themes, “Beneath the Surface” (2015) and “Trauma, Healing & Empowerment in Asian America” (2016), our superedition offers a compilation of works by students at Stanford and writers from across the globe. These diverse contributions of prose, poetry, research, photography — and more — explore parts of the same whole — the hopeful, harrowing, and heartfelt moments that lie at the core of the Asian American experience.

Art is polyvalent and has the ability to reveal truths that otherwise could remain unnoticed. Our 2015 theme, “Beneath the Surface,” speaks to this capacity; in particular, racialized experiences often undergird many surface level interactions and the journal hopes to bring these issues to light.

We beckon acknowledgement to how Asian Americans are often judged at a surface level (e.g., stereotypes), but there is an infinitely deeper inner life that many people ignore. “Beneath the Surface” acknowledges the wealth of what is unseen; our poetry, our fiction, our research, our art, all spring from a powerful history that surges and roars.

Executive Editor Professor Murphy-Shigematsu regards both editions as resonant with his research. “Beneath the Surface” resonates with the theme of his last book, *When Half is Whole*, exploring the ways in which identities and experiences are invisible, unrecognized, or disguised.

“Trauma, Healing & Empowerment in Asian America” the theme of our 2016 issue, is adopted from Professor Murphy-Shigematsu’s 2016 winter quarter course of the same name. About twenty Stanford students engaged in an integrative classroom approach that included scholarly investigation, embodied practice, and creative expression to explore the meaning and manifestation of trauma, healing, and empowerment in our individual and collective stories. Our 2016 issue invites you to look at the ways in which Asian Americans are affected by the legacy of war, occupation and colonialism through themes of home, displacement,

community roots, identity, and intergenerational trauma.

The works in this volume illuminate what is hidden in the darkness of prejudice, stereotypes, and ignorance. They bring to light the complexity of Asian American lives and the richness of our stories. Through self-reflective processes rooted in narrative, we regard these works as a means of becoming whole and healing personal, historical, and collective wounds.

Sincerely,

*The Stanford Journal of Asian American Studies*  
Editorial Staff '15-'16

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2015

ACADEMIC  
ESSAY

# LEOW HUI MIN ANNABETH

## Who Sees, Who Speaks?: Focalisation, Masculinity, and the Asian American Male Gaze in Adrian Tomine's *Shortcomings*

In the U.S. American racial consciousness, not only does size matter, but size also has its own place in the country's white-supremacist racial hierarchy. Adrian Tomine's graphic novel *Shortcomings* follows Bay Area theatre manager Ben Tanaka's attempts to negotiate competing desire for white women and women of his racial background, in a culture where Asian men are emasculated by an imposed association with effeminacy. The contested masculinity of cis-het Asian American men is thus a key thematic concern in *Shortcomings*; it is even paratextually foregrounded in the cover art of the hardcover edition, where the lower border of the cover is the image of a ruler, alluding to Ben's textual concern over white women's supposed rejection of his inferior penis size (Tomine 56-58). Given that form follows function, the masculine anxieties that shape the story in *Shortcomings* are borne out by an examination of the role of narrative perspective and focalisation in the discourse. If focalisation is about perceiving and showing an object, how does the racialised heterosexual male gaze "see" women?

As a graphic narrative, *Shortcomings* is a multimodal text, which combines the verbal (captions, speech and thought bubbles) with the visual (frames, panels, gutters). In this way, the comics medium is an excellent site from which to address Gérard Genette's foundational questions on focalisation: "Who sees?" and "Who speaks?" Mieke Bal embraces literal vision in her conception of focalisation as a relationship between the act of seeing, the agent, and the object that is seen—a metaphor of vision literalised in visual media like film and comics. In Göran Nieragden's refined typology of focalisation, he principally clarifies Bal's theories on focalisation and the relationships between narrators and focalisers. Nieragden distinguishes between "narratorial" and "figural" forms of focalisation, based on whether the focaliser is the narrator or another character (691). He moves away from the distinction of "external" and "internal" focalisation, proposing instead that focalisation be considered "heterodiegetic" or "homodiegetic" depending on the relationship between the subject and object of the act of focalisation.

Yet Monika Fludernik also cautions that Bal's model of focalisation "flies in the face of Genette's binary distinction between 'speaking' and 'seeing'—the narrator speaks, but does s/he also see?" (Fludernik

103). This problem emerges from the fact that a distinction must be made between heterodiegetic (narratorial) focalisation and autodiegetic and homodiegetic (character) focalisation. In short, it is the epistemic problem associated with Seymour Chatman's proposed "cinematic narrator": how it is possible for a reader to infer whose consciousness selects which images are being selected for presentation in the discourse. Silke Horstskotte and Nancy Pedri caution against the glib equation of focalisation—either narratorial or character focalisation—with consciousness presentation. For example, Horstskotte and Pedri write, in psychonarration, the narrator is focalising on the consciousness of a character, but that character is not the focaliser: "Even if focalization is primarily (but not exclusively!) associated with consciousness presentation, the focalizer does not have to coincide with the consciousness being presented" (335). In other words, just because there is visual representation of an object does not necessarily imply that that object is being perceived or contemplated by the focaliser, whether the visual point-of-view is "shot," to borrow a filmic term, from the narrator or from a particular character.

The anti-mimetic disruption of the camera angle is pronounced and perceptible in scenes from *Shortcomings* such as Ben's introduction to Sasha Lenz. The character Alice Kim having already shut the door—with an accompanying "SLAM!" of visualised sound for emphasis—it is simply not physically feasible for an embodied focaliser to show Ben from over the shoulder of Sasha, whose back is to the closed door (55/5-7). However, in "Presenting Minds in Graphic Narratives," Kai Mikkonen suggests that characters' subjectivity can filter into the discourse even when the "camera angle" is positioned "where no perceiving character could be present." Mikkonen compares this to free indirect discourse in a textual work (310). A comparable example from *Shortcomings* would be the extended sequence in the Oakland Airport car park, when Ben sits in the empty car staring at the cup of coffee (Tomine 36-37). The panels in which Ben is seen show him looking at the cup; the centre panel, which draws the attention of the reader to the heart of the page, shows the cup itself on the dashboard. Although the establishing shots of the car park and the car have demonstrated that a camera narrator is at work, the sight of the coffee cup—and the translation of this act of seeing into the image on the page—suggest that Ben's capacity for focalisation also controls the discourse.

Mikkonen argues that "[t]he impersonal agent of the 'camera' angle, far from being an exercise in indirect presentation by a zero-level or so-called omniscient focalizer, [...] can be marked by a character's subjective field of vision and perception, or encompass it, and thus bear

traces of his thoughts and emotions” (312). In this way, the manner in which Sasha’s body is framed in the moment of introduction—which is both her diegetic-level introduction to Ben and her extradiegetic-level introduction to the reader—can be interpreted as reflective of where Ben’s focus lies.

This echoes Patrick Colm Hogan’s novel emphasis on affect in “Prolegomena to Affective Narratology.” Hogan argues that focalisation should not be evaluated solely in terms of access to knowledge, in that—for example—a mimetic storyworld cannot have a homodiegetic narrator describing another character with internal focalisation, because it is impossible to provide interior monologue or psychonarration for another consciousness. Instead, Hogan puts forth a typology of “epistemic” versus “affective” focalisation; that is, focalisation can be produced by either a narrator’s limitation in knowledge, or a limitation in *interest* (78). “Put in the most basic way—if it talks, it feels,” writes Hogan. “Narrators necessarily have emotions” (77). While the focalisation in scene in question in *Shortcomings* is character-driven and not narratorial, the visual representation of Ben’s line-of-sight focus on Sasha’s bare legs and buttocks in her first two panels (Tomine 54/2-3) suggests that the presentation of the new character Sasha in the panels is filtered through his subjectivity.

Another example of Ben’s consciousness bleeding into the focalised image presented by the camera narrator can be seen in Autumn Phelps’s first flirtation with Ben (31/6-32/2). The first panel in this sequence shows Ben at his desk with his head turned towards something out of the frame. The second panel reveals this object to be the closed-circuit television set. The third panel is a close-up of the television, and the next two panels show Autumn blowing a kiss to the camera. The angle from which this visual focalisation is taking place shifts from panel to panel, but as the sequence progresses, the images capture Ben’s internal state more and more. The final two panels are close-ups of Autumn’s face with static lines and the outline of the television indicating that she is being seen through a camera (32/1-2). It is highly plausible that, in these panels, the reader is seeing an intradiegetic story level—the video footage—through Ben’s eyes.

The imagery in *Shortcomings* draws a frequent association between visual images and women’s bodies, whether in the porn videos of white women (28/4, 72/6), Autumn’s punk performance (43) and toilet photographs (48/8), or the photos of Ben’s ex-girlfriend Miko Hayashi that her new boyfriend takes (77, 95/1-3). A masculinist aesthetic thus emerges from this visual objectification in the discourse—an objectification that is the result of the contorted slippages between what Ben



sees (an epistemic quality in the character); what Ben looks at because he cares (an affective quality); and what the ostensibly zero-focalising narrator selects from Ben's field of vision to present to the reader. The story these discursive images produce from their narrativity becomes one where women exist as spectacles for consumption.

The slippage between narratorial and autodiegetic character focalisation in *Shortcomings* occurs particularly when the camera gaze is focalising upon images of women. For example, when Miko tosses *Sapphic Sorority* and other porn flicks onto Ben's desk, and the camera narrator devotes an entire panel to the DVD cases, there is an ambiguity as to whether Ben or Miko—or neither—is the actor focalising on the sight of the DVDs (28/4). Similarly, before the transition to Ben's aghast expression at Autumn's "experimental music, performance art" show, there is an ambiguity as to who is the focaliser of the actions on stage (43). The panel-to-panel shifts in the angle of the camera narrator would suggest that the focalisation is narratorial, yet the sixth panel, which looks at Ben, also suggests some degree of representation of his internal state as he watches.

Randy Duncan and Matthew J. Smith, in their comics studies textbook *The Power of Comics*, have written about the difficulty of diegetically representing non-visual sensory perceptions as images in graphic narrative (155-58). As the challenge of interpreting the focalisation in *Shortcomings* makes evident, even visual sensory perceptions are not easy to embed in images without ambiguity. Nonetheless, the slippage between narratorial and character focalisation serves to destabilise the racial agency to which Ben pretends. This concern is raised especially in the photographs of Miko whose discovery is the climax of the plot (Tomine 77). In all but two of the panels, Miko looks away from the literal camera of her boyfriend Leon Christopher. Even when she faces the camera directly, her features are expressionless and give no hint as to her interiority. The discourse renders the body of an Asian woman into a passive object when even the objectified bodies of white women are allowed some activity in their visual expressiveness (43).

However, it is not as simple as that. This intersection of race and gender politics is pertinent because Ben has, at this point in the story, already earlier rejected the sight of Miko's sexual advances—as she stands in their apartment clad in only her underwear, with visibly erect nipples—in favour of the white actors on his DVDs (19). In spite of this, Ben opens his eyes to look at Sasha during the act of sex, while Sasha's eyes are shut, refusing to return the gaze (64-65). The visual images presented by the discourse explicitly invite a comparison between the agency of Ben's white and Japanese lovers. Sasha is represented only

synecdochically by the sight of her hair on Ben's pillow (65/3), while the representation of Miko progresses from half her face on the pillow in the novel's cover art, to her entire face in Leon's photograph (77/6). It is only under the force of Ben's gaze on her postcard, in her physical absence, that she is reduced to a partial face and then simply hair on a pillow once more (95/2-3).

Because of this, the question "Who sees?" is brought to the forefront. When the images of Miko are presented in six panels, taking up an entire page, what temporal moment instantiates itself there? Are the images located at the moment of Leon's photo-taking, Alice's discovery, and/or Ben's viewing? Which moment is the reader joining in when looking at those panels? Ben denies to Alice that he has ever been the victim of anti-Asian American discrimination (15-16), but the uncertainty over who is controlling the objectifying gaze on women's bodies makes the demand as to whether Ben is a free agent in perpetrating his sexual objectification of women, or whether the gaze on the bodies of white and Asian women is instead controlled by the white patriarchy he not only disclaims but also discounts.

What Ben endeavours to achieve, in the plot of *Shortcomings*, is the masculinity that has been denied to him by white-supremacist caricature. A masculinist response, however, advances the cause of Asian American men at the expense of Asian American women. As Celine Parreñas Shimizu puts it, there is a tendency for male cultural producers combating the stereotype of effeminacy to assume that "the unconscious, as a site where racism takes hold, must meet another image: Asian American men, rather than white men, with Asian American women" (169). Paradoxically, Ben's desire to possess Miko is stoked by the imagined notion of her having sex in his bed with a white-passing man, even as he seeks to prove his masculinity not with Asian American women, but with the white women whose supposed purity has been used to control the autonomy of men of colour. Ben tries to defy emasculation by laying claim to the bodies of women, visually if not sexually. In spite of this, the ambiguous power of Ben's gaze over white and Asian women, and Miko's potential to resist being visually consumed by Asian and white men in turn, serve to highlight the fragility of this claim. The masculinist aesthetic of Tomine's novel in fact undermines the power of exaggerated Asian masculinity to challenge a U.S. American system of racism that works against Asian American women and men alike.

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# AKI YAMADA

## Vietnamese Nail Salon Workers in California and their Ethnic Business

### Introduction

As millions of people in the last quarter of the twentieth century immigrated to the U.S., America witnessed vast changes in the make-up of its population. One of the most sudden and marked flows of immigrants came from Vietnam. Following the collapse of Saigon in 1975, many Vietnamese sought asylum as refugees in the U.S. From 1974 to 1977 more than 200,000 Vietnamese were paroled into the U.S., and from 1978 to 2013 another 588,000 continued to arrive as refugees (Migration Policy Institute, 2015). These immigrants include the Vietnam War's U.S. allies, civil servants and officials of the South Vietnamese government, multiple waves of "boat people" who continued to flee after the collapse of Saigon, war detainees, and the children U.S. servicemen left in Vietnam (e.g., Zhou & Bankston III, 2000). The first wave of refugees arrived in resettlement camps, designed to quickly educate them, to help them adjust to American language and culture, and later find permanent resettlement locations and American sponsors. Since the end of the Vietnam War, these immigrants have flourished. For many Vietnamese women, in particular, much has changed dramatically: most if not all have been forced to address the cultural disparities between American and Vietnamese society, especially in relation to gender roles; their self-actualization, life cycles, and occupations of such women have reflected these gaps.

After coming to the U.S., such women experienced numerous difficulties, quickly learning to navigate cultural differences, language barriers, and the struggle to create a new identity. Unlike other Asian-American immigrants, the vast majority of Vietnamese arrived as refugees. And unlike Vietnamese refugees, immigrants from such countries as the Philippines and India came to the U.S. as skilled laborers who possessed technical skills in professional fields, such as nursing and engineering. Importantly, such immigrants also came to the U.S. having demonstrated some proficiency in English. To some extent, as a result, such immigrants have adapted to life in America more quickly and more thoroughly than members of the Vietnamese community, which, as it has grown and prospered over the past twenty-five years, has formed enclaves and economic niches (Ngyuen, 2000). One such economic niche is the rapidly growing nail-salon industry, the most common ethnic business of Vietnamese women.

This paper focuses on the process by which Vietnamese women perform new gender roles in the U.S. through their work in the nail salon industry. In doing so, it also demonstrates the important role that ethnic community plays in the lives of these women. In particular, it is indispensable to seek to define ethnic businesses more fully and to stress their effects of the lives of Vietnamese women how this specific field helped to forge the new identities of Vietnamese women in the U.S.

### **Vietnamese Women and their lives in the United States**

Vietnamese-Americans have been broadly studied, ranging from the post-Vietnam War refugees and their settlement process, to studies of Vietnamese family structures and the relationships between Vietnamese women and men. In one such study, Dinh (1982) found that many women in Vietnam tend to be confined by the strong patriarchal structure of Vietnamese culture, but that Vietnamese women living in the U.S. have witnessed dramatic changes in gender roles. Historically in Vietnam, women were traditionally subordinate to their husbands, taking care of their children with little or no help from her husband's family. These Vietnamese women were granted little decision-making power and were not accorded an individual identity apart from their role within the family, which was defined by their service to male family members (Pyke & Johnson, 2003). The education disparity between post-Vietnam War adult males and females was likewise glaring (Ngo & Lee, 2007). Vietnamese women tended to marry at a very young age, gaining but little education. For a Vietnamese wife, power and status came not through work and education, but through the production of a male heir.

For the Vietnamese male, his ability to work and to earn an income was a symbol of his authority over his household. But through the process of migration and adjustment, the hold of patriarchy on traditional Vietnamese culture has gradually diminished within the Vietnamese-American community (Kibria, 1993). After coming to the U.S., for instance, many Vietnamese males were unable to find work immediately in white-collar professions. As a result, Vietnamese males' patriarchal grip weakened in large part because their wives started to work in order to help support the household. The income earned by wives became indispensable to the survival of Vietnamese families in the U.S., as few job opportunities arose for non-English-speaking Vietnamese refugees. Further, as these women gained educational and economic opportunities, they came to challenge gender inequality. Dinh (1982) found that after arriving in the U.S., the majority of Vietnamese immigrants

gradually adjusted to American cultural norms. Moreover, this study revealed a significant shift in the gender power balance, expressed most fully in changes to men's and women's relative degree of control, in large part as a result of new social and economic resources.

### **Nail Salons as Ethnic Businesses**

Today, Vietnamese women staff a disproportionate amount of California nail salons and beauty parlors. According to Tran (1994), in 1994, Vietnamese owned and operated over ninety percent of all nail salons in Los Angeles. In 2008, a *Los Angeles Times* reporter observed: "These days, it's hard to meet a manicurist who isn't Vietnamese. In California, Vietnamese Americans make up an estimated 80% of nail technicians, according to the industry's trade publication" (Tran, 2008b). The nail business has become so pervasive among Vietnamese women in the U.S. that one school in Vietnam provides cosmetology classes geared toward women who intend to immigrate to America. Likewise, salons across the Midwest and East Coast advertise for workers in Orange County's Vietnamese-language newspapers. Cosmetology licensing tests in California and Texas are given in Vietnamese. There is even a major industry trade magazine targeting the Vietnamese nail salon demographic, VietSalon (Tran, 2008b). Nail salons owned by Vietnamese demonstrate the extent to which Vietnamese manicurists are geographical pioneers, spreading out as they establish new nail salons across the country (Nguyen, 2000). Such nail salons fit into Min Zhou's (1992) definition of an ethnic enclave: "Immigrant communities that provide occupational niches for immigrants and where they experience labor market rewards and possibilities for upward socioeconomic mobility over time" (p. 47). The Vietnamese nail salon phenomenon has become the most recognizable form of ethnic businesses established by Vietnamese women.

First, an ethnic business is a cultural institution in which immigrants who share an identity can earn an income from their host society while interacting with American customers. Such ethnic businesses provide not only an income to new Vietnamese immigrants, but also help to create a sense of place among immigrants. Small ethnic businesses, composed of a network of Asian immigrant groups that have entered into self-employment, are thus a means to both cultural adjustment and economic advancement for Vietnamese immigrants (Waldinger, Aldrich, & Ward 1990; Bates, 1994).

Yet, why is it that Vietnamese women concentrated in such a specific field? By what processes have these women found employment in the beauty industry and why do they remain? Vietnamese immi-

grants have been historically disadvantaged in the U.S. labor market, a problem only exacerbated by comparatively low levels of development in their native country (Bonacich & Modell, 1980). However, becoming a manicurist holds appeal for a number of reasons: the ease with which one can earn an income in comparison with other cosmetology fields, the speed and ease with which one can obtain a license, and the reduced language barrier, which is lower in the nail salon industry than in most other occupations. Jean-Francois, Milarsky and Do (2006) reported, "About 20 years ago, a well-liked tech might earn about \$60,000 annually." Today, though, these numbers have dropped drastically. "The average today is \$35,000 annually and about \$25,000 for newcomers. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimated the median income of nail technicians in 2004 (the latest numbers available) to be \$18,500" (Jean-Francois et al., 2006).

Vietnamese have found success in the nail-salon industry for a host of reasons. Before the Vietnamese came to dominate the salon industry, nail businesses, with their expensive services, catered largely to middle and upper class women. In the 1960's, before nail salons came to be dominated by Vietnamese immigrants, they tended to be owned by Korean immigrants (Kang, 2003). But Vietnamese nail salons offered what seemed a new and different service at a better price and in a different style. Federman, Harrington, and Krynski (2006) explain "Vietnamese manicurists appear to have been associated with new forms of service delivery in the form of walk-in salons that may have increased demand by reducing time costs" (p. 315). In the 1970s, for instance, manicures cost upwards of \$60. But waves of Vietnamese manicurists, mostly refugees who happily settled for lower wages, slashed prices. Now, manicures and pedicures go for as little as \$15. As My-Thuan Tran (2008a) has noted, Vietnamese nail salons have transformed a business that once was an indulgence for the pampered and wealthy class into a common and affordable American routine. Furthermore, as Vietnamese manicurists made their services more affordable, they also dramatically altered the standards of beauty and style among American women.

### **Study Methodology**

The growth of the nail salon industry in the California and other American states can help us understand the ways in which Vietnamese women's lives have changed since immigrating. By juxtaposing their occupational and cultural values both before and after coming to the U.S., we can understand the extent to which they have adjusted to American society. Two questions have guided this research. First, what have Vietnamese women learned about gender roles and gained socially by

working in nail salons? Second, what kind of meaning does Vietnamese community have for Vietnamese manicurists? To answer these questions, two research methods were employed. The first was the observation of the Vietnamese community in Orange County, California and San Jose County, California. During this time, I visited 24 different nail salons in both Southern and Northern California. Second, interviews were conducted with several Vietnamese female manicurists working at nail salons for the most part located outside of the Vietnamese communities.

Table 5-1: Basic Data of Interviewees

**ID: Name, Age, Arrival year, Place of residence, Family Size, Children, Education, \*, Position**

1: CN, 59, 1972, Past: San Diego, CA, San Francisco, CA, 5, 0, High School

2: RN, 65, 1989, San Jose, CA, 5, 3, High School, 1994, Part timer

3: TL, 29, 1992, Past: San Diego, CA, Past: Orange County, CA, San Jose, CA, 3, 0, College, 2003, Manager

4: Anonymous, 49, 1995, Past: East Coast, Orange County, CA, 4, 2, High School, 2000, Part timer

5: Anonymous, 61, 1988, Pasadena, CA, 3, 1, High School, 1994, Manager

6: TV, 57, 1986, Los Angeles, CA, 2, 0, High School, 1993, Part timer

7: PT, 43, 1995, Orange County, CA, 5, 3, High School, 2000, Part timer

8: LN, 56, 1974, Milpitas, CA, 3, 2, High School, 1985, Manager

9: CT, 49, 1989, Evergreen, CA, 3, 1, High School, 1995, Part timer

10: Anonymous, 54, 1981, Milpitas, CA, 4, 2, High School, 1988, Manager

\* When did you start working in the nail salon?

In preparation for the ten interviews, several questions were formulated: some were basic questions about their family background and living conditions; others focused on discovering the strategies these women had devised for life in the U.S. In particular, the challenges they had faced and the independence they had gained in starting a career and supporting themselves without the help of a husband were asked. Also, their work in the nail salon industry and their relationships with their non-Vietnamese clientele were interviewed in detail.

As earlier research noted, women in Vietnam have traditionally lacked economic and educational opportunities. By developing ques-



tions about the Vietnamese family structure, and especially the role of women within the family, I attempted to discover the ways in which working at a nail salon made them both financially and psychologically independent. The nail-salon workers I interviewed were located largely in middle-class Caucasian areas of Los Angeles and San Jose. These are the top two areas of concentration for Vietnamese immigrants in California, with approximately 230,000 in the Los Angeles area and 95,000 in and around San Jose (Migration Policy Institute, 2015). These locations were chosen for their large and enduring Vietnamese communities, evidencing the creation and staffing of ethnic nail salon businesses. Furthermore, the salons in these areas showed the integration of their ethnic business model and their service relationship with mainstream America. To a large extent, as a result, the majority of the customers at these nail salons were middle-class Caucasians: the costs of services and the number of customers of varying ethnicities depend largely on where a given store is located.

### **Gender Role Shifts**

Examining the nail salon industry, which is predominately run and staffed by Vietnamese women, we can clearly see the gendering of work. Nail salons as an ethnic business are somewhat exceptional, because unlike most ethnic businesses they are run and staffed by women. For instance, in large part in the U.S., men run and staff other forms of ethnic businesses such as Cambodian-owned doughnut stores, Korean-owned dry cleaners, and Indian-owned hotels. Kibria (1993) explains: “As they immigrate to the United States, Koreans and Vietnamese experience a shift in gender arrangement, centering on men’s loss of economic power and increased dependency on their wives’ wages” (p. 24). The nail salon, then, can be seen as a place that makes Vietnamese women more independent and less reliant on male support.

Interviewee #2 said,

“Because my husband was working at a school, we did not have financial problems that much [in Vietnam]. But after arriving to the States, my husband could not teach anything here, so we both had to look for a job from the beginning. Now my husband is working at a can factory and I am working longer than my husband. He takes care of the housework and I am more taking care of the house financially. However, I do not feel negative, because we had to start working from the beginning and I am also enjoying my job. My husband does not complain about me working as a manicurist” (personal communication, March 9, 2010).

Interviewee # 5 said,

“After coming [to the U.S.], my husband and I did not have jobs for a while. I found out that becoming a manicurist was easy compared to other jobs, so I decided to go to community college in order to learn English while my husband was working as a cleaner at a restaurant. Because I went to school and worked as a manicurist, I can speak English more than my husband, since he did not go to school” (personal communication, February 16, 2009).

These responses demonstrate the ways in which these two women learned English and obtained work skills, assimilating to American life more quickly than their husbands. By studying English and interacting with non-Vietnamese clientele on a regular basis, these two women grew increasingly independent, eventually earning the lion's share of their family's income. Despite the fact that both had worked back in Vietnam, it was only in the U.S. that their experiences of work offered a newfound sense of liberation and independence. As early as 1982, Luu Tin Dinh had noted that women who had culturally determined roles as wives, mothers, daughters and helpmates back in Vietnam, faced an open, seemingly unstructured American urban society in which traditional females' roles were under heavy pressure and often seemed dysfunctional. Vietnamese women emerged from sheltered, protected family lives to learn a new language, to acquire a myriad of new skills and to assume active work roles (Dinh, 1982). Even today, Dinh's observations seem to hold true of Vietnamese salon workers: we can see, for instance, in observing the current working condition of Vietnamese women the extent to which they have gradually obtained personal working skill and overcome gender inequality.

#### **Working as a Manicurist and Creation of their Identity**

Through my interviews, it became clear how these women, despite working long hours, gained greater freedom in the U.S. Their work as manicurists brought them greater confidence, and helped them develop new identities as independent women. Interviewee #1 was a receptionist before the Vietnam War, arriving to the U.S. with her family as refugees. She said,

“Once I heard that being manicurists was easy, I decided to go to a community college for one year and then I took the test. After that, it took me for a while to open my store in Gardena, however I tried my best to work every day from 9:30 a.m to 7:00 p.m... At first I thought I sacrificed most of my life and devoted my money to the family, however, later I realized that I was gaining confidence and having my own ideas as a woman living in a new country, not depending to my hus-

band and other support. This confidence was very different from how I was working back in Vietnam, a country where I speak their language and know the culture.” (personal communication, February 9, 2010).

Interviewee #2 feared that her work as a manicurist was distancing her from her children, but found she had also gained a new role in her family.

“But my children told me how they were proud of me, because back in Vietnam, I was just a housewife, taking care of the children without earning income. Because I worked hard in a different environment country, the children realized the hardship I have been going through, and they also worked hard. Seeing me beyond just a mother, but more as a person working and helping the family, they admired me.” (personal communication, March 9, 2010).

Interviewee #3, in her late 20’s, described her feelings about her mother, who works as a manicurist in San Diego.

“I was always looking at my mother who was working as manicurist since I was 13. This situation made me consider working for Vietnamese manicurists, since I am bilingual and I am second generation.... Definitely America, and the work environment, the nail salon, made her strong and created my mom as a different and stronger woman” (personal communication, February 16, 2010).

Through their work as manicurists, these women overcame many obstacles and hardships in coming to a new country. These women articulated the same point again and again: that they were proud to be working in this field and that working as a manicurist had helped them to craft a new identity.

### **Interaction between Manicurists and their Customers**

During my research it became apparent that the nail salon remains a place of shared ethnic identity. As Tram-Le Huynh (2008) observes, Vietnamese manicurists created their own style of nail salon, introducing their own cultural style, but also combining it with an American style. Such nail salons adopt some American cultural ways while also providing a space that, at times, allows Vietnamese workers to retain their cultural and social norms among each other; despite such cultural hybridity, such manicurists have managed to find a space in which to share their Vietnamese identity both with their coworkers and their customers.

This mixing of cultures was evidenced during one of my nail salon visits to conduct an interview. The Vietnamese manicurist, though not a native English speaker, seemed to communicate with her American customers in a delightful manner, chatting about life and recent events.

However, whenever the manicurist spoke to one of her coworkers, she immediately switched from English to Vietnamese. Some manicurists prohibit the speaking of Vietnamese in the workplace because customers go to the nail salons in order to relax, and speaking Vietnamese may upset some of them. Interviewee #5 explained,

“When the customer comes to my store, I try not to speak Vietnamese to my coworkers, since I don’t want to make my customer uncomfortable when I speak Vietnamese to coworkers. They come here for relaxation, so I try my best not to speak, unless the customer asks me about my language, I will. Sometime they ask me to teach them Vietnamese, and ask me why I came to this job and what kind of place Vietnam is” (personal communication, February 16, 2009).

In the nail salon two different cultures coexist simultaneously: a close-knit Vietnamese community and an ethnic business serving the needs of middle-class, non-Vietnamese Caucasians. Most of the manicurists interviewed said that through their work in the nail business and these conversations with their non-Vietnamese customers they learned much about mainstream American life, while also sharing their experiences of Vietnam. Many of the manicurists also noted that they had regular customers who frequently came to the salon and with whom they had developed close friendships. Interviewee #2 described her own experiences with customers,

“I learned a lot about American culture, and they also learned about me, since they asked me how I came to this job... America is a place where the customer and I can both learn and share our experiences. In Vietnam, this cannot happen” (personal communication, March 9, 2010).

Conversations between American female customers and their manicurists are often very personal, giving Vietnamese manicurists a firsthand opportunity to see the manners in which middle-class American women perform identity and communicate their values. Thus, through their work in the nail salon, Vietnamese manicurists are able to gain experience conversing in English, and become exposed to American cultural values and norms, providing them greater confidence and independence.

### **The Meaning of Ethnic Community to Vietnamese Manicurists**

California has a larger population of people of Vietnamese descent than any other state in the U.S. The largest ethnic community is located in Orange County, California, and is called “Little Saigon.” Ngin (1989) has described such ethnic communities: “Ethnic community organizations and ethnic support networks serve the important social, emo-

tional, spiritual, and psychological needs of the recent arrivals. They also serve as important intermediaries between the new arrivals and American Society.” With fresh waves of Vietnamese immigrants coming to the U.S. every day, it is easy to understand the importance of Little Saigon, a place where Vietnamese people can remain connected to their homeland culture. Vietnamese newcomers, with their limited English and paucity of job skills, tend to depend on this ethnic economy when they first arrive. In particular, newly arrived women seek work in Vietnamese-owned nail salons, in which English language skills are not nearly as important as in other job areas. As Vo (2004), has explained, such work is immensely common among newly immigrated Vietnamese women: “Most of the [nail salon] employees are first-generation Vietnamese women who are more recent arrivals these days. This job area is one example of creative entrepreneurship borne out of necessity that has inadvertently helped the community, including for some, paying their children’s college education and homes in middle-class neighborhoods” (p. 88). Since many manicurists are unable to visit their ethnic community frequently, the nail salon becomes an alternative place in which most of the coworkers are Vietnamese and at which they can gather and bond.

Ethnic communities like those in Orange County and San Jose, have played a significant role in the lives of refugees. Vo (2004) explains: “Feeling isolated and lonely, they found psychological comfort, especially those yearning for their former lives and their homeland, among co-ethnics who shared their language, culture and history” (p. 102). Despite limited work opportunities in enclaves like Little Saigon, immigrants still flock to them in order to belong to a community of shared religious and cultural beliefs. This is a place in which Vietnamese people can share gossip; information regarding employment, housing, and education for their children; as well as new opportunities. Ngoc Tram-Le Huynh (2008) studied five first-generation Vietnamese Americans who immigrated to and remained in Orange County. This study revealed a significant point: that, for a refugee, this new community meant safety. Further, because many immigrants frequently reminisce about Vietnam, such communities allow one to access some aspect of their homeland.

The women interviewed and surveyed were asked how frequently they visited their ethnic community, and, when they did, what they did while they visited. Interviewee #2 said that she enjoys visiting the Vietnamese community:

“Since I have never been back to Vietnam, the only place where I can meet my generation is now in the community... Since I came 10

years ago, yet I cannot speak English that well, I feel comfortable to see my friends who went to Advanced Beauty College together, and we talk about life while we see each other” (personal communication, March 9, 2010).

Most of the interviewees said that their ethnic communities are special places, where they can get news and information about Vietnam. In comparison with other ethnic minority groups, the Vietnamese ethnic community is extremely large, with many sources of information and news that are sent directly from Vietnam (Dinh, 1982). The more clearly we see the extent to which Vietnamese women rely on their ethnic communities for the sharing of information, the more easily we can understand the ways in which the nail salon has served as a substitute for Vietnamese women who do not have the time to visit more traditional ethnic community spaces. Such ethnic communities not only help Vietnamese women cope with loneliness and fear, but also provide them with a space in which to bond among themselves.

### **Conclusion**

As refugees, many Vietnamese adults suddenly were forced to immigrate to the U.S. without preparations, facing the daunting challenge of adapting to life in a completely foreign country, language, and culture. I argue that Vietnamese nail salon workers have created and sustained themselves through an ethnic business model, which has in turn supported their independence and improved the lives of their family members. Through interviews with members of the Vietnamese nail salon sector, it is evidenced that the manner in which Vietnamese women are working not only supports their families, but also aids in English proficiency and their transition into American culture and lifestyle. By working in a field that necessitates social interaction and interpersonal relationships with non-Vietnamese customers, manicurists are able to gain insight into mainstream America and its values. Furthermore, Vietnamese women working in the nail saloon industry have made progress towards equalizing gender relations through their economic independence and adoption of Westernized views toward family and gender. At the same time they are adapting to the American way of life, their work in the nail salon, Vietnamese coworkers, and surrounding ethnic communities still allow them to retain aspects of their distinct Vietnamese identity.

By studying, reading, and collecting materials regarding Vietnamese women and Asian-American women and their occupations, we can better understand what successful ethnic businesses mean to female minorities in the multicultural lifestyle of Vietnamese American wom-

en. Some of the advantages of their ethnic business model include good pay relative to other work for which workers are qualified, low barriers for starting capital, education, and language skills, and the unique ability to work with relatives and other Vietnamese immigrants that share their language and culture. Additionally, there is great potential for entrepreneurship in the nail industry. The Professional Beauty Association (2008) reports that approximately 70% of nail technicians own a salon or own a “booth rental,” a space within a salon that is leased and run as an independent business. Despite the demanding hours of their jobs, nail salon workers gain economic and social capital, support of fellow Vietnamese American coworkers, and the potential for acculturation through their interactions with customers. Their work has opened up various opportunities for their children’s education so that later generations of Vietnamese Americans can earn a better living. Vietnamese women have used their ethnic businesses as a strategy to satisfy their own needs, while improving the lives of and offering new opportunities for their families. According to Nails Magazine (2011, 2016), the nail industry in the U.S. has grown from an estimated 5.5 billion dollar business sector in 2005 to 8.51 billion in 2015. In 2011, Vietnamese nail salon workers made up approximately 40% of nail technicians across the U.S., and that number has grown to 51% in 2016 (Nails Magazine, 2011, 2016). These historical trends indicate that both the industry as a whole and Vietnamese participation in it show no signs of slowing. Future research can monitor this trend, and re-evaluate the lasting impact of this industry on later generations. Will second and third generation Vietnamese Americans will follow their parents in this line of work, or will their parent’s successes support them to further education and career opportunities? How will the demographics of Vietnamese Americans in this industry change over time? Future research should continue to re-evaluate the value of the industry toward successive generations of Vietnamese Americans. It will be interesting to learn if the socio-economic opportunities leveraged by first-generation Vietnamese nail salon technicians will continue to be an equal boon for later generations, or if the value proposition of the industry provides them will decrease over time.

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# XIAOHUI LIU

## The Renewed Chinese Foodscape: An Inversion of Cultural Relations in Californian Chinese Restaurants after 1965

### Abstract:

The decades following the 1960s witnessed a transformation of the Chinese American foodscape. With the inflow of new Chinese immigrants after the passage of the 1965 Immigration Act, more Chinese regional cuisines were introduced into the U.S. and the Chinese American foodscape was revitalized. California, a state which not only stands in the forefront of recent culinary changes in America, but also is the birthplace of Chinese American food, serves as the perfect location to examine the transformation of Chinese American culinary culture. Thanks to the increasing number of Chinese immigrants, a considerable number of Chinese restaurants catering specifically to the Chinese community made their presence felt in California since the 1960s. These new Chinese restaurants exhibited new characteristics and served new cultural functions. It was in these establishments that the cultural relation between white American customers and Chinese restaurateurs changed. This article focuses on the restaurants serving the Chinese community and aims to reveal the inversion of cultural hierarchies between white Americans and Chinese immigrants in these establishments. Through this study, I argue that food can be a force that challenges established power relations and also eradicates white supremacy.

**Keywords:** Chinese American foodscape, ethnic cuisine, immigration, California, restaurants, cultural relations.

Chinese food is one of the most popular ethnic cuisines in the U.S. and has over 150-year history here.<sup>1</sup> The earliest Chinese restaurants were established in San Francisco as early as the mid-nineteenth century. The evolution of Chinese food has always been shaped by the broader sociocultural environment. Before the Second World War, due to white cultural domination and the inferior status of Chinese immigrants, Chinese restaurant operators made all the efforts to appeal to European American customers by adapting their food to the white palate. In this vein, Chinese food was reduced to cheap and simple dishes. Chop suey, a peasant dish in origin, became the most familiar Chinese food to most Americans. Chinese cooking and eating in restaurants was confirmed to Euro-American culinary norms and gradually lost its ethnic distinction in the earlier period. However, the Chinese American culinary scene has changed since the late 1960s. The coming of the new immigrants after 1965 brought in a large variety of Chinese regional cui-

sines, and revitalized the Chinese American foodscape. Under the new political, social and cultural context, the new immigrants exercised their cultural practices more confidently and strove to assert their culinary identity. Owing to the emergence of new types of Chinese food as well as the new cultural and social environment, the American perceptions of Chinese food also underwent transformation. A new cultural relation between white Americans and Chinese immigrants was observed through culinary matters. In this paper, emphasis will be placed on the change of American Chinese restaurants after 1965, especially the new type of restaurants that mainly targeted the Chinese community.

Although there are quite a number of scholarly works on Chinese American food, few of them discuss the transformation of the Chinese American foodscape after the 1960s. This paper aims to explore the new Chinese foodscape after 1965. Sit-down restaurants are my main focus since it was these restaurants rather than supermarkets, grocery stores, deli stores or fast food chains that nurtured the American taste for Chinese food, and made the biggest contribution to the change of Chinese food in America. This study particularly focuses on the new type of Chinese restaurants which specifically anticipated Chinese customers. In these establishments, Chinese immigrant restaurateurs exhibited their cultural pride by keeping their ethnic foodways intact and displaying the most peculiar and unusual aspects of their culinary culture. These restaurants were not only popular among the Chinese community, but attracted a few number of non-Chinese customers. The restaurant operators didn't bother to involve American customers into their culinary domain but tended to exclude them as culinary outsiders. However, thanks to the American food revolution starting from the mid-20th century,<sup>2</sup> a number of American eaters developed a pretty sophisticated palate and desired ethnic food in its original form instead of the adapted version. In order to get good food, these American eaters attempted to approach Chinese food. They not only tried to taste and appreciate unfamiliar Chinese dishes, but also get to know Chinese culinary culture. In these establishments, it was American customers who approached Chinese food instead of the other way around as in the earlier period. An inversion of power relations was witnessed in these establishments. Through this, I attempt to explore how food caused the change of cultural relations between two racial groups in a particular commercial setting.

To understand the change of the Chinese American foodscape as well as the communications and negotiations between Chinese restaurateurs and American customers, this study makes use of many kinds of sources, including newspapers, food magazines, menus, restaurant

guides, etc. It is through newspapers and magazines, particularly in the form of restaurant reviews, that Americans expressed their opinions on Chinese food. Interviews were also conducted with restaurant owners, managers, chefs and other staff. A combination of these sources allow me to access the viewpoints of both Chinese food purveyors and American diners.

### **The Earlier Chinese Culinary Scene: Restaurants in the “Chop Suey Era”**

The earliest Chinese immigrants in America were mostly from Kwantong Province and the majority of them were from rural areas. They came to California as labor workers during the Gold Rush Era and worked as gold miners at first and railroad workers later. These people constituted the bulk of the customers in earlier Chinese restaurants. Few of the earlier restaurant cooks were professional and they only served what they could cook. Thus, the food served in these restaurants usually featured Cantonese country-style home cooking. Owing to racial prejudice and different eating habits between the two nations, Americans thought Chinese food was strange, disgusting and barbaric.<sup>3</sup> They tended to shun Chinese food. For this reason, Chinese restaurants were only initially patronized by Chinese customers who craved their home cooking.

But as the Chinese population dwindled after the passage of a series of anti-Chinese laws, Chinese restaurateurs realized they had to attract American customers in order to survive. Since the late 19th century, Chinese restaurants began to make Americans their main targets of business. They made great efforts in adapting their food and décor to the European-American preferences. They presented a number of Chinese dishes that were highly adapted to American tastes. One particular dish that came into the public eye was *chop suey*. *Chop suey* was a stir-fried mixture which originally included chicken’s gizzards, livers, pig’s tripe, bean sprouts, water chestnuts, etc. *Chop suey* means animal intestines in Cantonese. But when it appeared in Chinese restaurants serving American clientele, meat usually took the place of intestines, and celery and onions were usually added. This dish might have originated from Kwantung province, but was generally considered an American creation by the Chinese community.<sup>4</sup>

Thanks to the popularity of chop suey, the period from the earlier 20th century to the Second World War was known as “the era of *chop suey*”. Since the beginning of the 20th century, “chop suey houses” were established in large numbers in big cities like San Francisco and New York and expanded beyond Chinatowns. In order to attract Western clientele, these restaurants normally offered both American dishes and

a limited number of Chinese dishes, which were carefully selected so as not to offend the Western palate. Besides *chop suey*, *chow mein*, fried rice, egg foo young were the most common dishes. In these dishes, no “unusual” or “weird” ingredients could be found and the flavors were usually agreeable to the American palate. Thus, Chinese cuisine became “tame” food in the U.S., as it was called by Sherrie Inness.<sup>5</sup> Inness said that American’s favorite chow mein and chop suey were “nothing more than the worst examples of the excesses of Chinese-American cooking, possessing little or no connection to authentic Chinese recipes.”<sup>6</sup> In addition, Chinese food was usually cheap in price. As Joel Denker said in *The World on a Plate*, the “Chinese-American” menu in Chinese restaurants was “made of cheap, quickly assembled, easily assimilated dishes.”<sup>7</sup> Chinese restaurateurs not only modified food, but also adjusted restaurant décor to the stereotypical Western fantasies of “Oriental” exoticism. They remodeled restaurants by designing them with an Oriental motif.<sup>8</sup> They used cultural symbols like “red doors, green tiles, golden letters and silver couplets...” to create a pseudo-Chinese ambience, which European-Americans could easily grasp.<sup>9</sup>

Seeing the Chinese as an inferior race, European Americans could not accept Chinese food as a high-class cuisine. They were unwilling to spend much money on the dishes that seemed strange and even challenging to them. Unlike the scholars who liked to view the acceptance of “chop suey houses” by American customers as a suspension of racial prejudice when it came to eating,<sup>10</sup> I view Chinese restaurants in the earlier period as a product of the social and cultural domination of the whites and a reflection of white supremacy. Race relations between the white and the Chinese community are well reflected by food. Chinese restaurateurs were in a subordinate cultural position even in their own ethnic establishments. They couldn’t represent their culinary practices and traditions in their original forms in this white-dominated society, but conformed to Euro-American eating norms and cultural preferences.

In the era of chop suey, far from embracing Chinese culinary culture and eating practices, Americans only accepted a very narrow range of Chinese dishes which were usually highly Americanized. *San Francisco Chronicle* noted as late as in 1972 that “[...] Chinatown is still a mysterious world to most whites [...] who only know how to order [...] chop suey and beetle juice.”<sup>11</sup> The American public’s understanding of Chinese food and Chinese culinary culture was still quite limited before the late 1960s. It was not until the coming of the new immigrants after 1965 that a global Chinese cuisine and culinary culture became known to Americans.

## **The Transformation of the Chinese American Foodscape after 1965**

The 1965 Immigration Act brought in a large number of Chinese immigrants. Unlike the earlier immigrants who mostly came from Kwangtung, the new immigrants came from different regions of China. While most of the earlier immigrants were from the lower-class, quite a number of the new immigrants enjoyed relatively higher social statuses before they came to America. Although the new immigrants as a group were relatively better-educated and more skilled, a considerable number of them still engaged in the restaurant business for various reasons. Among these people, there were a number of master chefs who entered America under the quota of technical personnel. These chefs had received serious and systematic training in cooking. They not only brought in a wide range of Chinese regional cuisines, but also professionalized and gentrified Chinese cooking in America. Before them, there had never been such a large group of Chinese food professionals in America. Different from the immigrants who ended up in the restaurant business in order to survive, these people worked in restaurants because of their advantages in the culinary field rather than the disadvantages and incapability of finding other jobs. They strove to reconstruct their cultural identity through ethnic food.

It was these new immigrants who brought changes to and regenerated the Chinese American foodscape. Chinese restaurants proliferated and Chinese food diversified. The number of Chinese restaurants increased dramatically in this period. In the city of San Francisco, between 1960 and 1984, the number of Chinese restaurants increased by 234%, from 121 to 284.<sup>12</sup> Since the late 1960s, restaurants serving different Chinese regional cuisines sprung up in large quantity, among which there were a number of large, fancy, high-end eating establishments. No longer confining themselves to the simple Cantonese American fare, many of these new Chinese restaurants boasted extensive menus which were full of curiosity-provoking dish names such as General Tso's Chicken, Moo Shu Pork, Kung Pao Chicken, Dragon and Phoenix. Some even sounded challenging and intimidating to American ears, like "pig intestine with daily special," snake soup, and "Squid with ginger and green onion."<sup>13</sup> In contrast to the older restaurants that prioritized Western preferences, the new establishments reaffirmed the significance of the Chinese community and offered genuine Chinese food to Chinese customers.

The introduction of a global Chinese cuisine received an enthusiastic response from Americans. Famous food writer James Beard wrote in 1973:

Right now there's a small cultural revolution in cooking going on. Every-

where you find people taking classes in Chinese cuisine, flocking to the newest Chinese restaurants, buying Chinese food to take out.<sup>14</sup>

In coastal cities, the sophisticated white customers were no longer drawn to the cuisine of local Chinese Americans, but to the regional cuisines of Beijing, Shanghai, Sichuan and Hunan brought by the new immigrants.<sup>15</sup> The relations between Chinese restaurateurs and white customers changed, and the cultural hierarchy was reversed in the setting of these Chinese restaurants – white Americans were no longer the rule makers but cultural outsiders, and restaurant staff became cultural purveyors. This tendency was particularly evident in the restaurants for “insiders.” By “insider”, I refer to Chinese immigrants, Chinese Americans who still have a Chinese palate, or part of a Chinese palate, as well as non-Chinese food enthusiasts, who have developed a Chinese or semi-Chinese palate. There were a number of Chinese restaurants that particularly aimed at this group of people.

### **Restaurants for the “Insiders”**

California is a state which is distinctive in its culinary culture. Food writer Leslie Brenner said, “Californians have always been adventurous, willing to try new sensations, and they readily embraced a new way of eating.”<sup>16</sup> California has been standing in the forefront of culinary changes in America since the mid-20th century. The birth of “California cuisine” is the best manifestation of the enthusiasm Californians have for food. With the creative efforts of young ambitious chefs like Alice Waters, Wolfgang Puck, Michael McCarty, and Jeremiah Towers, California developed its own culinary style.<sup>17</sup> In addition, California is also the birthplace of Chinese American food. It boasted the longest Chinese American history and the largest Chinese population. Thus, the Chinese American foodscape was more complex in the Golden State than anywhere else. Before 1965, the Chinese population was relatively small due to the decades-long Chinese Exclusion Act. On account of their lower socioeconomic status, the consuming capacity of most Chinese immigrants was relatively low. So except for some deli shops and mom-and-pop restaurants, white Americans were the major customers of Chinese restaurants and large chop suey houses mainly catered to American preferences. The situation changed after the coming of new immigrants. Among the new Chinese immigrants who came to California after 1965, there were a considerable number of wealthy people who possessed a discriminating palate and good consuming capacity. They created a demand for the Chinese food which was both “authentic” and of high quality. At the same time, as American interest in Chinese food grew, with the presence of a large Chinese population, people in California

developed a more sophisticated palate for Chinese food. Some American customers were even interested in searching for “authentic” Chinese food around the state. Thus, the customers of these types of Chinese restaurants were by no means homogenous. Owing to the existence of the large number of Chinese immigrants, Chinese restaurants began to attach more importance to their own ethnic community. A number of restaurants targeting the Chinese community opened and offered food agreeable to the Chinese palate.

In the restaurants anticipating Chinese customers in California, the dining environment and the food offered were quite different from those restaurants targeting non-Chinese. These “insider” restaurants aimed at making Chinese customers feel at ease. The décor was usually relatively simple and less pretentious. Generally speaking, ordinary Chinese people care less about dining environment as long as food is good. The food was that served back in China and was without doubt satisfying to the Chinese palate. “Unusual” and “controversial” food items that seemed strange to American eaters appeared daringly in these restaurants. It could be challenging or intimidating even to the mainstream American palate. Cultural adaptations were rarely made and the food was seldom modified to cater to the palate of white Americans. In spite of this, these restaurants still attracted American foodies and was patronized by American Chinese food lovers who had a strong interest in tasting real Chinese food and enjoying what Chinese people eat. *San Francisco Sunday Examiner & Chronicle* reported in 1974 that non-Chinese diners enjoyed some of the peculiar Chinese food such as duck feet, squids and tripe.<sup>18</sup> Restaurant operators also said that dishes like pickled Chinese cabbage with plain boiled pork and fried leek dumplings which were not even liked by quite a number of Chinese eaters were embraced by some of the American foodies.<sup>19</sup>

Culinary pride and cultural confidence was strongly expressed by Chinese restaurateurs in these establishments. In the new era, Chinese restaurateurs displayed real Chinese food and food culture in public with little adaptations. These restaurants served as cultural institutions in which real ethnic foodways and food culture were kept intact and the culinary traditions were fully respected. A cultural connection with the homeland was retained through food, which countered the effect of cultural assimilation. These establishments kept Chinese food from the homogenizing force of American society. Besides that, these restaurants also exerted a cultural influence on a number of non-Chinese American food lovers and foodies by showing them the “real thing” and broadened their culinary horizons. Restaurants for “insiders” provided Chinese immigrant restaurateurs a chance to showcase the most bizarre,



peculiar and distinctive aspects of their cuisine and gave American customers an opportunity to see and try real Chinese food without leaving American soil. They changed the stereotypical perceptions of Chinese food held by Americans who usually saw Chinese food as unexciting and tame. More importantly, an inversion in cultural relations was witnessed. Under the new social and cultural context, the power relations between Chinese restaurateurs and American diners were twisted in these type of restaurants. The *L. A. Times* grumbled that it was hard to get good Chinese food if the customers were not Chinese: “they (Chinese restaurants) tend to strut their best stuff for the local community, leaving serious Western eaters to the heartbreak of pan-fried noodles”<sup>20</sup> Having difficulty in getting some particular kinds of Chinese food, some American eaters complained that Chinese restaurant staff always assumed the American taste was not that broad and thus avoided offering them some particular food items such as shells, innards, snails, etc. In this vein, American customers were in a disadvantaged position and had difficulty in getting what they really wanted: “That leaves those of us who want more than the endless stir-fry permutations with bell pepper and onion with a fight on our hands.”<sup>21</sup> Some of the American customers felt frustrated and bored because they always got the same kinds of food in Chinese restaurants. A food writer asserted that when he went all the way to a particular restaurant and ordered something unusual, the response from the restaurant staff was often “you don’t like that.” He expressed his dissatisfaction, “The more I eat in Chinese restaurants, the more I find they conform to old stereotypes.”<sup>22</sup> Another journalist held the same opinion and said Chinese restaurants always steered him toward the cliché “Anglo” dishes:

I always get a fork in Chinese restaurants [...] I am always asked if I want sweet-and-sour pork... When I ask if I can have some of the wonderful food that the Chinese family of 12 is eating at the next table, I am always told that I wouldn’t like it. When I ask what the wall posters mean, I am always told that they are special foods, for special orders, and I wouldn’t like them anyway.<sup>23</sup>

These sophisticated American customers expressed a feeling that they were sort of marginalized and treated as cultural “outsiders.” Sometimes, English and Chinese menus even had different items. Some food items that appeared on Chinese menus couldn’t be found on English ones – “it would seem so to a non-Chinese who scans the menu and is unable to find what the next table of Chinese are eating – such items as periwinkles, cuttlefish or pig’s tails.”<sup>24</sup>

“Wo Choy” provides the best example for this phenomenon. “Wo Choy” means Menu of the Day but is written only in Chinese.

It includes several dishes grouped together and the price is usually lower than a la carte. “Wo Choy” was offered for the benefit of Chinese customers. Chinese restaurateurs tended to exclude American customers from their cultural and gastronomical domain consciously or unconsciously through “Wo Choy.” They assumed the specialties on “Wo Choy” were beyond the appreciation of Americans and there won’t be a great demand for “Wo Choy” among non-Chinese, so they kept it to the Chinese communities. Because of the limited range of choices on English menus, it was hard for American customers to get a glimpse of chefs’ full repertoire based on the menus they were offered. In an article titled “Wo Choy: the Secret Meals of Chinatown,” the author states,

There is a curious paralysis of thought that grips many other-wise rational non-Chinese people when they enter a Chinatown restaurant – the feeling that an intriguing dining experience is just, but forever, beyond reach.<sup>25</sup>

To a certain extent, the act of treating Chinese and American customers differentially by Chinese restaurant operators could be seen as a form of resistance or even fightback to the cultural oppression they had suffered for decades long. Just like decades ago when white Americans stereotyped Chinese restaurants as filthy and unclean, Chinese restaurant operators stereotyped the majority of American customers as cultural and culinary outsiders who were incapable of appreciating real Chinese food. Possessing ethnic cultural capital, Chinese restaurant operators reasserted the cultural authority on their ethnic food. They reclaimed their lost cultural territory and placed themselves in a dominating cultural position in these establishments. In order to get good food, non-Chinese eaters had to learn. In these restaurants, adaptations were usually made by non-Chinese customers instead of Chinese restaurants. Chinese food was no longer modified to be acceptable to American eaters. This time it was American customers who approached Chinese food. American eaters took the initiative to learn the way Chinese people order in restaurants: “If you want to be treated as something more than a barbarian, learn a few Chinese names for dishes or ingredients.”<sup>26</sup> They had to decipher Chinese cultural codes in order to be treated as “insiders” and finally access authentic Chinese food:

Nor does it do any good to make a fuss because it simply won’t do any good. What one has to do is develop a strategy...I have come up with some rules of behavior that just might get you chopsticks instead of a fork, attention instead of disdain, authentic food instead of what the proprietors think non-Chinese like.<sup>27</sup>

American diners not only learned to appreciate what the Chinese savor but also followed Chinese culinary practices and dining etiquettes such as using chopsticks or sharing dishes with fellow diners sitting in one

table. During the process, their taste changed and became much more sophisticated.

It was food that caused a change in cultural relations. In the social space of “insiders” restaurants, the cultural relation between American customers and Chinese restaurants changed. Because of food, the old cultural hierarchy in which white Americans were in a dominant position was challenged, and a new form of cultural relations was established. The cultural roles have been reversed – white Americans were no longer the “rule makers” but had to observe the culinary rules of the Chinese community in this type of restaurants and Chinese restaurateurs who used to be the subordinated, yet eventually became culturally dominant. Like Sylvia Ferrero asserted, ethnic food is capable of twisting relations of power and knowledge in food markets.<sup>28</sup> The change of cultural relations might further stimulate a change of social relations. To sum up, food not only voices but also changes power relations. In this case, Chinese food subverted the established cultural hierarchies between Chinese and white Americans in the particular setting of Chinese restaurants.

### **Conclusion**

Under white cultural domination, the earlier Chinese American food was reduced to cheap and simple fare. Dishes like *chop suey* and *chow mein* became icons of Chinese American food. Chinese restaurateurs also *ethnicized* the dining environment of restaurants to cater to the Western fantasies of Orientalism. It was the post-1965 Chinese immigrants who transformed and revitalized the Chinese American foodscape. The American perception of Chinese food also changed. As multiculturalism prevailed in the U.S. after the Civil Rights Movement, Americans showed more interest in Chinese culture and gave more cultural respect to Chinese food.

Chinese immigrants began to reassert their authority on their native food. They imbued food with cultural values and expressed their cultural pride through their food. They successfully made Chinese restaurants their own cultural domain instead of the establishments in which Euro-American demands and expectations were always met at the sacrifice of traditional Chinese cultural values and traditions. In California, a state which had a large number of Chinese population, a new type of Chinese restaurant emerged that catered to the Chinese community. Although these restaurants aimed to satisfy the Chinese palate, American customers were nevertheless attracted to these places for a bite of real Chinese food. In these establishments, instead of giving priority to the cultural and culinary preferences of white Americans

as the old generation of Cantonese restaurants did, new restaurateurs placed themselves in a dominating cultural position. These ethnic restaurants served as the arena in which the cultural relations between the two racial groups were inverted. It suggested that in the new era, the cultural influences of ethnic communities was growing and the power relations between ethnic minorities and mainstream racial group underwent a certain change.

**Notes:**

1. Chinese food has been the most prevalent ethnic cuisine in the U.S., followed by Italian and Mexican food since the 1980s. See Wilbur Zelinsky, "You Are Where You Eat," in *The Taste of American Place*, eds., Barbara Shortridge and James Shortridge (Lanham, Maryland; Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998), 249.

2. On the American food revolution since the 1960s, see David Kamp, *The United States of Arugula: The Sun-dried, Cold-pressed, Dark-roasted, Extra Virgin Story of the American Food Revolution* (New York: Broadway Books, 2006) and Leslie Brenner, *American Appetite: The Coming of Age of a National Cuisine* (New York: Perennial, 1999).

3. J. A. G. Roberts, *China to Chinatown: Chinese Food in the West* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2002), 136-37.

4. Although the name of the dish was obtained in America, chop suey might have been a country specialty of Kwantung province. In rural areas of China, it wasn't an uncommon practice for villagers to improvise a dish by putting rice, whatever vegetables at hand and a little bit of meat together. Some Chinese immigrants also mentioned that they had eaten chop suey in China before they came to the U.S.

5. Sherrie Inness used the word "tame" to describe Chinese American foods which were made to appeal to European-American tastes and might or might not have originated in China. See Sherrie Inness, *Secret Ingredients: Race, Gender, and Class at the Dinner Table* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 51.

6. Inness, *Secret Ingredients*, 52-3.

7. Joel Denker, *The World on A Plate: A Tour Through the History of America's Ethnic Cuisines* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2003), 98.

8. John Jung, *Sweet and Sour: Life in Chinese Family Restaurants* (Yin and Yang Press, 2010), 40.

9. Tonia Chao, "Communicating Through Architecture: San Francisco Chinese Restaurants" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1985), 120.

10. See Lisa L. Hsia, "Eating the Exotic: The Growing Acceptability

of Chinese Cuisine in San Francisco, 1848-1915,” accessed February 17, 2014, <http://www.lisabug.net/EatingTheExotic.pdf>.

11. “Beetle juice” refers to chop suey. See The Chinese Historical Society of America’s pamphlet, *Working Through Time: The Chinese Food Experience in San Francisco*, 27. Chinese Historical Society of American Collection.

12. Chao, “Communicating Through Architecture,” 148.

13. Menu Collection of Los Angeles Public Library.

14. James Beard, “Cooking Up a Chinese Revolution,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 19, 1973.

15. Harvey Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 216.

16. Brenner, *American Appetite*, 134.

17. On how these individual chefs contributed to the birth of “California Cuisine,” see Brenner, “The California Vision” in *American Appetite*, 123-57, and Kamp, “California Nouvelle” in *The United States of Arugula*, 231-66.

18. Ken Wong, “The Joys of Wo Choy,” *San Francisco Sunday Examiner & Chronicle*, October 27, 1974.

19. Based on the author’s personal interviews with the owner of Lee’s Garden, Alhambra, CA, January 11, 2013.

20. Max Jacobson, “Monterey Park’s Top Guide to Middle Kingdom,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 26, 1986.

21. Bruce Cost, “An Advanced Course in Dining Chinese,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 26, 1989.

22. Ibid.

23. Fred Ferretti, “Why Is It Hard to Get Chopsticks,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 21, 1983.

24. Wong, “The Joys of Wo Choy.”

25. Robin Zehring and Leslie Nathanson, “Wo Choy: the Secret Meals of Chinatown,” *San Francisco*, November 1973. Yuk Ow Collection, Carton 21, Folder 2, Ethnic Studies Library, U.C. Berkeley.

26. Cost, “An Advanced Course in Dining Chinese”.

27. Ferretti, “Why Is It Hard to Get Chopsticks.”

28. Sylvia Ferrero, “Comida Sin Par. Consumption of Mexican Food in Los Angeles: ‘Foodscapes’ in a Transnational Consumer Society,” in *Food Nations: Selling Taste in Consumer Societies*, ed. Warren Belasco and Philip Scranton (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 198.

# JESSICA SHINDO

## Tilted Food

National culture manifests in a wide variety of forms, from sports, fashion, and food, to language and literature. This national culture is constantly changing with new trend and global influences while simultaneously battling to maintain and reify “tradition.” Many cultures claim to have endured for eons and centuries, however, it would be false to say they are precisely the same as they were when they were first created or that they stem from a single monolithic entity. Instead of being static and never changing, culture is instead dynamic, constantly under construction. What constitutes a nation is the constant state of being created and shaped by its transnational interactions (Doyle 2009). These interactions cause a shift either towards, or away from the essence of the nation - a “tilt” according to Doyle, and it is the aggregate of the individual tiltings that form the overall identity of the nation. Doyle examines this through the lens of the literary world, arguing that it serves as a microcosm or stage where negotiations that mirror the kinds of interactions happening on a larger scale between nation-states can play out.

In this sense, food is another vehicle for which these transnational interactions can occur, reaching a wider audience than literature. It is something that must be consumed by people of all classes whether they want to or not, and is something that is constantly being changed by those who consume it. The process of consuming, producing, and sharing food offers a widely accessible, visceral method for participating in a larger national culture, something Benedict Anderson terms the “imagined community” (1983). Foreign foods and people have also interacted with Japanese people throughout history to transformed foodways, or dietary attitudes, objects of consumption, and etiquette. Thus, food becomes another space in which transnational interactions can occur, and identity can be negotiated in, and can exhibit the same kind of tilt as transnational literature. One example of tilting is captured through the discourse between foreign foods and the Japanese characters found within the pages of a popular Japanese gourmet comic by Kariya, Tetsu and Akira Hanasaki, *Oishinbo: A la Carte. Hiyashi-chuka* (chilled Chinese noodles) is a Chinese dish cast as fatty, full of spices and additives and cheap, but unsafe due to pesticides and of inferior quality. These kind of food experiences create transnational social fields, through which foreign food is used to reify and values of traditional

Japanese cuisine through a triangular discourse on what Chinese, and Western foods are, and by extension, what Japan was not. Despite not specifically mentioning Japanese foods, the criticisms against Chinese food provide a means to clarify aspects of Japanese cuisine and culture. Dialectic discourse against foreign food lets Japanese culinary culture maintain and reify the values of Japanese society, tilting foreign foods back towards Japan.

### Foreign Influences in the Japanese diet

Food scholars have attributed major changes in the Japanese diet to two primary sources: China and “the West,” meaning Europe and the United States. Japanese scholars and elites have actively engaged in nation-building discourse since the Meiji period (1868—1912), when the need to clearly delineate what was Japanese in the face of what was Western. As early as 1880, a treatise on food and drink was written by Noguchi Hokugen on the differences between Chinese, Japanese, and Western foods. (Cwiertka “Modern Japanese Cuisine” 139). As Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney asserts, “the Japanese self was born through discourse with the other” (8), highlighting the importance of the presence of the other in any sort of discourse on the Japanese self. The Meiji era westernization, however, was not the first instance of transnational exchanges within the culinary realm; Westerners introduced foods and techniques like tempura and *konpeito* (sugar confectionaries) around the 1600s, and the Chinese had enjoyed a position of affluence from at least 700 CE (Ishige 2001). Chinese cuisine also enjoyed this elevated status as more Japanese people were keen on imitating the Chinese literati.



「冷やし中華」 Hiyashi-chuka

During those times however, the provinces of Japan had yet to be unified, let alone conceived of as a collective whole. Until about 1570, Japan was mostly comprised of warring lords of small domains. The country did not experience peace and political unification until 1600; even then, culturally, the country was still highly regional (Gordon 2006). The Meiji period represented the first time Japanese people thought of themselves at the national level instead of at the local level, but it wasn't until the later Taisho era (1912—1926) that the affluence of an expanding middle class began to enable significant dietary changes. Much of this came to an abrupt halt as Japan entered the war due to food shortages (Reilly 188). After the war, food was scarce and Japanese dietary culture

was characterized by rations and wheat-based products from their US occupiers (Cwierka “Western Food” 2004; Ishige 2001). It wasn’t until the 1950s that Japanese people were able to think about food beyond nutrition, but it was during those years that attitudes towards Asian foods and nutrition began to change.

The Chinese position of cultural superiority had been on the decline since at least around the end of the 16th century, when Toyotomi Hideyoshi, one of Japan’s three great unifiers, decided to go on a conquest to conquer China through Korea (Gordon 2006). As Japanese Imperialism grew, the status of Chinese cultural objects dropped in Japanese society. Fueled by China’s loss to Western powers, the position of Chinese things fell to an antiquated and inferior state as Japan sought to rapidly modernize through embracing Western culture around 1900. Japan also sought to actively distance itself from its Asian neighbors to distinguish itself as an Imperial power. Chinese and Asian food in general, were associated with a dystopian and dirty East Asia, due to those countries’ colonized status (Kushner 146). It was not until the 1920s, and later in the 1950s, due in part to the Japanese colonies in Taiwan and in part to the belief that the meat and fat in Chinese food was more nutritious, that Chinese food was consumed by non-Chinese in Japan (Tsu 2010). The Chinese-Japanese-Western tripod also had become firmly established in the minds of the Japanese public by 1960 and was roughly representative of Japanese imperialism, Japanese tradition, and Japanese modernity respectively (“Modern Japanese Cuisine” 139).

### **Reading food in Japanese comics**

The 1982 Japanese gourmet comic series, *Oishinbo*, captures this ethos of the increasingly affluent and global Japanese culinary scene, using food to navigate and build upon what qualifies foods as Japanese or not. The story follows a newspaper company’s quest to create an “ultimate menu” out of the most delicious foods. Read by over 100 million people and running for over twenty years, this series, through the character’s interactions with the foreign food and ingredients within, allow for transnational social fields to emerge within which Japanese identity can be negotiated through food. Even food that carries the identity of other nation-states within Japan experience a tilt towards Japan rather than their perceived country.

This is primarily done by positioning the foreign ingredients, dishes, or sometimes chefs, against indigenous versions and portraying the differences in a negative light. Often, food safety, the use of additives and pesticides, and nutrition are mobilized to convey the superiority of domestic products and serve as a vehicle for emotions and national



identity. Readers, lacking auditory, olfactory, and gustatory cues, do connect to the nation through “recall[ing] their own eating experiences in order to interpret the illustrations, sound effects, and characters’ verbal descriptions of food” (Brau 39). Each action the characters take, each food item is not only read, but remembered by recalling the reader’s past experience with similar foods. At the same time, each page is a base, allowing the reader to join the community through this shared idea. The comics connect the individual to the collective imagination of people who have had similar experiences, helping to build and maintain the image of what Japanese food is, or in the case of foreign foods, is not.

One such food is *hiyashi-chuka* (chilled Chinese noodles), which uses the same noodles as ramen; what sets *hiyashi-chuka* apart is the use of cold soup, cold noodles, cold toppings, and a relatively recent appearance to the culinary scene (Kariya and Hanasaki “Ramen and Gyoza” 2005). In *Oishinbo*, the main characters, Yamaoka and Kurita,



are trying to prove that *hiyashi-chuka*, a non-traditional Chinese food, has a rightful place in the Chinese culinary repertoire, the irony being that they and the dish are Japanese, and go about it in a very Japanese way for a Japanese audience. To do so, they carefully analyze each ingredient of *hiyashi-chuka*. One of the criticisms levied against the faux Chinese dish when their group visits the purported best restaurant in the Ginza,<sup>1</sup> is the overuse of MSG,



spices, and sugars. “...it’s got an overly strong scent and a very flat flavor... They’ve added so much MSG that it’s numbing my tongue!” complains Yamaoka (“Ramen and Gyoza” 63).

The use of oils, spices, and MSG are stereotypical portrayals of Chinese cooking<sup>2</sup> — so common that from the Edo period until only recently, it was widely believed that there was a biological difference between Chinese and Japanese people. Chinese people were able to eat the rich, oily, and heavy foods that delicate Japanese stomachs could not handle because the lining on their stomach was supposedly thicker (Tsu 63). Yamaoka, the son of a famous



gourmand with an acute sense of taste and the man in charge of making the Ultimate Menu, acts as the voice to this belief that for Japanese bodies, even the best restaurant in the most expensive part of Japan has too much MSG for the Japanese palate. The inclusion of MSG in

1 The most expensive district in Tokyo with lots of high class restaurants

2 Ironic, since MSG was actually invented in Japan (Kushner 2010).

Chinese food is seen as a problem and positions Japanese food as something that does not value the use of MSG in its cooking.

Ramen, another “Chinese” food<sup>1</sup>, is also portrayed as having lots of MSG and other spices. Yamaoka’s partner, Kurita, explains later why



too many spices can be a bad thing: “So many strong flavors are hitting your tongue that you can’t really pay attention to how the noodles taste” (“Ramen and Gyoza” 83). In doing so, she levies another criticism against Chinese cooking: due to the strong flavors, it is impossible to tell the flavor of each individual ingredient. By situating Kurita and Yamaoka, both Japanese citizens, in opposition to Chinese noodles through the act of criticizing its abuse of spices,

Tetsu Kariya effectively positions Japan against China. Where Chinese food is defined by an abundance of spices, Japanese food is inferred to be the opposite: light enough to be able to taste each individual ingredient, especially one as central as the noodles in ramen and *hiyashi-chuka*. The flavors of each individual ingredient should be delicious, and none should overpower the other.

This kind of ideology is resonant with the group-focused characterization of Japanese culture in the *nihonjinron* (literally, “theories about the Japanese people”) as written by Japanese scholars (Goodman 2008). Traditionally, it is generally opposed by the more Western individualism, that privileges the individual over the welfare of the larger group, but in *Oishinbo*, the Chinese method of cooking is used instead. Using Chinese food as a foil to articulate the collective Japanese identity was a common practice observed in many popular food writings during the latter half of the 20th century; comics about food were no exception (Tsu 77). By allowing oils, spices, and MSG to overpower the taste of noodles, the psychological classification of ramen seemingly tilts away from Japan and towards China in the minds of Japanese people. This explanation offers another possible explanation for the phenomena of

<sup>1</sup> Ramen actually underwent a name change in the 1950s and 1960s. Its original name was *chuka soba*, or Chinese soba, but was changed due to China officially becoming the Peoples Republic of China, and also because of associations with Japanese imperialism and the use of “*chuka*” (Kushner 2010).

Japanese people denying ramen's "Japaneseness" despite ramen being a national food in Japan, originating in Japan, and never existing in China ("Modern Japanese Cuisine" 144).

As the group goes about examining why the regular soba noodles used in ramen and *hiyashi-chuka* taste awful on their own, one character notes that "the simplest flavor... is the hardest to make" ("Ramen and Gyoza" 84). By pointing out the extreme difficulty in making simple flavors, Kariya nurtures the idea that the ability to bring out the simple flavors in foods without the use of extra seasonings or other flavors to muddle the "true" flavor, requires the greatest amount of skill. A central idea Japanese cooking is predicated upon is the chef's ability to "present natural taste of food itself in as pure a way as possible" (Ishige 117); refined Japanese restaurants from the Edo period (1600—1868) refused to change their style of cooking during the country's period of westernization, crystalizing the Edo custom of using as few seasonings as possible as the traditional style of



possible as the traditional style of Japanese cooking. Framed in this context, Chinese cooking does not require the same amount of skill as Japanese cooking and contributes to *Nihonjinron* by asserting the subtle and refinedness—and thus, uniqueness - of Japanese gastronomical tastes (Tsu 77).

Purity and safety are other issues raised by the Japanese culinary experts. One of the first problems pointed out by Yamaoka is the inferior quality of the flour. He explains:

Imported wheat is sprayed with pesticides and fungicides before being shipped. So it not only tastes bad but is also bad for you. And when the flour's processed into noodles, they add *kansui*<sup>2</sup>, food dyes, and stabilizing agents which degrades the flavor even more. ("Ramen and Gyoza" 83)

Both the poor flavor and the adverse health effects are attributed to the wheat used to make the flour. It is not just any wheat either, but specifi-

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2 "Kansui is a food additive that consists of alkaline salts, usually a mixture of potassium carbonate and sodium carbonate. Kansui is added to the dough to help give noodles a firm texture and yellow color. Eggs or lye (sodium hydroxide) can be used for the same purpose" (Translators Notes on the Text, "Ramen and Gyoza")

cally foreign, imported wheat that is sprayed with chemicals and then adulterated with preservatives and additives to make up for their deficiencies. Domestic wheat, on the other hand is portrayed in a favorable light. “I’m aware that domestic wheat tastes better and is safer, but it’s just too expensive.” Wheat grown in Japan, compared to wheat grown outside of Japan, is always cared for, safer and of higher quality, hence the prohibitive cost. The noodle maker justifies his choice in imported wheat by saying, “We don’t like to do it, but we’ve got no choice. We have to use low quality materials to try and create noodles that look good and have the right texture. And the restaurants keep nagging at us to lower our prices.” The manufacturer acts as an authoritative figure on the inferior quality of imported wheat, but shifts the blame from himself to the larger systems of capitalism and economics to garner sympathy from the reader. But the reason for the wheat’s low quality is emphasized primarily due to its non-Japaneseness, as if it is impossible to obtain high quality, chemical-free wheat from abroad. By pointing out the pollution of foreign wheat by pesticides and other chemicals, the dichotomized image of foreign versus domestic wheat is symbolically transformed into one of polluted versus pure food.

Purity is not only associated with traditional Japanese culinary practices, as mentioned earlier, but is one of the core values of Japanese society. Throughout Japanese history, mainstream culture has sought to embody purity by excluding those it deems as spiritually polluted, as in the case of the *burakumin*, people whose original jobs were associated with the slaughtering of animals (Aoki 186). Death is considered an unclean act; those who come into contact with it must be ritually purified lest they infect others with their impurity (Reader 48). Food, in this case, is no exception. The origin of wheat allows the author to contribute to the reader’s mental formation of Japanese cuisine—and thus, Japanese culture—as one associated with purity.

As a solution to the overuse of spices and additives, pesticide-ridden raw ingredients, factory processed eggs, and the general capitalist attitude compromising the flavors of the dish, Yamaoka decides the only way to make the best and most edible kind of *hiyashi-chuka* is to do it all himself—the Japanese way. He goes out of his way to obtain flour made from domestic wheat, which his supplier explains “tastes better and is safer, but is just too expensive” (“Ramen and Gyoza” 88). He also obtains chicken and eggs from an old woman who lives in the countryside, explaining that the usual chickens used in most broths are raised in an unhealthy environment and slaughtered too young to make good tasting broth. Ramen shops solve this by, “add[ing] MSG to their soup to compensate for the fact that it doesn’t have any deep flavor” (93). The

Japanese way, therefore, rejects capitalism and refuses to compromise its flavor with artificial ingredients. Kuriyama, through the characters, voices the opinion that real *hiyashi-chuka* can “only be realized by using real, pure ingredients” (“Ramen and Gyoza” 111). Real, pure ingredients in this swings the tilt of the dish back towards Japan, emphasizing the importance of non-processed and unadulterated ingredients to making a good dish.



Pure ingredients, however, are only one aspect of crafting a dish worthy of being accepted by the pickiest palates in Japan. The protagonist’s estranged father is considered *the* cultural authority on what constitutes good food, and is working for the rival newspaper company to create the Supreme Menu. He voices another integral dimension to Japanese culture and cuisine as he critiques his son’s *hiyashi-chuka*: “[Yamaoka] paid great attention to each of the ingredients individually, but neglected to consider the dish as a whole” (“Gyoza and Ramen” 117).

For *hiyashi-chuka* be truly accepted by the Japanese into the Chinese pantheon, it must combine the food in such a way that resonates with all the other ingredients, yet does not completely overpower each individual one.

In Japanese, this ideology is called *wa*, often glossed as “harmony.” *Wa* is another key concept in the *nihonjinron* literature that is often used to categorize Japanese culture (Goodman 2008). The author of *Oishinbo* himself writes that, “*Wa* is the best word to describe Japan; we harmonize and synthesize anything we can, but strangely the flavors of the ingredients still remain distinct, and eventually we get something that’s unique to the Japanese taste” (Kariya and Hanasaki “Japanese Cuisine” 114). In *Oishinbo*, harmonizing the ingredients means using condiments and sauces that match the cooking method and ingredients, all of which at some point in time, came from China. It also further underscores the idea of a homogeneous, harmonious society; Japanese condiments in a Chinese dish simply do not mix well.

For all its Chinese-ness on the surface though, *hiyashi-chuka* is, at its core, a dish unique to Japanese tastes. At first glance, the dish appears to overwhelmingly tilt towards China since the condiments, methods,

noodles, and broth are all borrowed from Chinese cuisine. However, looking more deeply, it follows the fundamental philosophies of Japanese cuisine: the importance of each individual flavor and the ability to harmonize all these flavors without erasing any one of them. By changing the direction of its tilt under different contexts, *hiyashi-chuka* is able to be a “flexible citizen,” to borrow the term from Aihwa Ong (1999). Economically and politically, the food is cast as Chinese; philosophically and culturally, it is Japanese.

The stratification of *hiyashi-chuka* can be further analyzed in terms of MacCannell’s stages of authenticity, which divide performances of authenticity into a front region and a back region (1973). Performances take place in the front region, but it is the back region that does the staging. In the front region, the dish is deliberately cast as Chinese by placing it in Chinese restaurants and using Chinese dishes and ingredients, something commonly done by actual Chinese restaurants in Japan (Tsu 76). The structured front space that allows consumers to taste a little bit of China with every bite of *hiyashi-chuka* as colonial tourists. Eating Chinese food was a visceral and tangible way for normal Japanese citizens to participate in the Japanese Imperialism (Solt 196-197; Cwiertka 139). It is the back region however, where the philosophical approach is revealed. It is here identity work actively occurs, revealing the “true” identity in a sense of the food, and the Japaneseness of *hiyashi-chuka*. It uses philosophical approaches to cooking, rejecting capitalist approaches of using artificial flavor enhancers while elevating pure ingredients, to firmly identify it as Japanese.

### **Tilted “foreign” foods**

Foreign food in contemporary Japanese culture is ubiquitous and consumed by a wide range of people, from rural towns to urban metropolises. In the 1980s, Japan experienced a gourmet boom that increased the popularity not only of ethnic foods, but also of food related popular culture and mass media (Tsu 67). In addition to “gourmet comics” and “gourmet dramas” the presence of food in Japanese culture is celebrated and everywhere, even in shows not primarily about food and on cell phone straps as well as overseas.

*Oishinbo* was one of the first and longest running of these gourmet comics; running for over 20 years, Tetsuya Kariya and Akira Hanasaki masterfully construct a narrative that not only tells a story, but in the process, defines and builds upon important aspects of what it means to call something “Japanese food” by putting it into a dialectic discourse with foreign entities and foreign foods. Its pages, along with its narrative of what it means to eat food that has a Japanese tilt to it, have recently

been translated into English and released in countries outside of Japan. *Hiyashi-chuka* was one example pulled from that discourse. It highlighted the overuse of additives and MSG to the point of polluting the dish, the overly strong flavors, and the danger in pesticide and chemical use in foreign foods, with the implication that domestic foods, and Japan as a whole, is characterized by the opposite.

The English editions, rather than being released in chronological order, are curated into “a la carte” volumes grouped by ingredients or theme. Its first volume, rather appropriately, is centered around “Japanese Cuisine,” and features a commentary section by the author, Kariya. In it, he discusses their reasoning to create a Japanese cuisine volume, the stories they chose, and what exactly constituted “Japanese cuisine.” Kariya admits that “[he] has no intention on getting into a huge Japanology discussion on ‘What is Japan’ and ‘What does it mean to be Japanese?’” (112) but that is because he already has, through the thousands of panels of food in his comics.

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# KATHERINE NASOL

## Tracing Trafficking Throughout the Migrant's Journey

### Introduction

In January 2014, Erwiana Sulistyarningsih, an Indonesian domestic worker, came forward to demand justice against her abusive employer. When fleeing home to Java, she was found in critical condition at the Hong Kong International Airport – covered in cuts and burns with only HK\$70 (US \$9) in hand.<sup>1</sup> Pictures of Erwiana spread across the world, and her story caused uproar. Thousands of migrants, as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and service organizations, reprimanded the Hong Kong government for creating conditions of forced labor, trafficking, and debt bondage. Now, seven months later, Erwiana's case is still unresolved. She has not obtained her stolen wages, the criminal prosecution of her employer, and money claims from her recruitment agency. Even with many supporters behind her, she is facing government neglect.

Erwiana's fight has shed light on the realities of trafficked migrants, and, as a result, the Hong Kong government is facing international condemnation. According to the 2014 Trafficking in Persons Report, the US Department of State maintained Hong Kong's status as a Tier 2 ranking, stating that the city has not fully complied with the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, a US legislation, and other international standards.<sup>2</sup> They have stated that more than 320,000 domestic workers in Hong Kong are victims of debt bondage because of agencies' exorbitant fees.<sup>3</sup> With urgent calls from the international community, Hong Kong has a global duty to protect the exploited within its region.

Yet, how do citizens become at risk for trafficking during the migration process and how can it be stopped? In order to fully prevent trafficking, it is important to understand how elements of trafficking can be found throughout a foreign domestic helper's migration journey.

### Overview and Research Process

This research paper aims to understand how Filipino and Indo-

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1 Hewson, Jack. (2014, January 19.) Hong Kong's domestic worker abuse. Al Jazeera. Retrieved from <http://m.aljazeera.com/story/20141199347455882>

2 US Department of State. Trafficking in Persons Report 2014.

3 S. Sto. Domingo, Bernadette. (2014, July 11) US government to Filipino migrants: 'Know Your Rights.' Hong Kong News. Retrieved from: <http://hongkongnews.com.hk/us-govt-philipino-migrants-know-rights/>

nesian foreign domestic helpers (FDHs) are vulnerable to trafficking throughout their travels from the sending country to Hong Kong. In order to understand this topic, I will be asking the following questions:

- What elements of trafficking are present throughout FDHs' migration journeys?
  - What practices are used by the recruitment agencies in sending countries that create debt bondage and illegal recruitment?
  - How do recruitment agencies in Hong Kong initiate debt bondage?
  - What policies in Hong Kong create conditions for forced labor?

By answering these questions, I hope to identify policy failures and gaps that must be addressed in order to combat trafficking against Filipino and Indonesian FDHs.

### **Methodologies**

In order to answer my research questions, I will be using the following strategies:

- **Semi-structured Interviews:** With the help of the Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM), a NGO based in Hong Kong, I will be analyzing interview transcripts of community organizers, domestic workers, welfare workers, and executive directors. The transcripts are based upon the issues of overcharging, illegal collection, and illegal recruitment in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Hong Kong.

- **Policy Reports and Briefs:** I will be analyzing policy reports on trafficking in Hong Kong such as the 2014 US Trafficking in Persons Report, Amnesty International's "Exploited For Profit, Failed By Governments," and Liberty Asia's policy brief, "How Many More Years A Slave?"

- **Secondary Sources:** I will be collecting information from past research papers that have discussed the forced labor and debt bondage of Hong Kong FDHs such as Lee and Peterson's "Forced Labor and Debt Bondage in Hong Kong" and Nicole Constable's "Maid to Order."

- **Campaign Statements:** Through connections with Indonesian and Filipino migrant organizations, I will be gathering data from participant observations at migrant groups meeting, campaign statements, and hearings against illegal recruitment and trafficking.

### **Definitions**

Before discussing the migration of trafficked foreign domestic helpers, it is important to define human trafficking, forced labor, and debt bondage.

### *Human Trafficking*

Human trafficking is the trade and exploitation of human beings.<sup>1</sup> According to the Palermo Protocol, a UN adopted protocol, human trafficking must have three components: an act, a means, and a purpose.<sup>2</sup> The **act** can include formal or informal recruiting; harboring a person; transferring a person one person to another; and/or receipt, or to meet the victim at agreed places on their journey.<sup>3</sup> The **means** relates to the mental state of the victim, and the power dynamic between the trafficker and the trafficked.<sup>4</sup> In order for a case to be considered trafficking, there needs to be proof that the trafficker has used threats, coercion, abduction, and abuse of power. Means does not have to be considered if the trafficked person is under 18.<sup>5</sup> Lastly, trafficking must have an **exploitative purpose**, or in other words, a reason as to why the perpetrator has trafficked another human being. Purposes can include the prostitution of others, sexual exploitation, forced labor, slavery or similar practices, organ removal, and/or other types of exploitation.

### *Forced Labor*

In regards to FDHs in Hong Kong, the most common exploitative purpose is forced labor. As stated in the ILO Convention on Forced Labor No. 29, forced labor is all work or service where a person is under **menace of penalty**, or loses rights and privileges, and the person did not **offer themselves voluntarily**.<sup>6</sup>

1 Liberty Asia. (2014 March) How Many More Years A Slave?: Trafficking for forced labour in Hong Kong. Retrieved from: [http://www.justicecentre.org.hk/framework/uploads/2014/03/JCHK\\_Report\\_final\\_spreads.pdf](http://www.justicecentre.org.hk/framework/uploads/2014/03/JCHK_Report_final_spreads.pdf)

2 United Nations General Assembly. (2000.) Article 3, paragraph (a.) Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Crime. Retrieved from: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/ProtocolTraffickingInPersons.aspx>.

3 Liberty Asia. (2014 March) How Many More Years A Slave?: Trafficking for forced labour in Hong Kong. Retrieved from: [http://www.justicecentre.org.hk/framework/uploads/2014/03/JCHK\\_Report\\_final\\_spreads.pdf](http://www.justicecentre.org.hk/framework/uploads/2014/03/JCHK_Report_final_spreads.pdf)

4 Liberty Asia. (2014 March) How Many More Years A Slave?: Trafficking for forced labour in Hong Kong. Retrieved from: [http://www.justicecentre.org.hk/framework/uploads/2014/03/JCHK\\_Report\\_final\\_spreads.pdf](http://www.justicecentre.org.hk/framework/uploads/2014/03/JCHK_Report_final_spreads.pdf)

5 United Nations General Assembly. (2000.) Article 3, paragraph (a.) Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Crime. Retrieved from: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/ProtocolTraffickingInPersons.aspx>.

6 ILO Convention on Forced Labor No. 29.

### *Debt Bondage*

The UN Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery (1957) defines debt bondage as a situation where a person's labor is used as payment for a loan.<sup>1</sup> Debt bondage has been a major crime against migrant workers, and with the increase in education and awareness, more FDHs in Hong Kong are reporting crimes of debt bondage and illegal collection.

### **Tracing Trafficking Throughout the Migrant's Journey**

In order to trace trafficking throughout the migration process, it is important to start with the conditions of the home country. In under-resourced countries, such as the Philippines and Indonesia, high inequality, mass unemployment, and socio-economic and political repression make it difficult for citizens to afford an education, find a job, and to support loved ones and families. Because of such conditions, many are forced to migrate and find jobs away from home. Sending countries may even promote the migration of their own people. For instance, the Philippines government promotes the Labor Export Policy, which encourages citizens to migrate to be temporary laborers in wealthy countries. Migration temporarily boosts the economy through remittances, even though they fail to address the true root causes of economic failure.<sup>2</sup>

### *The Selling of Migrants: How Sending Countries and Hong Kong Trade Citizens*

Recruitment agencies take advantage of these conditions. Agencies in sending countries will receive jobs orders from agencies in Hong Kong, and **formally recruit** Filipino and Indonesian citizens in their local communities to fulfill these orders. After recruitment, workers must pay and undergo trainings, medical examinations, and final exams. The trainings can also include trafficking elements such as **harboring**. For instance, Indonesian workers are brought to training camps where they are kept indefinitely until the agency receives a job order, limiting their own freedom of movement.<sup>3</sup>

1 UN Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery. (1957).

2 Cai, Feini. (2011 Aug 24.) The Labor Export Policy: A Case Study of the Philippines. Retrieved from <http://www.e-ir.info/2011/08/24/the-labour-export-policy-a-case-study-of-the-philippines-2/>

3 Amnesty International, International Secretariat, United Kingdom. (2013.) "Exploited for Profit, Failed By Governments: Indonesian Migrant Domestic Workers Trafficking To Hong Kong."

During the training process, workers are **coerced into debt bondage**. They are forced to pay recruitment fees to their agencies often a few nights before their flight to Hong Kong. Fees can cost HK\$13,000 (US \$1668) to HK\$21,000 (US \$ 2695), which is equivalent to three to seven months of salary, and agencies commonly confiscate the worker's passport and identity documents as collateral.<sup>4</sup>

If the worker is unable to pay, the agency refers the worker to a moneylending company where they must fill out a form to open an account and take out a loan. Workers can be forced to sign five to twelve blank post-dated checks while not receiving a loan receipt. Many workers may also be unfamiliar with the loan process, and this lack of education leads many migrant workers to sign these checks without understanding the consequences of how it will affect their salaries abroad.

Agencies can also use salary deduction to obtain fees. For instance, Indonesian agencies will deduct around HK\$2,850 (US \$366) from workers' salaries for the first six months, when their salaries may be around HK\$3,500 (US \$449). These salary deductions are often 80% of the workers' salary, leaving little money for their own survival in Hong Kong and for their families back home.<sup>5</sup> Ultimately, agencies use **fraud, coercion, and deception** to accept jobs with supposedly lucrative salaries. Yet, because of illegal recruitment fees, sham loans, and debt bondage, migrant workers are actually receiving less than they should be receiving. Additionally, the agencies' use of passport confiscation is a form of use of force in order to keep workers compliant.

#### *Deception Continues: Arriving in Hong Kong*

When migrant workers arrive in Hong Kong, agency control continues. Hong Kong agencies take away their passport and employment contract, leaving workers with their temporary Hong Kong ID and a photo-copy of their identity documents. They are then taken to pay a loan to the Hong Kong agency to cover a fee for their agencies abroad. According to Hong Kong law, only 10% of the FDH's salary can be deducted, yet these loans are used to get around the law.<sup>6</sup> Workers rarely receive a copy of these loans, and at times, do not even receive the actual money. Often, they are asked to confiscate their medical documents,

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4 US Department of State. Trafficking in Persons Report 2014.

5 Amnesty International, International Secretariat, United Kingdom. (2013.) "Exploited for Profit, Failed By Governments: Indonesian Migrant Domestic Workers Trafficking To Hong Kong."

6 Hong Kong Labour Department. (2014 February.) A Concise Guide to the Employment Ordinance. Retrieved from: [http://www.labour.gov.hk/eng/public/wcp/ConciseGuide/EO\\_guide\\_full.pdf](http://www.labour.gov.hk/eng/public/wcp/ConciseGuide/EO_guide_full.pdf)

school grades, and even their family's land certificate.<sup>1</sup> This process leaves workers restricted and bound to their agency, and continues the process of fraud, coercion, and deception.

During the first few months of paying the loan, workers are afraid to speak out because their job can be terminated at any time. This unequal power structure leaves workers vulnerable to abuse from both the agency and the employer.

### *More Than a Slave: Forced Labor Under City Lights*

When workers are placed with their employers, they realize that their work environment is not what they expected. According to a 2013 survey conducted by the Mission For Migrant Workers, 87% of clients reported working long working hours with an average of 16 hours a day. Clients have also reported being forced to sleep in closets, laundry rooms, kitchens, hallways, and washrooms. Workers have received insufficient food, usually eating the spoiled leftovers from their employer, and have experienced emotional and physical abuse.<sup>2</sup>

Additionally, the continuous debt bondage creates an emotional toll, especially when they are the main economic breadwinners for their families. These conditions lend itself to **forced labor** since many workers are afraid to speak against their employer because they are trapped in paying agency loans, extraneous fees, and necessities for loved ones. With this in mind, these jobs can become abusive and turn into forced labor. Workers undergo **menace of penalty** because they may be working 15 to 16-hour days with little pay, they are not receiving enough food allowances. They also did not **voluntarily consent** to work in these conditions where they are in debt and underpaid.

Hong Kong's legislation worsens this repressive labor environment. For instance, the city's "two-week rule" states that if either party terminates the two-year contract prematurely, they are only able to stay in Hong Kong for two weeks before being sent back home.<sup>3</sup> Many workers may lose their jobs because their employer may terminate the contract only after a few days or months after arrival, and with only two weeks, it is difficult to pursue legal challenges.

Another troubling legislation is the live-in policy, which states that

1 Amnesty International, International Secretariat, United Kingdom. (2013.) "Exploited for Profit, Failed By Governments: Indonesian Migrant Domestic Workers Trafficking To Hong Kong."

2 Mission for Migrant Workers. (2014 April.) Statistics on MFMW Counseling, Shelter, and other Emergency Services for 2013.

3 Hong Kong Labour Department. (2014 February.) A Concise Guide to the Employment Ordinance. Retrieved from: [http://www.labour.gov.hk/eng/public/wcp/ConciseGuide/EO\\_guide\\_full.pdf](http://www.labour.gov.hk/eng/public/wcp/ConciseGuide/EO_guide_full.pdf)

it is mandatory for the migrant worker to live with the employer. This policy has led to many issues such as long work schedules, lack of rest days, and minimized safety and privacy.<sup>4</sup> In addition, migrant workers are subject to Hong Kong's low minimum allowable wage and their "overtime" hours are not being regulated or paid for. As a result of these policy gaps, the live-in allows employer to enact worker abuse without fear of repercussions.

*Redress: Lack of Recourse for Foreign Domestic Workers*

Even when workers are educated about their rights as overseas workers, it is difficult to prosecute against their employer and agencies. Firstly, agencies hardly leave a paper trail, or hard evidence workers can use against them. Agencies rarely provide receipts and copies of transactions and checks to the workers, and the agency name may not be mentioned on loan papers, even though these agencies referred workers to these moneylenders.

Secondly, there are obstacles in prosecuting against the agencies in the sending countries since Hong Kong's labor department only deals with agencies within Hong Kong. For example, if Filipino workers have complaints, they must undergo the hands-on conciliation process, where they must call the consulate and claim what they have paid. Yet, workers are only able to obtain a conciliation meeting, instead of a hearing to try the case. In addition, they only can receive half of the amount they if they are successful.<sup>5</sup>

Thirdly, Hong Kong's lack of regulation adds more distress. Part of the Labor Department, the Employment Agency Administration is the main body in charge of regulating Hong Kong based agencies, but they do not have the evidential expertise to go through the agencies' data. As a result, there is passivity, low transparency, and low success rate in cancelling agency licenses.<sup>6</sup> In addition, if a worker would like to try their agency for trafficking, they must string along many ordinances in order to build a case. Since Hong Kong does not have an anti-trafficking law, migrant workers are unable to use a specific legislation against their agencies. These lack of efficient recourse mechanisms demonstrate that there must be more done to protect migrant citizens.

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4 Mission for Migrant Workers Limited. (2013 April). Live In Policy increases female FDWs' vulnerability to various types of abuse.

5 Tayag, Michael. (2012 December.) An Evaluation of the Hands On Conciliation Policy and Practice of the Philippine Consulate General in Hong Kong. Migrants Review.

6 Chu, Desmond. (2012 December.) Illegal Agency Fees: An Analysis of Related Laws and Administration. Migrants Review.

## **Moving Forward: Resistance, Research, and Recommendations**

Although not all workers end up trafficked, the migration journey lends itself to high exploitation. Agencies in the sending countries use fraud, deception, and coercion to recruit workers into accepting jobs abroad. They are able to keep workers in control throughout the journey through passport confiscation, debt accumulation and sham loans, with the help of money lending companies. When workers travel to Hong Kong, the Hong Kong agency also charge excessive fees through illegally deducting more than 10% of the worker's salary. They will ultimately use physical and emotional harassment techniques if the worker does not pay. In addition, the jobs workers are deceived into accepting can end up to be abusive situations. These poor work conditions are exacerbated through legislation like the low minimum allowable wage, the live-in policy, and the two-week rule. Workers thus work in slave-like conditions, are in debt bondage to their agencies, and provide little back to those at home. Even if workers are educated about their rights and would like to pursue a case, unregulated and inefficient recourse mechanisms stop them from claiming illegal fees, and persecuting their employer and agency.

Ultimately, migrant trafficking is due to policy gaps and failures found with the Philippine, Indonesian, and Hong Kong governments. The Philippine and Indonesian governments are unable to provide employment, welfare, and social services to their own citizens, forcing them to go abroad. In Hong Kong, the government is failing to regulate recruitment agencies and employers as well as continuing obsolete laws that are exacerbating the trafficking of migrants. As a result, there is a dire need for governmental changes that address these multi-national policy failures.

Many migrant workers are leading the fight for just treatment and systematic change. In 2007, Indonesian migrant groups and unions such as ATKI, LIMU, and IMWU protested to lower the recruitment agency fees from HK\$13,000 (US \$1668) to HK\$21,000 (US \$2695). In 2013, Filipino migrant workers created a movement called TIGIL NA! (End Now) Movement of Victims Against Illegal Recruitment and Trafficking. Ever since, the group has organized and mobilized to address current problems of recruitment and lending agencies.<sup>1</sup>

As a result, migrant workers, community-based service providers, and NGOs are now calling for the following to address labor trafficking:

### **Redistribute wealth to social services, affordable education, and job**

1 Mission for Migrant Workers Hong Kong. (2013 June.) Mission welfare beneficiaries mount advocacy against illegal recruitment and trafficking. Migrants Focus.



**production in the sending countries.** If migrants are forced to leave their homes, the Philippine and Indonesian governments must redistribute its wealth towards social services, job creation, and education to better the lives of its citizens. Even though remittances can temporarily help a country's economy, mass migration is a sign of underdevelopment instead of progress. Mass inequality thus leaves citizens vulnerable to trafficking, and to other mass human rights abuses.

**Provide multi-national and inter-agency mechanisms for regular accountability of recruitment agencies and employers.** Recruitment agencies in Hong Kong and the Philippines must be regularly investigated for illegal practices such as identity document confiscation, sham loans, and illegal collection. Other recommended practices are to minimize excessive fees in the migration process, and firing government officials who ignore recruitment agencies and illegal collection.

If recruiters and moneylending agencies are found caught, there must be enforced punishment such as high financial penalty, license cancellation, suspension, and transparency to workers themselves. This also includes having effective recourse mechanisms for migrant workers to reclaim stolen wages.

**Adopt and enforce a comprehensive definition of trafficking that adheres to international conventions.** Currently, Hong Kong's definition of human trafficking only focuses on prostitution, and is not on par with many international conventions. It ignores migrant exploitation as a form of trafficking, making it difficult for legal services and migrant workers to build a legal case against their agencies. Hong Kong's Ordinances are not enough to protect workers from exploitation.

**Abolish laws that create an environment for forced labor.** For Hong Kong, these legislations include the two week rule and mandatory live-in policy. The Hong Kong government must create legislation that ensures the rights and welfare of migrant workers such as enacting maximum hour regulations for all workers, raising the minimum allowable wage, criminalizing passport and identity confiscation, and returning direct hiring practices.

**Provide protection, welfare, and support for overseas workers.** The sending country's governments must be the main bodies that should be responsible for the protection of migrant workers, not agencies. Because agencies are a source of repression, it is detrimental for workers to rely on them for support. Instead, sending countries must take care of their workers through, for example, providing efficient and just consulate officers abroad. For the Hong Kong area, there are limited number of shelter and legal counseling for many migrant workers, with many organizations overworked with the growing number of exploited workers.

The government is able to help through funding grassroots organizations, service providers, and non-profits.

### **Conclusion**

Trafficking is major crime that must be combatted, and it should be seen as not the root cause of injustice, but the symptom of injustice. The real root causes stem from mass inequalities in the sending country, where citizens are forced to migrate. In order to truly protect migrant workers at all stages of their journeys, the governments of sending and receiving countries have a global duty to ensure the human rights of all visitors and overseas citizens.

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**CREATIVE  
NONFICTION**

# DEBRA TISOY PACIO

## When Half Is Whole

“We, the children of postwar unions, were simply the products of our parents’ revolutionary actions. Some of us were born unwelcomed into the world, while others were seen as flowers amidst the ashes—new life springing forth with hope and promise from the devastated land.”

~Stephen Murphy-Shigematsu, *When Half Is Whole*

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I had my qualms about Aimee. Everyone did. But what I didn’t expect was that one day, she would turn around in her desk, and ask me, “Debra?”

And I look up from my desk. “Yeah?”

“What is your mix?”

Is that what everyone thought?

It is difficult to compose an answer to that question, and was especially difficult for my high school self who knew very little of the extensive history of colonization that had occurred in the Philippines. In my reply, I made sure to cover that I was “full-Filipino” but that it was a bit of a misnomer since the Philippines has been ruled by various powers, ranging from Chinese invasions in its earliest history to the better known Spanish and Japanese imperialists of more recent wars. But after reading *When Half is Whole*, I look back and realize how defensive that word now sounds—to be “full-Filipino,” when really, there is no such a thing because of our history.

I had to use the word “full.” Because if I was not “full,” would that mean I was empty?

Growing up as a Filipino-American in the Bay Area, I was never in an environment that asked me to question my ethnic identity too often. There were Filipinos aplenty. But there were also Vietnamese, Chinese, Cambodian, Japanese, and Taiwanese immigrants, all of whom had one defining “Asian” trait—beautiful, straight black hair. I was jealous.

My hair had always been a deep, dark brown, revelatory in its near-amber hues under the sun. My mom, with similarly dark brown hair in

her younger years, told me that our hair color came from Spanish ancestors. She herself had inherited rather fair skin for a Filipina, beautiful olive tones that she had passed down to me. These shades were special to me, until the day that inherited differences wrung my straight locks into a definite, frizzy curl. Dad always told me that our family had a unique hair pattern. Women on his side of the family, upon entering puberty, experience a sudden curling of the hair up until their elder years, when their hair will relax into a calm wave. Before, with my straight, dark brown hair, the mothers of my friends would come up to me with a smile and ask if I were Vietnamese—it was a question that I was pleased to hear. But by my late middle school years, I knew that I could no longer pass. My curls gave me away.

From kindergarten up through high school, I generally stayed with the same demographic in the Bay Area and kept the same group of friends. My closest companions happened to be Vietnamese and Chinese. I rarely ever spent any time with the Filipinos, with the exception of a similarly fair-skinned Filipina friend, Lucia Santos. The majority of the Filipinos at my high school had dark copper skin and the straight hair that I had always adored, and I knew that, with my curly locks, I would never fit in with them.

And I was never “Asian” enough either. I would argue with my classmates, defending the “fact” that the Philippines counted as an Asian country while others, my own Filipino brethren especially, would argue that we were a part of the Pacific Islands. But what did I know, being the supposedly Filipino girl who looked nothing like most of the other Filipinos at school? And on the other side of the coin, I, apparently, was not Asian enough to lay any claim to Asian ancestry. Did it even matter?

No, what mattered to me the most was the physical displacement I felt throughout high school. Independence High School has a unique campus because of its history. Located in San Jose, it was formerly touted as the second largest high school in California with an approximate student population of 4,000. Now, it is looked down upon for its 200-student per year drop-out rate. That said, the school is physically large. The rumor, or rather the history, of the school, is that it was originally intended to be a community college or three separate high schools, but that it instead became one unified school. “Unified” is an interesting word in light of the set-up of our campus. Independence High is famously broken up into four “villas” or sections. From my own high school experience, I remember those reflection of social divisions in those villas very clearly. You can find the African American students in A Villa, the community

service-oriented Asians in B Villa, the Latinos in C Villa, and the Filipinos in D Villa. And as for myself, finding no place where I felt that I truly belonged at the school, I could be found floating between the K-buildings that housed my two favorite classrooms, physics and computer science, in the company of close teachers and a small group of friends.

I knew that I had a quiet personality and didn't care too much for my lack of socializing during breaks and lunches. Prior to Stacey's question, it had never occurred to me that the disconnect between myself and others may have stemmed from something deeper, that the discomfort I felt with my own appearances were differences apparent to others as well. I knew that I was Filipino—I was born in the Philippines and lived there until the age of three. My family upholds Filipino values in the household. But outside of the house, I was unlike other Filipino-Americans my own age. Looking back, my decisions to take courses like Introduction to Asian American History (my first-ever class at Stanford), Tagalog, and a summer-intensive course on mixed race, and to teach an Alternative Spring Break course on Filipino-Issues were subconsciously driven by the need to understand myself. The question became more than Stacey's what am I, but rather, who am I? Who have I chosen to be? How have my heritage and ancestry shaped me? How do others' views continue to offer their own molds as well?

There was a slight twinkle in Aimee's eyes when she asked. It was honest curiosity. I still remember her as far from my favorite person in that class, but I look upon that memory with gratitude, thankful that her words prodded me to begin the conversation. Not necessarily with her—no, that chat ended the moment it began. I began a conversation with myself, so that the next time someone asks, I'll be a bit more prepared to go beyond a generic answer. Next time, I'll be able to invite them to explore our individual identities together, as others have in *When Half Is Whole*, in the context of histories and narratives greater than ourselves.

Work Cited:

Murphy-Shigematsu, Stephen. *When Half Is Whole: Multiethnic Asian American Identities*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012.

# GRACE CHAO

## Four Dinners

*One. 2000*

Walk down two blocks with Annie, who is eleven, and Cindy, who is six, to Lily Bates's house at five. Think about the bread you will soon have. Jesus served 5,000 hungry people giant baskets of fish and thousands of loaves of bread, but Mother only buys rice. You have never been to a white person's house for dinner before.

Say hello to Lily and her parents. Her father has a British accent. Her mother is Chinese. *Hi, Mr. and Mrs. Bates.* See the basket of rolls atop the green-checked tablecloth, next to the *I Can't Believe it's Not Butter*. Sit down. Jesus had bread even during his last supper.

Grab a roll from the top, soft and light brown. Bite into it, then the chicken and cheese *en-chi-la-da*, then long, red strips of smoked salmon that Mr. Bates bought at Costco in the afternoon. *I got them with the enchiladas*, he laughs. His yellow hair is thinning. Costco must sell everything.

Take another brown roll. Eat half. Mr. Bates asks you to please pass the butter.

Ask, *If it's I Can't Believe it's Not Butter, why do you call it butter?*

Mr. Bates laughs. Smile because you have made him laugh.

*Two. 2008*

Answer the door to find Mrs. Sue, skinny in a pink sweater, white Styrofoam box in hand. She is an old friend of your parents. They discuss the Bible on Fridays. Today is a Wednesday, and Father is in the hospital. Mother is with him.

*Good girls*, Mrs. Sue says. *I don't know what you girls like to eat, but I brought you some dinner.* She hands you the white box. She says Father is a strong man for surviving his heart attack. Smile and say, *yeah*. Say your goodbyes.

Head to the kitchen. Helen, seven, asks if it's cake. Cindy, fourteen, asks if she's crazy. *What kind of adult buys children cake for dinner?*

Open the box. It is a big, brown slab of take-out meat, supine in a puddle of orange oil. *I think Mrs. Sue bought her husband the wrong dinner and gave it to us instead*, Cindy says.

Maybe, you reply. You wish that Annie were here. *If Annie were here, she would have cooked*, you say.

When you called Annie, nineteen, yesterday and told her to guess where Father was, she asked in a panic, *Prison?*



You chuckle. Remind yourself to tell Father when you visit him tomorrow. You saw three cubes off the meat and pass them around. It doesn't taste that bad.

On Monday, you played a song called *A Thousand Winds* for Father that you had heard when you visited Japan. He liked it and played it on his computer, over and over again.

Today, you searched up the song and realized it was about the dead. The song came from a poem called *Do Not Stand at My Grave and Weep*, before it was translated into Japanese.

Saw another three cubes off the meat. You decide not to tell Father about the song for the dead.

### *Three.* 1999

Feel nauseous on the plane ride, on the car ride, while greeting your grandparents (whom you haven't seen since you were one), and throughout lunch. Lunch is at a gigantic seafood restaurant, where they have a spinning circular board on top of a circular white table. Look away as the board spins and spins and spins. Feel increasingly nauseous.

Mother spins a bowl of something gray and floppy toward you. It has no English name. Take a bite and chew until Mother looks away. Vomit.

No one sees. Amalgamate the vomit into one neat lump, a grayish blob on your plate, and place your soup bowl on top. Insist that your sculpture stays that way, when waiters come to clear the table. It stays.

*You little American, Grace, you barely ate anything!* Uncle buys you a Happy Meal after the seafood restaurant, chicken nuggets and fries.

Mother says something about coming halfway across the world to Taiwan, *to eat McDonald's!* You hug the Happy Meal box in your arms, because you can't eat in the taxi, all the way to Grandmother's house.

At Grandmother's house, feel nauseous again. Your room is on the fourth floor. Drop the Happy Meal, unopened, on the table and run as fast as you can up the stairs, because someone is in the first floor bathroom, and you don't know where the other bathrooms are.

First floor, second floor. Mother runs behind you. Third floor, fourth floor. Fall and vomit all over the top of the stairs.

Wake up in the morning at 4 A.M. Mother is dozing next to you. Poke her. She asks if you feel better. Ask where your Happy Meal is.

*Grandpa ate it,* she says.

Think about the fries. Begin to cry.

### *Four.* 2013

Take the 11:00 train to the last stop in San Francisco on Saturday morning, because you and your roommate Hannah woke up late, and

missed the 9:30 shuttle. You have an orange duffel bag of clothes, a green purse for shopping, and a backpack with your laptop and homework inside, for when you have a few extra minutes this weekend. On the train, your roommate falls asleep—she can fall asleep anywhere.

You're on your way to visit Aunt Teresa and Uncle Ronald, who are fifty-nine and sixty-five and in interior design and real estate, and not your real aunt and uncle. They are Madeline's aunt and uncle, but you have heard so much about them that you do not know what else to call them. Uncle Ronald was a former model and a ladies' man and cooks only gourmet food; Aunt Teresa ran off to Los Angeles after high school and modeled too and designed clothing for the stars. (She doesn't eat sweets, so Uncle Ronald never makes gourmet dessert.)

They are beautiful, appearing ten years younger than they actually are, and take care of two striped cats named Monkey and Gunner. They are friends with everybody. They own two apartments on Washington Street, side-by-side: one for living in, and another for storing Aunt Teresa's expensive staging furniture. ("That's where you'll be sleeping tonight.")

They are the aunt and uncle of Madeline Elizabeth Bank, whom you met on the first day of freshman year. She is five-foot-eight and has blonde hair and blue eyes, and until the day you two met, you believed she was from Germany because Facebook said she attended Germantown Friends School. Germantown Friends School is a diverse Quaker school located on the outskirts of Philadelphia. She is German, French, Irish, Dutch, and Norwegian, and she is your first real, fully white friend.

You arrive at the very last station in San Francisco, near AT&T Park, where Aunt Teresa and Madeline pick you and Hannah up. They have just swung by from the farmer's market. Aunt Teresa is striking, resembling Sharon Stone, but friendly too. *Grace!* she sings, though she's never met you, and she takes everyone to shop while Uncle Ronald cooks his gourmet dinner at home.

Stroll to Marc by Marc Jacobs, green purse in hand, where you are delighted to find that they sell ten-dollar bracelets with heart-shaped clasps and four-dollar pens, styled like red lipsticks. Buy a pen for your sister, and one for yourself. Visit your first thrift shop, romantically named Crossroads, where everything is *not* five or six dollars, like you imagined. Try on a cognac skirt, \$13.50, because you have wanted something cognac for the last six months, but in the mirror the skirt looks much too puffy. Listen to Aunt Teresa tell her favorite storeowners that her lovely niece Madeline and her friends from Stanford have come to visit for the weekend. *They're brainiacs, these girls,* she says.

Drive to the apartments on Washington Street, where you finally meet Uncle Ronald, tall and white-haired, chopping capers in the kitchen. He is going to make salad with capers, squid ink risotto, and duck; he likes to laugh and joke but you can tell he is a serious man. When you offer to help, he thinks for a bit and says you may slice the bread and place it next to the cheese. There are two different breads, and three kinds of cheese. Sample each one, twice, when no one is watching. Dinner spans a course of two hours that night, but you are so full from bread and cheese that it hurts to finish everything Uncle Ronald has made.

During dinner, talk about movies, famous people, young people these days, and school. Talk about what everybody wants to do after graduation, except you do not know. Madeline will be a doctor, and Hannah an engineer. You know that at the moment, you are studying literature. Tell them about how you grew up in a small town not far from San Francisco, where everybody went to Chinese School on Saturdays and had engineers for parents who wanted their children to be doctors, but you guess you turned out a little bit different.

In the morning, you do not wake up to the smells of breakfast because Uncle Ronald is cooking in the real apartment, and you are staying in the furniture apartment. Climb out of bed quietly, let Hannah sleep because she woke up in hives from the squid ink risotto in the middle of the night, and remember to shut the door behind you, so Monkey and Gunner cannot escape.

In the real apartment, say *Good morning* to Aunt Teresa and Uncle Ronald, who are creaming coffee and frying frittatas, respectively. Sit down at the round glass table, where there are pink flowers and orange placemats and unlit candles, and Madeline is eating grapefruit with a grapefruit spoon. Use a grapefruit spoon for the very first time. Pick up the five jars of marmalades and preservatives, one at a time, and study the label on each one.

When breakfast is ready, Uncle Ronald and Aunt Teresa join you at the table and pass around the Sunday edition of the New York Times. He takes sports; she takes fashion; you take the crossword puzzle and Madeline joins. You have completed many Monday and Tuesday puzzles by yourself, but Sundays are much more difficult. Today's puzzle is movie-themed—perfect, in your mind, because the teacher who introduced you to crossword puzzles in the ninth grade also loved movies. He taught you about a new one every Thursday. At your graduation, he gave you a book of one hundred of the most difficult New York Times crossword puzzles, and told you to never cheat. *You can only ask real people*, he said. It's been nearly three years since you last saw him.

You study the crossword puzzle.

*Movie about...a harvester?* Grain Man.

*Movie about...a bee during a downpour?* Stingin' in the Rain.

*Warren "blank," baseball's winningest lefty?*

Neither you nor Madeline knows any baseball players, dead or alive. Uncle Ronald has gotten up and is making more coffee in the kitchen.

*Uncle Ronald?* You say, and as those words leave your mouth, you realize it is the first time you have called anyone *Uncle* in your entire life. You have three real uncles, in another country, but it has been four years since you last saw them, two of them do not like to talk, and you may only address them in Chinese. You would have had a fourth uncle, but he died when he was fifteen.

You ask Uncle Ronald about the left-handed baseball player, and he answers, *Warren Spahn*.

*Uncle.* You hear the name over and over in your mind.

You finish your first Sunday puzzle three hours and six slices of buttered toast later, and decide to keep the piece of tattered paper to tack on your wall at home. You thank Uncle Ronald for helping you with the baseball question.

He will call you *the* brainiac. You will call him Uncle Ronald. He won't know that you've never called anyone else *Uncle* before.

Aunt Teresa, strawberry blonde and beautiful, asks if you want more toast.

# GARIMA SHARMA

In the summer of 2013, I received a Human Rights Fellowship through the Program on Human Rights and McCoy Center for Ethics in Society to travel to Forbesganj, Bihar, which is a hotspot for human trafficking at the Indo-Nepalese border. Here, I worked with NGO Apne Aap Women Worldwide to conduct leadership & negotiation workshops for girls at risk of trafficking. I returned the following summer to conduct research for an honors thesis on the factors shaping parent aspirations for daughters. Below is a compilation of my reflections on the experience of working with the girls—they are drawn from journal entries and notes written during my time in Forbesganj and soon after.

## **The protest**

In my fourth week in Bihar, I walked into a dismal classroom. Forty pensive-looking girls surrounded me: “Didi (older sister), boys catcall at us incessantly as we walk on the street!” exclaimed Khushboo. The girls described to me, and each other, in great detail the experiences of having strange men sing, whistle, or pass lewd comments—such as “*kya mast maal hai*” (what great “goods”), or “*utha kar leja ise*” (let us abduct her)—as the girls passed them by. The general consensus in the room was that the girls were infuriated by the common occurrence of street harassment, and tired of having their freedom of movement curtailed by their parents for fear of such harassment, or rape.

Towards the end of the session I asked the girls: “*Yeh jo chhedkhaani hoti hai, ise rokne ke liye hum kya kar sakte hain?*” (What do you think we can do to mitigate street harassment?)

Earlier on, I had shown the girls pictures and videos of the massive protests against rape that took over Delhi in 2012. Inspired, Gudiya replied: “*Didi, hum andolan karenge!*” (Older sister, we shall protest!)”

And thus began our preparation for a rally to be held on Tuesday—the traditional “Temple Day”, which uncouth youths capitalize on by gathering near the *Kaali* (Goddess) temple for the purpose of harassing girls. The girls rallied together in our 10x10 sq ft classroom, animatedly discussing slogan ideas for Forbesganj’s first protest. Their parents were unconvinced. A mother called me late that night, refusing to allow her daughter to participate on account of security concerns. As others followed suit, I quickly realized that in order to successfully organize, we needed to communicate clear goals and allay concerns about retaliation among parents.

The girls and I brainstormed: we conceptualized the rally as a vehicle to simultaneously vent the girls’ frustration with the current state

of affairs, raise media and police response to harassment, and encourage families to place the onus of prevention on boys and men who engage in harassment, as opposed to the girls who are subject to the same.

I, along with the center's supervisor, visited the girls' houses to invite their parents to the rally and allay concerns about safety. "We have permission from the District Superintendent of Police," I said. "He has agreed to increase patrolling in harassment-prone areas! Your daughters will be safer; your community will be safer, and you can be less burdened with worry about the girls' wellbeing." This, along with the fact that local media coverage would lend widespread recognition to the march, proved an effective proposition. Upon being reassured of the girls' safety, parents were enthusiastic in their approval of the march, and convinced of the importance of conducting such an activity.

On the day of the rally itself, close to 80 girls and staff members began their journey from the Basti Vikas Kendra at Rampur, and made their way to the DSP's office. Here, the older girls handed over their deputation to the DSP; they also urged him to up the number of patrol persons on routes frequented by harassers. The DSP then assured the girls that he would take their concerns into consideration in determining the town's security plan. From here, the girls made their way to the temple at *Kali Mandir Chowk*, which has been identified as a location particularly prone to harassment.

Throughout the course of the procession, the girls were spontaneously chanting slogans, including "*mahilaon ko samman do*" (respect women), "*ladkiyon ko chhedna band karo*" (stop harassing girls), and "*seetiyaan bajaane se tum hero nahi, zero ho*" (whistling does not render you a hero, but a zero). Additionally, the protesters were periodically entreating the parents, who came out of their houses to view the march, to refrain from telling their daughters to stay at home, and instead teaching their sons to respect women. In effect, the girls' message was one that critically views the differential treatment meted out by parents (and society) to girls and boys, daughters and sons. A microphone accompanied the procession, and two of the girls took turns making the general audience aware of the march's purpose as well as leading the other girls in slogans.

At the close of the march, a tired yet merry audience of girls listened to the older ones narrating their experience with the DSP.

Although street harassment still occurs in Forbesganj, as in the rest of the country, the protest marked the first time these girls felt as if they had agency in altering the status quo. Upon returning this summer, I was delighted to discover that in the past year, they have independently organized community-wide awareness campaigns around child marriage,

domestic violence, and trafficking. Self-efficacy is the first step in social change, and the experience of organizing this protest march alongside girls in Forbesganj left me humbled in the realization that I had been able to play some infinitesimal part in facilitating the girls' self-advocacy, which is perhaps the most important characteristic of empowerment as I view it.

### **Julie's wedding**

Two days before I was to leave Forbesganj, we found out that one of the girls from my *Kishori Mandal* classes was scheduled to be wed on the day of my departure. She is 14 years old and was a student in the 9th grade at the time of her wedding.

Since others at the organization were scheduled to drop off a group of girls at the hostel that had been arranged for them, I visited Julie Khatun along with Sanju Di (the center in-charge) and Fatima di (an incredible woman from the community who works with Apne Aap.) The older girls from the Kishori Mandal had already attempted to convince Julie that she ought to wait until the completion of her studies, but with only two days left until the wedding, even they were helpless.

As soon as we walked into her house, we saw Julie sitting draped in yellow *haldi*, and with henna on her hands—she had just finished partaking in the ceremonies that immediately precede an Indian wedding. The first thing she said to me was: “*Didi main usse pyaar karti hoon. Main apni marzi se shaadi kar rahi hoon.*” (I love him and am happy to be getting married of my own accord.)

Julie's mother, who was also at home, said to me: “You know how difficult it is for poor persons like us to muster a high dowry for our daughter's wedding. The groom is a close relation; he is a good boy and will treat her well. He is not asking us to stretch beyond our means to satisfy his greed.”

What do you say to a girl of 16 who tells you that she is marrying for love, and is happy with her decision?

What do you say to her mother, who is convinced that she is doing what is best for her daughter, and for her family?

The glorification of marriage as the ultimate sanction of a woman's social status is extremely common, if ineffable, in the community in Forbesganj in particular, and in India (the world?) in general. Nazmeen, another 15-year-old girl who is studying in the 11th grade, but is mature well beyond her years, described what she believed as being the root of the desire for marriage among younger girls: “*Didi*, they are brought up to believe that a marriage is the best end that they can aspire to; they don't see many women going on to attain tertiary education or be involved in

employment.”

Additionally, says Gargi “when they grow up in such close quarters with others engaged in the sex trade or inflicted with domestic violence; when sexual exploitation is something they’ve encountered in the second-hand from when they were toddlers, then they begin viewing a loving marriage as perhaps the best way to escape an otherwise undesirable fate.”

And so I spent the next hour asking Julie, and her mother, about their plan. “How many husbands out of 10 in your neighborhood beat up their wives?” I asked. “Between 5-7” replied Julie and her mother.

“I pray that Julie’s marriage is a successful and happy one,” I said, “but what about the off-chance that it ends up being like about 60% of marriages in your neighborhood?” “Surely the parents of these women, and the women, did not bargain for a life of violence? Surely they did not enter into a marriage with the initial belief that it would eventually result in abuse?” “If you don’t complete your education up until at least the 10th standard, then you will be completely dependent on your husband financially. What is your plan, then, to negotiate your way through an abusive relationship?”

Julie didn’t answer except to say that she was convinced that her to-be-husband was too kind to ever beat her. But Fatima Di appealed to her mother’s rationale—they are both victims of domestic violence. She entreated Julie’s mother to consider the prudence in allowing Julie to finish her education up until the 10th grade; this would allow her to be employed in some industry or another if the need for self-sustenance ever arose.

We left Julie’s house that day with the assurance that her mother would negotiate with the groom’s family members to ensure that Julie return to her house after the wedding for a year (in order to complete her studies), before going on to live with her husband in Mumbai.

Yesterday marked the 20th day after Julie’s wedding. I spoke on the phone with Sanju di and Sajjadi (Julie’s sister), who tell me that she is to return home sometime next week. I do not know whether the assurance is an empty one. Even as I play my conversation with Julie over in my head, I wonder if there is more that we could have done in her case. I know there is not; informing the police would have alienated the entire community, with which we have worked so hard to build trust. But what if we had known of her impending wedding a bit earlier than 2 days before it was to occur? Would timing have changed things?

I do not know. But I do know that subsequent conversations with the girls still in the *Kishori Mandals* and their families are the first step towards forestalling other potential early weddings. I had the first of these



before I left Forbesganj (on the same day as I met Julie), and the staff is making a concerted effort to reach every parent on an individual basis (of which I was informed on the phone call yesterday.)

I truly hope that with the right role models, the right conversations, and the right examples, we can someday deconstruct the idea that marriage is a means for escape, and an end that must be aspired to as early in a girl's life as possible. But I know that we are currently far from this intended goal and that there is much to be done in the women's movement in India. I hope to do some of that work when I'm older, and I'm grateful that the HR Fellowship allowed me to engage in it in some infinitesimal part this summer.

### **Solidarity**

*“What I love most about them is the ease with which they embrace each other's company; there is no conscious appraisal of a person's background, her parent's association with prostitution or how well off (or not) her family may be.”*

I penned down this thought in my journal on the 8th day of my 2-month-long stay in Forbesganj, and its verity with respect to the girls at the Basti Vikas Kendra continues to astound and inspire me even after I have said my goodbyes to them and to Forbesganj. Among the most significant revelations from my time with Apne Aap has indeed been that uncalculated acceptance of a person's context or circumstance sans sympathy is the first step towards a cognizance of and respect for their human rights.

“What around you would you like to change?” I asked the girls one afternoon. “Prostitution of my friends” came one reply. “Men getting drunk and beating their wives”; “People gambling away their wives'/mothers' hard-earned money”; “Forcing a daughter into marriage before she has attained 18 years of age”; “Refusing to allow a girl to study.”

Then came the disclosures: “*Didi*, I wish my father weren't as violent.” “I wish I was allowed to stay out as long as my brother (is). Why should he get to spend so much more time with his friends?” “My parents are always chiding me for being friends with boys.” “My brother is perpetually asking me to iron his clothes/perform chores for him!” “My parents want me to be married, and I'm barely 14. They can't afford a high dowry, you see.” “I wish I were still in school.”

And through the afternoon of admissions, empathy and anger (yes, anger) at the general state of affairs, not once did the girls offer each other pity. Instead, their compassion was reflected in the act of proposing solutions to each other's predicaments—“*Perhaps we could all talk to your parents about the merits of a good education?*” and even: “*You should ne-*

*gotiate chores with your brother in return for keeping his girlfriend a secret.*” In refusing to ever become the piti-er or the pitied, and in partaking as equal stakeholders in each other’s everyday troubles, the girls preserve their sisterhood and the dignity of all its members.

My time in Forbesganj was rife with revelations, unforgettable experiences, and undeserved love (from community members, the girls and staff members alike), and while countless responses would make worthy contenders for how I decide to describe my time working with Apne Aap in Bihar, it is that afternoon of collective venting (and subsequent brainstorming) I must highlight; for, even at the risk of confirming every cliché about a summer intern, I cannot help but concede that it taught me the most important lesson of my life—reserve judgment, especially if it leads you to pity, because you can never help by doing someone the indignity of wanting to “save” them, or thinking that you can. (That being said, collaboration and fraternity go a long way.)

Now I know what Ms. Watson meant:

*“If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time; but if you are here because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.”*

# CATHERINE ZAW

## Hand-Me-Down

The liver.

Called so because no one *lives* without one. The liver handles hundreds of essential bodily functions. Weaken it and watch a completely healthy young person decline into jaundice, agony and pain while the organ scars and fails, a slow devastating process.

Hepatitis B.

One hundred times more infectious than the AIDS virus. Ten times more prevalent. Causes seventy percent of liver cancer cases. Asymptomatic, and often chronic. The silent killer. A quarter of victims live with and die from the virus without ever even knowing what hit them.

~

“I have hepatitis B.”

My mother looks at me in disapproval.

I know that look. Across the Pacific Ocean, that look gets thousands of people thrown out of school, handed a divorce, exiled from a family — all because this disease runs through their veins.

“Well, you haven’t been the most prudent daughter either,” she simply explains.

To the untrained ear, Cantonese sounds like chopping vegetables, but even with my understanding, her remark passes sharp through my ears like a metal spoon scratching at the bottom of an empty pot and sits sour on my heart like acid reflux.

I ignore her comment. “I’ve had it since birth. It’s passed down from mother to child.” Then I add, “You should get yourself checked up too.”

“I’ve heard about hepatitis B,” she chides while tasting the broth that she had been attending to. “That disease is only passed down from father to son.”

My voice roughens. “That’s not true. Hepatitis—”

“Here, taste. Do you think the soup needs more salt?”

I purse my lips together when she pushes the wooden ladle to my lips. The flavor of home, family and childhood curls over my tongue.

I can’t be angry at her.

That would render me ungrateful for everything that she has and will give me.

“Needs more salt,” I mumble under my breath.

She clicks her tongue. “You see?” she retorts, her ladle whipping in the air to emphasize her point. “There is enough salt in the soup. You use too much salt.”

Her attention is back on the soup. “That’s why you’re sick.”

~

I take lingering silence as a cue that the doctor has allowed me to consult with my mother. So I turn to her.

“Why didn’t you tell me you had hepatitis B?”

“Because I don’t,” she returns, as matter-of-factly as ever.

I hide my furrowed eyebrows and upturned lips, unveiling a hopeful smile instead. I turn to my doctor—his freckled face and ginger hair hasn’t understood a single syllable of the sharp conversation that occurred—and nod.

“Great,” he says, swiveling in his desk chair and typing furiously. “I’ll keep you posted about your status.”

“How long is the wait?”

His fingers stop over the keyboard for a moment. He knew the question was coming, and he knew that no one liked the answer.

“Depends,” he explains briefly. “Some areas have a shorter or longer wait than others because of the availability of livers. And then the organ donor network also has to take MELD scores into consideration. Those with a higher score are prioritized.”

“So...what’s considered a high score?”

He averts his eyes and recites, “The average MELD score in California is 37.”

My score is significantly lower than the mean.

The last time I had to worry about a curve was when I was an undergraduate in an introductory biology class, back when I was overly concerned about grades, Facebook and relationships—all of which becomes more trivial by the day.

Back when I wore a rain jacket that my mother insisted I use through the wet West Coast winters.

I had believed this agonizingly orange and painfully unstylish rain jacket was the worst hand-me-down I ever received from my mother.

But a virus might just compete for first place.

FICTION

# LEENA YIN

## Lost in Translation

HAVOC IN HEAVEN: A TRANSLATION OF THE CHINESE FOLK-  
TALE

### I. STONE MONKEY

It begins like this: there is a boulder on a mountain, older than time. The boulder cracks in half and from it emerges a monkey.

Filled with joy at the gift of life, the Stone Monkey climbs to the top of the mountain and screeches his happiness. To the east he sees the sloping hills and dense forests; to the west, a glittering expanse of ocean. How it feels to see the world for the first time: a brave new world, that has such people in it!

*[leave out the Shakespeare—too sardonic]*

A translation of the landscape eludes you.

You cannot imagine the world, the character, without smelling starched sheets and chrysanthemum and your father's cigarette smoke. He speaks of the monkey leaping, jagged cliffs, mists that wrap around you like silk. You slip back in time with every word, slowly, slowly. One year. Ten. Thirty.

Five thousand.

The Stone Monkey soon meets other monkeys.

It will be years before he first hears the word “*yao guai*,” hurled at him from within the stone walls of civilized country. The other monkeys have no word for him. But they smell the stone in his strength and the singe of lightning in his fur; they know he is something more than they, and hold him at tail's length.

Translations for *yao guai* (n.):

1. demon
2. monster
3. spirit
4. ogre
5. one who does not belong

The ten years of Chinese classes that made her hate Sundays, the harsh

accents that burned her ears, the smells of rice vinegar and peppercorn that chased her from the house. The laughter at her sixth birthday party when he brought out longevity noodles instead of cake: she never threw a birthday party again.

She tries to erase his words with those of Wikipedia and Wu Cheng'en of the Ming Dynasty and Anthony C. Yu, Professor Emeritus at the University of Chicago; to cloak her childhood with a B.A. in English and an M.F.A. in Creative Writing and the distance of thirty years.

But his voice is there. Unrelenting. Unforgiving.

The monkeys have a contest: whoever jumps through the waterfall will be our ruler. The water is frigid and batters him, tearing at his flesh like it wears away rock. 'Now I am your king,' he says when he returns, frozen and eroded.

The other monkeys look at each other. 'Yes,' they say, but they do not seem to see him, only his stone hands and the cracks spreading through them like spider webs.

Perhaps you remember when he used to say, 'five thousand years of history.' Children of the dragon. The Yellow River in our veins. On Thanksgivings you visit your husband's family and follow their traditions: the Macy's Parade, the grace, the perfect roast turkey—

Five thousand years of history.

Perhaps there can still be longing for something you can only claim half of.

## II. KEEPER OF HORSES

He travels to the bottom of the sea to find a weapon worthy of the Monkey King and steals one from the Dragon King of the Eastern Seas. The Dragon King, grievously injured, pleads with the Jade Emperor of Heaven for retribution, and the Emperor sends his messenger god to bring the monkey to Heaven: the devil makes work for idle hands.

*[Biblical reference too out of place?]*

You write in your office on the second floor of the house, sleek silver laptop, polished wood desk, mug of coffee three days old. Empty spaces that slowly fill with post-its: *watch out for phrasing. Ask for M.K.'s dictionary. Warning!: symbolism confusing, jumbled, overlapping, be careful.*

*Who is the monkey?*

*Who is the god?*

The messenger is friendly and the Monkey King, though struggling to remain calm, is excited. A position in Heaven's court! Never would a monkey dream of such a thing. But the Monkey King is not like the other monkeys.

'What would my title be?' asks the Monkey King. He wonders if he will have a plaque, or robes of red and gold.

'You will be the Keeper of Horses,' replies the messenger god, 'in charge of all the steeds in the heavens. It is a fine position, worthy of one such as you, O mighty king.'

The Keeper of Horses agrees. He bids farewell to his monkeys, and follows the messenger god to Heaven.

The Chinese idea of Heaven is not the Christian one. *Tian* is not the land where the virtuous go after death, but the palace in the clouds where the gods only reside. The Jade Emperor is all-knowing but not all-loving; even he is not exempt from squabbles, feasting, disgust for creatures lower than he.

The writer wants to believe they see past the black hair and yellow skin, to believe that they mean no harm, but she gets used to smiling as their laughter curdles in her stomach and sours in her mouth. The Keeper of Horses has one advantage: ignorance. The writer hates him. She wants him to taste the sourness, to feel the heat rising, to suffer like she does.

While he spoke with her teachers about her grades, she sat beside him loathing the way he missed the *th*'s and said *rr* instead of *ll*, interrupting the pauses he spent painstakingly translating words from Mandarin to English and back again. Once he came early to pick her up from school and showed up at her classroom. Her classmates' heads swung from this man with the choppy haircut and oversized sweater to her, to him, to her, and she sank in her seat, wishing she could melt into the floor.

Translations for *cheng jiu* (n.):

1. doctor
2. lawyer
3. engineer
4. success (*Chinese, Mandarin dialect*)

The job is boring and the Keeper of Horses does not have much patience, but he tries. He enjoys watching the horses graze: they are cloud horses and leave wisps wherever they walk, and they like him. One day he passes by another god, who walks with the swagger of the insecure.

'Hello there!' the Keeper of Horses calls.

'How dare you call out to me like we are friends,' says the other god.



‘Do you know who I am?’

‘No,’ says the Keeper of Horses. ‘And why should I? We are all gods, are we not?’

‘Pah!’ the other god says. ‘Some gods are better than others. What are you?’

‘I am the Keeper of Horses,’ he says.

The other god laughs. ‘Why, then you’re nothing but a fool! Don’t you realize that’s the lowest of the low? It’s the job they give you if they don’t want you for anything else. You’re nothing but a stable servant! Ha! Keeper of Horses indeed!’

He laughs again and swaggers away, still laughing. The Monkey King stares after him, something that he has never felt before curdling in his stomach. In the future he will recognize it as humiliation.

She went to college in Vermont, where there was no Chinatown and three thousand miles lay between them.

He sets the horses free.

### III. GREAT SAGE, EQUAL OF HEAVEN

Your husband doesn’t understand your obsession. When your son is in bed you read him books with animals and knights, fairies and toys, clear beginnings and happy endings; your head swims with low, rolling words in a tongue he will never speak.

The writing runs from the writer. The rapids of the river carry you away. With enough distance we can write anything, but sometimes the current still drags us under, swallowing us whole, leaving us gasping for air.

He has been home on his mountain for a week when the messenger god comes flying down, his wrinkled old face alight with sweat: ‘Why, Great Sage, why are you still on your mountain?’

‘What did you just call me?’

‘Great Sage,’ the messenger god repeats, ‘Great Sage, Equal of Heaven. Good title, isn’t it? You’ve been promoted to guarding the peaches of the Mother Empress’s garden. For the Emperor’s sake, why are you just sitting there?’

‘But I set the horses free. Why am I being promoted?’

‘Your otherwise stellar performance has impressed the Emperor and Empress,’ the messenger god says. ‘Come! There’s no time to waste!’

The Great Sage Equal of Heaven allows himself to be pulled onto a

cloud, and back to the palace.

The Empress's peach garden is pure temptation. Ripe peaches hang on every branch, pink and white and fat, a feast worthy of any monkey in the world—and perhaps in Heaven, too. The Great Sage licks his lips but sits on his haunches and manages to wait a whole two hours before giving in. The taste is exquisite! So sweet and tangy and rich that he eats another, and another, and another...

He eats until he hears the sound of giggles. Though he is not a monkey, he has their instincts, so he climbs to the highest branches of the tallest tree with peach stuffed in his cheeks.

'Are you excited for the banquet, my sister?'

'Oh, yes. All the cooks need are the peaches, and we can feast tonight.'

The voices stop just beneath his tree. He is careful not to move, though excitement stirs in him: a banquet! Tonight! His mouth waters at the thought of more heavenly food—peaches.

'Are these precious trees guarded?'

'It appears not, though I have heard a rumor that there is a monkey... a foolish one, brought from Earth. Perhaps he is asleep somewhere.'

'But he is a god?'

'Good heavens, no! If he were one, he would have been invited to the Mother Empress's feast—and he certainly is not.'

She remembers the way he stared at her when she told him no, she wasn't going to grad school for computer engineering, that she'd gotten into an MFA program, a really good one, it'll be wonderful, Baba, you'll see. She remembers hating the blankness on his face, the lack of comprehension that made no sense because she speaks perfectly good Mandarin and it was he, in the first place, who insisted that she learn. She remembers repeating, explaining, showing him the letter, hoping—maybe—for a bit of understanding. A bit of acceptance. Perhaps—stupidly—a bit of pride.

*Zhe shi wo xiang yao de*, she said. *This is what I want.*

He becomes a whirlwind, howling and raging and ripping peach-laden limbs from trees like arms from men, stuffing fruit into his mouth, juice dribbling from his chin, feasting on succulent flesh until he bleeds the garden dry. Then he leaps with two bounds into the Grand Hall—the door splinters in his wake—and, seeing the tables laden with tender meat and fragrant dishes, ravages the wine, pours it down his throat until the burning in his stomach matches the burning in his veins.

Drunk and still furious, he sways through the pearwood corridors and nearly falls through a cloud. Finally he reaches the pagoda of Lao

Tzu and ransacks it, clawing great gashes in the red beams, kicking over stools, toppling the stove so that steam pours over the ground and greedily eats its way toward the tile roof.

Out fall two round pills blacker than cormorant feathers: the elixir of longevity, Lao Tzu's jealously guarded cure for mortality. The Great Sage holds them up against the ceiling, where they glitter like the messenger's god teeth when he smiled, telling the King of Monkeys he was an equal of the sages in heaven.

He swallows them whole.

Their anger didn't build the way the Monkey's did, a storm ignited like a flash of lightning. Theirs was a fire.

*Wo bu hui chu qian*, he said coldly. I won't pay for it.

*I don't need your money*, she said back, through gritted teeth. *This is my choice. This is what I want.*

*I'll kick you out!*

*Fine!*

Laughter. *How do you expect to make a living?*

That was when she lost it. Lost him. I'll write. I'll do something! I'll do anything! *You aren't thinking. How can you throw your future away like this?* It's my future, I'll do what I want with it. *You've gone crazy!* You make me crazy! *I don't know what you're saying!* You never listen to me! I never wanted this! *I never wanted you!* Until she was screaming in English and he in Chinese, and the house shook and smoked and burned from their words, and still neither of them understood the other.

He leaves the Jade Palace on a cloud. Behind him the gongs of war begin to sound and the heavenly armies amass by the thousands.

#### IV. YAO GUAI

Why writing? She had no answer. Regardless, they never spoke again, so it didn't matter, did it? She paid her own way through the rest of college and graduate school and married an American man, and never told him that somewhere inside her there must have been a craving for words that would never be satisfied.

When your world is in two languages, who can understand the language of your thoughts?

They come for him, of course. Having escaped death he becomes its deliverer, waves of soldiers falling at his feet like so many blades of grass. One by one the gods of war challenge him and one by one he sends them

running back to the palace, their armor torn, their limbs askew. When he is finally captured they drag him kicking and screaming through the Heavenly Gates.

‘For the crimes of rebellion, treason, first-degree murder, theft...’ the magistrate drones. ‘The *yao guai* is to be executed.’

The blade drops. He laughs, and laughs, and laughs.

There is a deadline. You type late into the night, your mantra: plot, theme, characterization, are the words right, is the diction solid, is the syntax off. The post-its layer and fall off the desk and scatter across the floor, spilling over like splashes of water.

You departed from the original long ago. Now there are only stories that you remember, and a character you despise.

They beat him until blood drips from his mouth and ears and nose, cut him until his body is a composite of gaping openings, flay him until his fur is black and his skin peels to reveal pink flesh underneath, and still the ringing of his laughter terrifies them. Finally, Lao Tzu steps forward. ‘This *yao guai* owes me for the pills of longevity he stole,’ the old god says. ‘I will lock him in my crucible and distill him into an elixir with the most sacred and severe of fires.’

So he says and the soldiers bear the Great Sage, laughing, into the flames of the cauldron.

Perhaps there is regret.

After 49 days of distilment, Lao Tzu’s servants open the cauldron. The creature that leaps out is neither monkey nor god nor elixir, but something in between.

Lao Tzu returns to find his crucible destroyed, his servants’ throats slit, the ground smeared with their blood: I may be a monster, but I am a monster you made.

The confusion of being melted away and abandoned before you can be shaped into something new. Who am I? What am I? You are left blind, deaf, mute. You are no one and none of them and still you are lost.

At least the monkey king has his revenge.

Maybe you remember it wrong, that last fight. Maybe what you really said was, *I don’t know who I am*. Maybe what he really said was, *I’m scared of losing you*.

The writer called home once, to tell them the wedding was in June. In her mother's lilting tones she could hear worry; in the gentle accent she could hear the slurs she used to hate; in the pauses she could hear her father's words, slow, plodding, meticulous. Control A delete at the end of each day's typing. Kiss your son goodnight. The next day you start over again and still the same words, the same anger, the same low voice in your head. Nothing changes. You loathe it, loathe yourself, loathe...

The story doesn't end there, but you can't seem to get past this point, but you can't just stop, but you can't let him win—

You can only leave.

You need a break, says your editor. Take some time off. Go to Europe. Go up to Montauk. Spend time with the family. What else are you going to do?

You nod. You have no words.

You don't go to Europe or to Montauk. Instead, you stay at home. It's the same as before, really, only now you avoid the office—puttering around the kitchen trying to cook dinner, lounging in the living room with the TV on, helping your son build Lego structures in the playroom and watching them get torn down. You do a lot of things, and nothing at all. Dinner is burnt. Your husband is irritated. Get out of the house, get a hobby, get another job. What else can you do?

I want a story, your son says at the end of the day. Sometimes, when you look at him, you remember that his hair was blonde when he was born—you were shocked, and though it is slowly growing darker, you still can't quite shake that initial surprise.

You pluck the first book off the shelf and hold it up: *Tales of Peter Rabbit*. He shakes his head. No, not that one.

You run through them all: Winnie, the three little pigs, King Arthur, James and his stupid peach, Aesop, Dorothy, every Curious George book you own.

We've read all of them, he says, I want a different one.

You try to tell him that you'll have to make do, that you can go to the bookstore tomorrow.

But I want more, he says. His eyes are the same as yours, and very serious. It stops your breath.

What else can you do?

You start hushed, as if confessing something. You've read and reread them so many times that the words come smoothly, though you stumble

because you've never said them aloud before, and they feel strange, different from how you'd imagined. Foreign. Are they yours? Are they his? Or someone else's entirely?

Does it matter?

It begins like this:

There is a boulder on a mountain, older than time. The boulder cracks in half and from it emerges—

# PHOTOGRAPHY

# JAMES HUYNH

## A New Generation of Black Power, Yellow Peril



*On December 5<sup>th</sup> 2014, Asian American students gathered to stand in solidarity with the BlackLivesMatter Movement. As a diverse group of Asian and Pacific Islanders, we stand together to change the narrative that we are silent, apolitical, and obedient. We refuse to be White Supremacy's Model Minority. We actively condemn the militarization of police force and the dehumanization of Black lives. No justice, no peace.*



# KINJAL VASAVADA

## National Highway 8 – A Road Trip to Kathiawad, the Heartland of Gujarat, India

As a kid, I had only ever heard about Kathiawad, Gujarat's heartland in my mom's stories. During our road trip on NH 8, her stories came alive – the times she would race up the steps of Ambaji with her brother, the times her uncle started his solo Girnar trek before sunup and would be back before lunch, the time a lion visited the Ambaji temple, the times



they stayed at my great-grandmother's summer house near Ambaji, the times they ate prasad from the giant platter at Ambaji temple.

The times that they managed for cram a family of 15 (stacked in 3 layers, the skinny kids almost falling out) and a giant tiffin full of food, into a single rickshaw that could barely trudge up the hill to the entrance of Girnar. The summers she spent at my great-grandmother's ancestral home, full of ornate stained glass windows and antiquities from around, the diwali holidays her family spent going door to door visiting relatives in junagadh, the times she and 4 siblings spent in the backseat of my grandfather's open jeep as they drove through the streets. My photographs attempt to capture a slice of her stories and showcase my experience of natural and cultural heritage in the interior of western India.



## Photo Descriptions

### 1. Laxmi Vilas Palace

Laxmi Vilas Palace, built in 1890, is the largest private residence in the world, nearly 4 times the size of Buckingham palace. Located in Baroda, India, it was the grand residence of the Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III of Baroda. Part of it remains inhabited by the descendants of the Gaekwad family, and it is still open to visitors today.

### 2. Skyline

Parakeets swing on the power lines as the boiling red sun rises in Ahmedabad, the largest city in Gujarat, India, the home state of India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi. One of India's fastest growing cities, Ahmedabad is an important economic and industrial hub of India, with a booming stock exchange, commerce and pharma sectors, and cotton/textile production.

### 3. Adalaj Vav

It's golden hour at Adalaj Vav, a 15th century stepwell located in Adalaj village outside of Ahmedabad city. One of 120 such wells in the semi-arid regions of Gujarat, Adalaj Vav was built by the local king for his lady love.

#### **4. Mount Girnar**

Located in the fairytale countryside of Gujarat, Mount Girnar is older than the Himalayas. A hike consisting of 3 mountains, Girnar is a tough climb for many. Each peak is marked by shrines built in the 12th century, and tiny stalls have sprouted along the trail, with vendors selling food and drink. The view from the final peak, Dattatreya, is the most magnificent, made sweeter by the victorious feeling of overcoming the challenge of 8,000 steps.

#### **5. Mahabat Makhbara**

Located at the outskirts of old Junagadh city, Mahabat Maqbara is the mausoleum of Nawab Mahabat Khan II (1851-82) of Junagadh. One of the many Islamic heritage sites in Junagadh, Mahabat Maqbara's doors have been locked for years. Its doorstep now serves as a cricket pitch, and its consecrated tombs and ornate ceilings are clouded with cobwebs and debris. Two visitors stare in awe at the staggering beauty of this ancient, tenacious structure and the birds that flock to perch on its domes.

#### **6. Gir Asiatic Lion**

Gir National Forest, or Sasan-Gir, is the home to the Asiatic Lion, known as the "Saavaj" in the local Kathiawadi dialect. Only 52 lions were left in 2005, but since then, conservation efforts have grown and numbers rose to 411 in 2014. Lionesses can be seen roaming the forest with their cubs. Gir is home to flora like khakhra trees and fauna like lions, crocodiles, hyenas, leopards, golden spotted deer, and cormorants.

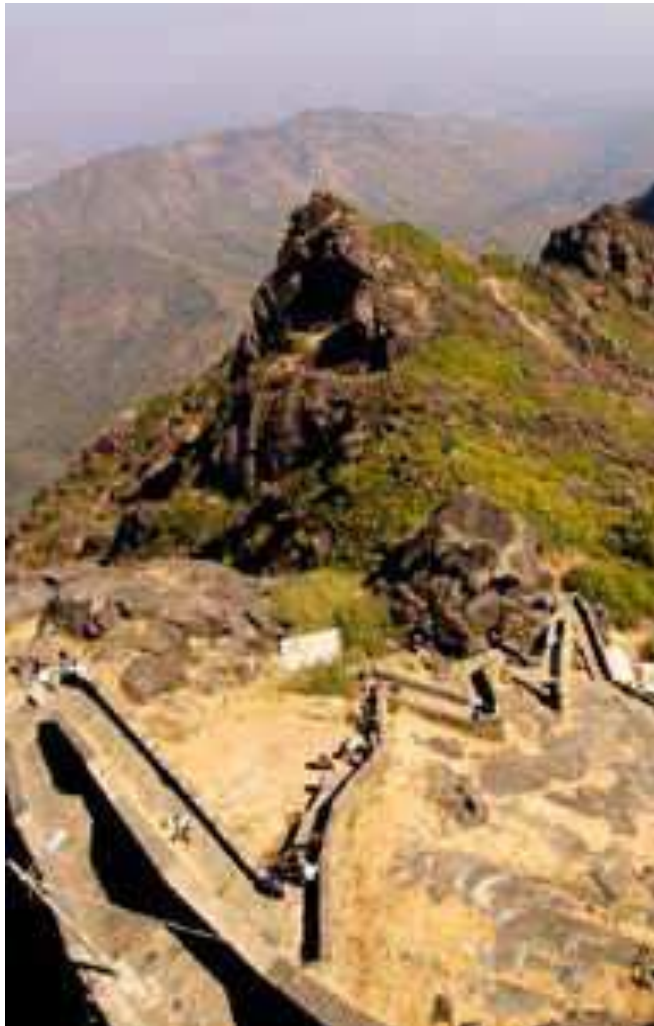
## 1. Laxmi Vilas Palace



## 2. Skyline



### 3. Adalaj Vav



### 4. Mount Girnar

**5. Mahabat Makhbara**



**6. Gir Asiatic Lion**



# POETRY

# JOSHUA DE LEON

## this is how i'll remember you

this is how i'll remember you  
somewhere between elm street and main  
when i tagged along  
by the belt loops on your rugged  
work pants and scattered  
crumbs across the sun-  
bleached sidewalk  
with every gap-toothed  
bite of warm  
*pan de sal*

this is how i'll remember you  
pointing at your  
reflection in the rear-view mirror  
declaring laugh lines the best  
part of your face  
and grinning at the throaty  
gurgle of the engine as  
it turned over with the key

you called your wrinkles  
a road map of your life and  
i imagined great  
adventures  
preserved in the  
creases as they caught  
the light when you  
tucked me into bed,  
winking the  
lamp into submission,  
leaving only the  
soft luminescence of  
glow-in-the-dark stars  
on the ceiling to guide  
me into the happy  
oblivion of an  
oblivious sleep

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this is how i'll remember you  
dancing the box-step in your  
fraying *barong tagalog*  
unnoticing or  
uninterested in  
the stares from  
blanched dress  
shirts and windsor  
knots. Because just

like you always said,  
how you look isn't  
who you are –  
and you're different *anak*,  
you'll have the best laugh  
lines, and don't you  
forget that.

so this is how i'll remember you  
with the twinkle in your  
eyes before they  
stopped glowing-in-the-light

this is how i'll remember you  
even when  
you  
don't

this is how i'll remember You

because.

Author's note:

*Pan de sal* is a type of Filipino bread, similar to a dinner roll

*Barong tagalog* is a Filipino dress shirt, typically made of light white fabric

*Anak* is a Tagalog term typically used when speaking to one's child or younger relative, or in this case, a grandchild\

# AMY CHEN

## Souvenirs from China: A Piece in Four Parts

*Inspired by winter break, 2014-2015*

*{start audio track of “Ā mí tuó fó” from a temple in China. It plays on repeat}*

*ONE: Hospital (Guangzhou)*

Outside of the cancer ward, the air smells like cigarettes.

A mouth opens wide at the end of a tongue lined with benches for teeth  
and  
men and women younger than they appear sit patiently on molars.

Grandma lies on a hospital bed mattress, grandchildren line up to sit  
and listen,  
Television playing for guests, as always.

The first question the men ask, is  
“how are you?”  
quickly followed by  
“how do I connect to the Wi-fi?”

“Number one, is health—”  
Grandma says,  
Cradling iPad in one hand and brother’s hand in the other.  
Television in the background occasionally interjects  
“Number one, is health—“  
Grandma’s hand takes mine  
the first time since young childhood  
Television interjects  
Grandma is done, hand is freed,  
Both hands on electric baby she is  
cooing and playing games and looking at old photographs.

Eyes flicker across the room, uncles and “uncle” are back,  
Looking into frames of screens and living in endless photographs.

*TWO: Home (San Francisco)*

Tonight,  
Our living room air mattress is not enough of a room for me.

Television plays Sūn wù kōng—the Monkey King—for dad.  
Television screams mind-numbing cartoon monkey laughter for me.

Dad television stop  
Dad says no  
Dad says I should watch  
Dad says

“It has a lot of Chinese culture.”

*THREE: Tea Farm (Putian)*

We are here for grandma but now she is napping so we go to a tea farm.  
Brother is into tea since taking East Asian Tea class,  
Parents are fake mad at him  
Parents say we have plenty of good tea  
Parents still find someone to take him.

The tea farmer is a good man.

He takes us up to his farm and brews tea for us,  
I am new and don't know difference.

He pulls off leaves and tells us they are too large,  
to come back in spring and we can pick leaves with him.

He shows us the old and new machines and  
tells us about improvements in tea machinery.

He invites us to dinner and then to more tea at his home.  
It is filled with counterfeit shoes up to the ceiling.

He tells us the shoemakers work for Nike during the day  
and fake Nike at night.

He offers shoes.

I wear them to be polite and  
tell him they are beautiful and he is too kind and  
I try to be kind and it is hard to say no.

*FOUR: Mountain of Three Temples (Putian)*

At the top it is beautiful,  
except for the smog line.

We parked behind a billboard  
next to a police training center  
and walked up to the unmarked trail.  
There are three temples on this path  
In one of them, a tape recorder sits next to Buddha, repeating:

*{audio track repeats three times:*

*Ā mí tuó fó*

*Ā mí tuó fó*

*Ā mí tuó fó*

*then cuts off}*

and there are no monks in sight.

Halfway up, I turn around to face another mountain  
I imagine someone across the valley is climbing the other  
Turning to face me.  
We cannot see, but  
We are making direct eye contact  
and will never meet.

# CLARA LUU

## Asian/American

“We are American-”  
Dreamers, opportunity-seizers,  
Rising from frontier dirt to middle-class glory.  
We own a little home  
on a tree-lined street, it’s quiet.  
The American dream seems complete.  
until I’m admitted to a mental health facility  
and my thoughts become my fault:  
We came here, so why this?  
We work hard, so why this?  
We gave you everything, so why this?  
Why you? Why this?  
I’m not a poor child of Vietnam, true-  
Depression isn’t something I decided to do.

“We are not American,” Mom says,  
when she finds the birth control.  
“We don’t do this.”  
So how am I supposed  
to tell you about the lightless nights he held me  
as I cried, and talked me to sleep? The smashing car  
and the glass and blood, the exacto-knives slicing my photo  
up into stripes, flung out the window into the dry air like confetti?  
The smoking gun to my head? Or the lines engraved on pills crammed  
deeply  
into my quiet, lovely mouth?

Or how I wish I had drowned, in the generous ocean of your womb  
so that I would not now be buried in myself and my transgressions.  
Moldering, folding softly  
in the brightness of the benevolent Californian sun.

# MARK FLORES

## Americana

I am supposed to miss China,  
call it the motherland, or something.

Maybe the Philippines too, because  
at least one relative still lives, *Nunu*.  
I don't know if it's a name or a title  
the spelling, or her.

But there is a reason we left,  
there is a reason we stay.

I grew up on *e-mein*, *char siu bao*  
with a silent r because my Cantonese  
grandmother, Margaret, struggles with r's  
like my name and hers,

and manapua, spam musubi (yes,  
that's japanese), french fries  
burgers, soaked in oil  
ketchup, pizza

I was born here,  
I grew up here,  
I belong here,

like other American things.

## Kleptomaniac

Empty *lisee*, red, glistening

a stuffed dragon, made in *China*

*Fu*, an ideogram from wikipedia

my skin. My almost-tan flesh  
wrapping around these eyes, settling  
cheekbones and a receding nose,  
blood of a yellow emperor

ears

counting syllables like miles away  
unformed by half-mute tongue

the books know. Their characters  
dancing around in ritual, I press  
my fingers into them, hoping  
they too bleed ink, inscribing into me  
like vellum

if I look too hard, they fall apart  
stitching back my pieces

only the stomach remains:  
juices, the scents  
*bao, mein*, the names I still hold

resisting their reconquering.

## A Historical Aside

When my great-grandfather died,  
I remember missing school for his  
funeral, his *bai sun*, and how we burned  
paper money away into smoke.

I never understood him.  
My mother would translate his words  
through his dentures, old  
like him, his century-aged body,  
*Tai Gung* would sit in his chair and talk,  
gesture, breathe.

Only when I was older did I ever learn  
he was speaking English the whole time,

did I learn about his voyage across the sea,  
his Exclusion-act student visa.  
His existence touching three centuries,  
he was 103, 104, 105, 106  
his birth certificate was wrong anyway  
and he used to celebrate his birthday  
at New Year's.

His movements were slow  
and deliberate, stiff.  
He dragged his feet all the way  
from China, but only  
                                  now,

I have  
begun  
picking up  
his pace.



# ANNIE PHAN

## A Still Photograph of Enduring

The man who lives on Jack Kerouac Street  
speaks Spanish fifty feet  
from Chinatown, Chinatown—  
the fantasy of fetishizing '49ers, hodgepodge  
Hong Kong imitation  
meant as a safe for their opium,  
justification for turning men into women  
and women into whores,

but today it remains  
authentic, and caricature  
Just watch, how the scents of ginger  
and dried shrimp, sweet milk buns  
and duck skin roasted to crisp,  
watch how they billow  
under the red lanterns and golden tassels  
how the fireworks spark  
and light the sky with calligraphy.  
This place is real,  
didn't you know?

But there is a man who lives on Jack Kerouac Street,  
looking through his glasses out to the Mission  
when we've all lost our way,  
no mission statement to guide us  
though we lapse into apathetic remission,  
          minds foggy, fucked up and drugged up  
no better than when we received our first admission  
          to this goddamn institution  
faces blank like the murals  
we forgot to commission,

and on the other side of this building  
is the home of Howl,  
not the shrieking or the screeching  
not the wailing or the weeping  
but the Howl, the Howl,

and now here reside  
'angelheaded hipsters,' Satan in their sleeves,  
'best minds of my generation  
    destroyed by madness,'  
books upon books on the rocking  
of the poet's chair, lyrics  
dripping through the eaves,  
this gentrified collective, home of the Howl  
but can they hear anything?  
Over the City Lights, the city Whites  
do they know?

That there is a man who lives on Jack Kerouac Street,  
speaks Spanish fifty feet from Chinatown,  
looking through his glasses out to the Mission  
behind bars.  
I have met him before.  
I met him in San Quentin  
in grey in blue in orange in yellow  
in a cell "unfit for dogs,"  
say the two grown men who sprawl out the open door--

open door-- what a joke.  
Open as the door into Angel Island  
three months of jade walls  
etched with years of lamentation,  
cries for home they dreamed of and the home they left behind  
in a language no one wanted to listen to.  
This is a city of immigrants  
we have thrown into cells.  
This city is a zoo  
and I doubt you know  
on which side of the bars you stand.

But the man who lives on Jack Kerouac Street  
watches all the things that billow  
under the red lanterns and golden tassels,  
city lights and bookshelves,  
dim lightbulb and the prison walls  
and weaves these voices into a song of hope.

Even mine.  
My voice, the voice that trembles  
like the stars in the face of so much darkness,  
the voice that calls to find a Southwest sky  
pressed deep blue against the desert  
when all the *valles* here seem pumped with silicon  
My voice will travel  
with this man who lives on Jack Kerouac Street  
and the rope he gives for me to hold  
until I know, until I know again, that  
Hope exists, that this place is real,  
that you are here.

# JADE VERDEFLOR

## Resilience

They try to oppress us  
Suppress us

And our real selves  
They say, Forget your true culture, leave it there on the shelves

Full of deceit, governmental corruption  
Makes me into a volcano; emotion's eruption

I wanted to break free from the complacent mold  
No longer buying into the lies I was told

The thought of my people, my country, my land  
Facing injustice, made me take a stand

Discovering these abuses, with anger I respond  
But I came to realization:

This is the Rage that I must go Beyond







2016

# ACADEMIC ESSAY



# HOLLY SLANG

## Casting Race and Yellow Face

### The Implicit Assault of the Asian Body on the American Stage

#### INTRODUCTION

Just a few months ago, on November 29th, Asian-American playwright David Henry Hwang walked peacefully to his Brooklyn home in the late evening, arms filled to the brim with groceries. He and his family had just returned from a Thanksgiving vacation and he had walked a few blocks to pick up the essentials. This was a walk Hwang had taken many times before and he had never worried about being alone in the dark in his own neighborhood - what had he to fear? But when he was just twelve doors down from his home, Hwang felt an abrupt impact near his head. Thrown off balance and still holding the groceries, Hwang managed to catch a glimpse of his assailant racing away from him. He felt the side of his neck, warm and bleeding. With what strength he had left, Hwang staggered home, calling to his family that he had been attacked. Mother and daughter came rushing out and together they walked to the hospital, where Hwang would discover the attacker severed an artery very close to his brain, one that would require a special neuroendovascular surgery. Luckily, the surgery was a success and Hwang was released from the hospital on December 2nd, expected to fully recover. Unluckily, the attacker was never discovered nor punished for the stabbing.

Given that nothing was stolen from Hwang, the police had a difficult time surmising why the attack happened, eventually chalking it up to some horrifying gang initiation. However, the reasoning became more conclusive when just two weeks later a 16-year-old Chinese girl was slashed in a similar manner on her way to school in Queens.<sup>1</sup> Considered together, these two incidents very obviously appear to be hate crimes. In his article, "The Time I Got Stabbed in the Neck," Hwang tentatively mentions, "Because I'm Asian-American, others argue it may have been a hate crime."<sup>2</sup> He seems hesitant to support this theory probably because of a subconscious political resistance to the term "hate crime." The words have become dirty lately - the Black Lives

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1 D'Auria, Carol. "Police: 16-Year-Old Girl Slashed In Face, Neck In Queens." *CBS New York*. CBS, 16 Dec. 2015. Web. 17 Feb. 2016.

2 Hwang, David Henry. "The Time I Got Stabbed in the Neck." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 07 Jan. 2016. Web. 17 Feb. 2016.

Matter campaign has stood in opposition to countless instances in which clear hate crimes are not legally charged as such. This is particularly surprising given the rather large definition supported by the FBI: a hate crime is a “criminal offense against a person or property motivated in whole or in part by an offender’s bias against a race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender, or gender identity.”<sup>1</sup> However, even if the attacks of Hwang and the girl were not classified as hate crimes, it is undeniable that there was some implicit bias in choosing the victims - Asians and Asian-Americans are often targets because of assumed language barriers and a tendency for Asians to be more reluctant in reporting crimes. In either light, the Asian community is under attack; members of the community are unsafe simply by possessing racial markers.



*Fig. 1 Photo originally appeared in France Soir, October 1985. Photographer unknown.*

But while physical violence is something that is easily recognizable and the effects undeniably identifiable, there are other ways to assault the Asian community. Misrepresentations, denied opportunities, and continued bias are all forms of violence because in each case, authentic representation is barred. Physical assault can permanently alter one person and inspire fear in many others, but attacks on the integrity of Asian and Asian-American identities through non-physical forms of violence have the capacity to affect generations of people. There are many instances in which these kinds of metaphorical attacks impact Asian identities, but a particularly striking example and one that has received considerable attention, especially from David Henry Hwang himself, is representation of Asian identities in theater. This paper will look closely at depictions of and opportunities for Asians and Asian-Americans on

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1 “Hate Crimes—Overview.” Federal Bureau of Investigations. Federal Bureau of Investigations, n.d. Web.

American stages and will come to a conclusion about how violence is continually and cyclicly exacted on Asian communities through non-physical means.

### **MADAME BUTTERFLY ADAPTATIONS AND ORIENTALISM MISS SAIGON: STEREOTYPES AS USUAL**

In 1989, a few White men came together and decided that a Vietnamese woman committing suicide made for a beautiful, artistic opportunity. Claude-Michel Schönberg and Alain Boublil, who would go on to write *Les Misérables*, were inspired by the story of *Madama Butterfly*, an opera by Puccini. The opera originated a phenomenon known as the “Orientalist fantasy”, in which a Japanese woman named Cio-Cio-san, or “Butterfly,” marries an American man. She remains faithful to him, even though he travels back home to marry an American woman. When she finally accepts that he has left her, her resolution is suicide. Schönberg and Boublil were excited by this story and decided to adapt the timing to the Vietnam War, right before the fall of Saigon. They were inspired by this photo (Fig. 1), which depicts a woman parting with her child before the child went onto a new life in America. The pair termed this photo, “The Ultimate Sacrifice,” and built *Miss Saigon* around this notion of sacrifice.

The story of *Miss Saigon* does little to adapt the original storyline, though it throws in some more sexist subjection for good measure by placing its heroine in a brothel. Each of the working girls seems enveloped by the idealism of America and secretly longs to find an American man who can sweep her off her feet and makes the “movie in [her] mind” a reality. In this version, this dream comes true for “Butterfly” and Vietnamese bargirl, Kim, when she falls for American GI, Chris, during her first day on the job. Still an innocent virgin at the beginning of the show, Kim is pitied by Chris, who, in a *Pericles*-like style,<sup>2</sup> tries to help her escape the brothel. They make love and fall in love, but he quickly leaves her to return home to America. Three years later, right before the fall of Saigon, Kim has a three-year-old son by Chris and she dreams of a better life for them in America. She waits for Chris to return and unite their family. In America, Chris is married but still thinks of Kim, which drives him to come back to Saigon. One thing leads to another and eventually both women find out about one another. Kim reacts severely to this news and begs for Chris to take his son back to America. To add weight to this plea, she kills herself.

Both *Madama Butterfly* and *Miss Saigon* play into the ideals of

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2 Shakespeare, William, and Stephen Orgel. *Pericles: Prince of Tyre*. New York: Penguin, 2001. Print.

Orientalism. As masterfully summarized by another “Butterfly”-esque character:

*“The West has sort of an international rape mentality towards the East. ...Basically, ‘Her mouth says no, but her eyes say yes.’ The West thinks of itself as masculine -- big guns, big industry, big money -- so the East is feminine -- weak, delicate, poor...but good at art, and full of inscrutable wisdom -- the feminine mystique... The West believes the East, deep down, wants to be dominated -- because a woman can’t think for herself. ...You expect Oriental countries to submit to your guns, and you expect Oriental women to be submissive to your men.”*

- Song Liling, *M. Butterfly*<sup>1</sup>

This language of rape demonstrates very clearly a kind of violence inherent in the West’s perceptions of the East. Fundamentally, the West fears the East like a man fears a woman. Deep in so many Shakespearean texts is the anxiety that women will make cuckolds of their husbands; similarly, the West worries about how the East can deceive them. This is the basis of Yellow Peril, a term coined in 1895 in response to a perceived threat of Asians destroying Western culture through immigration, but a concept still deeply rooted in the collective consciousness of the United States, even today. It would not be unreasonable to suggest that these caricatures designed by the Western world are a subliminal effort to displace concerns of conquest and re-emphasize their ideals of masculinity and dominance. The difficulty of this overcompensation is that Yellow Peril is an apprehension that has no basis in reality. Therefore, instead of counterbalancing a perceived power struggle, the West becomes the only true oppressive force. The binary stereotypes of the Orientalist fantasy, therefore, do nothing except reinforce destructive and unfounded views about Asians.

Is there any example in which the stereotypes are present but are used to subvert the traditional Western power display? Indeed. In fact, the creative development of *Miss Saigon* all happened in the wake of David Henry Hwang’s *M. Butterfly*, another adaptation of *Madama Butterfly*, which had received massive critical acclaim and the Tony Award for Best Play in 1988. While *Miss Saigon* revered its source text, borrowing themes of female subservience and the idealized West, *M. Butterfly* was written to mock its presumptuous ideas regarding Asian experience.

In *M. Butterfly*, Hwang turns the classic Orientalist fantasy on its head, deconstructing the stereotypes and flipping the clichéd roles entirely. At the beginning of the play, two characters are introduced: Rene

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1 Hwang, David Henry. *M. Butterfly*. New York, NY: New American Library, 1989. Print.

Gallimard, a French diplomat, and Song Liling, a beautiful Peking opera star. At first, *M. Butterfly* appears to be the typical story of submission, the lotus blossom woman facing the wrath of the abusive Western man in a relationship trope that spans decades. However, Hwang packs in a remarkable twist, in which Gallimard eventually discovers that his “Butterfly” is, in fact, a man disguised as this “Oriental love goddess”<sup>2</sup> in order to spy on Gallimard’s diplomatic duties. Upon this revelation, Gallimard realizes that for the duration of his relationship with Song, he was the one blinded by love while Song exploited him, switching the classic roles and putting Gallimard in the position of Butterfly. In the final scene, Gallimard dresses himself in makeup and a *kimono*, committing *seppuku* as Song looks on, smoking a cigarette.

In performance, this ending is so shocking because it challenges the audience to not only rethink the binary stereotypes of the Oriental fantasy but also to view its subversion violently. Essentially, with Gallimard’s death, the West is punished for its assumptions and becomes victimized, feminized. Gallimard *is* Butterfly and he is the one who dies. This complex conclusion calls into question the notion of both gender and racial categories, given that all the assumptions made about race and gender at the start of the play are inverted by the end. As Dorinne Kondo writes, “In *M. Butterfly*, we find a nuanced portrayal of the power and pervasiveness of gender and racial stereotypes. Simultaneously, Hwang de-essentializes the categories, exploding conventional notions of gender and race as universal, ahistorical essences” (26).<sup>3</sup> This de-essentialism forces recognition of intricacies in identities, it pushes the Orientalist fantasy to serve as a learning opportunity.

Unfortunately, all the ideas *M. Butterfly* purports are soon looked over with the release of *Miss Saigon* a year later. While some audiences enjoy a show that engages them to think critically, most prefer theater as a means of escape, an opportunity to experience a storyline with which they have some familiarity. After all, this desire must exist - without it, how could dozens of iterations of *Romeo and Juliet* be enjoyed? The immediate success of *Miss Saigon* was disappointing for Hwang, who lamented, “I couldn’t help but feel somewhat discouraged that *M. Butterfly*, which purports to turn the Madame Butterfly stereotype on its head, was immediately followed by a piece that took the Madame Butterfly legend and re-played it straight, without irony.”<sup>4</sup> It makes him

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2 *M. Butterfly* II.11

3 Kondo, Dorinne K. ““M. Butterfly”: Orientalism, Gender, and a Critique of Essentialist Identity.” *Cultural Critique* 16 (1990): 5-29. Web.

4 Fung, Richard. “Call in the Tropes!: *Miss Saigon* Undergoes Analysis.” *Fuse* (Winter 1993-94): 7-11. Print.

wonder - was anybody even *listening*?

While this frustration about the perpetuation of misrepresentative stereotypes was a large concern in regards to *Miss Saigon*, there was another kind of attack brewing, one that not only played into false conceptions but hijacked the Asian body altogether.

### **YELLOWFACE: PERFORMING THE ASIAN BODY**

The documentary by Nicholas Hytner, *The Making of Miss Saigon*<sup>1</sup>, takes the viewer on the journey of casting and producing the original London production of *Miss Saigon*. It devotes the first half hour to the process of casting and the extensive search conducted to find a woman to play Kim. Several young girls are shown blasting out “I’d Give My Life For You” to a room full of bespectacled White men. Eventually, they cast 18-year-old Filipina Lea Salonga to play the lead. The rest of the cast seemingly appears from thin air. With so much time spent focusing on just one of the leads, this sudden appearance of the rest of the characters is confusing. One of the most perplexing casting decisions is that of British actor Jonathan Price in the role of Engineer, a half-Vietnamese, half-French pimp. This decision caused an uproarious response among Asian theater communities. How is it possible that a professional production had the resources to search on and on for the perfect Kim but could not find a single Asian man to play the role of the Engineer?

This circumstance, of casting a White actor in an Asian role, is known as yellowface. A formal definition of yellowface is, “the practice in cinema, theatre and television where East Asian characters are portrayed by actors of other races while wearing make-up to give them the appearance of an East Asian person, often including epicanthic folds (the skin fold in the inner corner of the eye, a common East Asian feature).”<sup>2</sup> Similar to blackface, yellowface carries with it a long cultural history of White people “playing” race in order to mock members of that race. Even if a White actor does nothing to ridicule the race he is performing, simply the act of presenting himself as that race is violent because it calls upon centuries of oppressive performances.

As the Engineer, Jonathan Pryce was indeed made-up to appear Asian by wearing eye prosthetics (Fig. 2). While the production was not seriously protested in London, when *Miss Saigon* came to Broadway and Jonathan Pryce remained in the cast, the show became widely controversial. The union of American Actor’s Equity Association (AEA) re-

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1 *The Heat Is On (The Making of Miss Saigon)*. Dir. Nicholas Hytner. Perf. Cameron Mackintosh and Claude-Michel Schönberg. Thames Television, 1989. TV Movie.

2 “Yellowface.” *TV Tropes*. TV Tropes, 23 Nov. 2010. Web. 08 Mar. 2016.

volted and voted to prevent Pryce from reprising the role in New York. Executive secretary of AEA released the response, saying “Equity believes the casting of Mr. Pryce as a Eurasian to be especially insensitive and an affront to the Asian community.”<sup>3</sup> David Henry Hwang was very vocal on this issue, pointing out that while the yellowface makeup was offensive, there was also “a question of employment. When Jonathan Pryce was cast as the Engineer in *Miss Saigon*, this was a big missed opportunity to give a leading role to an Asian or a mixed-race Asian actor. Caucasians already have about 80 percent of the roles [in theater].”<sup>4</sup> Actor B.D. Wong went even further to comment, “In comparison to white actors who have historically played characters of all colors, it seemed to be assumed that minority actors could not even play themselves” (Lee, 184).<sup>5</sup> All these examples drill home the idea that Pryce representing an Asian was an offense to and stolen opportunity for Asian communities. While AEA tried desperately to stick to its guns and prevent *Miss Saigon* from continuing, pressure continued to mount for Equity to reconsider its decision. Ultimately, AEA backed down after producer Cameron Mackintosh cancelled the production, claiming he would not do the



Fig. 2 Photo originally appeared in *New York Times*, August 1990. Michael LePoer Trench.

show without Pryce. This threat shook Equity, fearing that they would inadvertently push dozens of other Asian actors out of a role. Regretfully, they reversed the ban and Jonathan Pryce came to Broadway to portray the Engineer.

This is not the first instance of yellowface and it certainly was not the last. Every day, Asian American actors are refused from playing Asian roles and all other roles, too. The tendency of the latter to occur is known as “whitewashing,” defined as “the tendency of media to be dominated by white characters, played by white actors, navigating their way

3 Witchel, Alex. “Actors’ Equity Attacks Casting of ‘*Miss Saigon*’” *The New York Times* 26 July 1990: n. pag. *The New York Times*. Web. 8 Mar. 2016.

4 Hoo, Winyan Soo. “Bearing the ‘Yellow Face’: Q&A with David Henry Hwang.” *Washington Post*. Washington Post, 22 Feb. 2014. Web. 8 Mar. 2016.

5 Lee, Esther Kim. *A History of Asian American Theatre*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006. Print.

through a story that will likely resonate most deeply with white audiences, based on their experiences and worldviews.”<sup>1</sup> This can include White actors playing non-racially specified parts or White actors playing parts written for other races. It can even occur in more vague contexts, such as casting all White actors as the heroes of the movie version of *Avatar: The Last Airbender*,<sup>2</sup> a children’s cartoon originally written with Asian-inspired characters (Fig. 3). This tendency suggests that there is an implicit assumption about representation: characters are White, unless specified otherwise. Such a belief is dangerous because it suggests concretely that “whiteness” is both invisible and dominant. As Richard Dyer says, “this property of whiteness, to be everything and nothing, is the



Fig. 3

source of its representational power.”<sup>3</sup> Whiteness is always in control.

Recently, there has been this push to cast “colorblind,” which is to say to pick the most suitable actor for a job, regardless of race. Arthur Rubin, the Vice President of the Nederlander Organization says, “The issue of an Asian role being

played by a white man is an incorrect issue in this day and age, when we want blacks to be able to play whites and Asians to be able to play whites... we are trying to establish the fact that anybody should be able to play anything.”<sup>4</sup> While this premise works well for White actors, it does absolutely nothing for actors of color. Karen Shimakawa asserts, “In an ideal world, where power and resources were equally distributed, there could perhaps be a truly ‘color-blind’ casting situation.”<sup>5</sup> However, this world does not exist. Minority actors are continuously

1 Andrist, Lester. “What Is Whitewashing and Why Does It Matter?” *The Sociological Cinema*. N.p., 22 Feb. 2015. Web. 8 Mar. 2016.

2 Inoljt. “Analyzing The Last Airbender’s Casting Controversy.” *Daily Kos*. Daily Kos, 5 Aug. 2010. Web. 18 Feb. 2016.

3 Dyer, Richard. *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representation*. London: Routledge, 2002. Print.

4 Pao, Angela Chia-yi. “Re-casting Race.” *No Safe Spaces: Re-casting Race, Ethnicity, and Nationality in American Theater*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan, 2010. 56. Print.

5 Shimakawa, Karen. *National Abjection: The Asian American Body Onstage*. Durham: Duke UP, 2002. Print.



discriminated against for a variety of reasons.

One primary reason is the economic concern of producers. Consider this: the majority of successful shows are headed by a strong White male lead. These shows bring money into producers' pockets and the show proudly promotes its lead character. As a result, consumers come to expect that successful shows are headed by White male leads because the best shows have White males. This causes an expectation for the producers to continue casting White male leads in order to fulfill what the audience anticipates. If producers do not provide what audiences want, then they will not profit as well, so they are incentivized to continue casting White males. This cycle necessarily precludes new voices from being heard for fear of lost profit. It's impossible to qualify exactly what the results of this cycle are, but this pattern certainly inhibits all minority voices from being at the forefront.

## CONCLUSION

Considering all of this evidence, one question still itches to be answered. Why was David Henry Hwang randomly attacked? What about that poor 16-year-old girl? Yes, the attacks can be chalked up to hate crimes, but what causes hate crimes? Hate spews from a total refusal to acknowledge complexity. Stereotypes result from a tendency to jump to the fastest associations. Who controls the easy outs, the most pervasive images? White people. Who wrote *Madama Butterfly*? Puccini. *Miss Saigon*? Two Jewish men. Who performs nearly 80% of all Broadway and prominent NY theater roles? Caucasians. Ultimately, the dominant culture is responsible for how minority cultures are represented. In this way, "whiteness" dictates "yellowness" - and the result? Perpetuated myths about Asian and Asian-American experience, myths that reinforce stereotypes and confine diverse groups of people into one image. David Henry Hwang was attacked for a reason and that reason was that his whole character was judged simply for his appearance. In this case, a misconception about Asian identity led directly to physical violence, but the denial of opportunities for proper representation is undoubtedly an assault, too. Yes, there is no blood on the ground, there is no physical wound, but these affronts, these assaults contribute to a growing gash, passed on through each generation, that obscures what Asian identity really is.

# RENEE CAI

## The Roar of the Dragon Lady and the Butterfly: Voices of Asian Women in American Film

### Abstract

In the twenty-first century, Asian women suffer enormously from racist and sexist stereotypes perpetuated by American media that inculcate discriminatory attitudes and encourage the dehumanization of Asian women. Furthermore, due to underrepresentation both on-screen and in the media industry as a whole, it is difficult for Asian actresses and filmmakers to disrupt the hegemonic nature of Hollywood and enter mainstream consciousness. The rapidly increasing Asian population in America and their role as primary media consumers necessitates a reexamination of degrading Asian portrayals in American media, yet media corporations are slow or reluctant to act. The overall issue of diversification and representation in Hollywood needs to be actively addressed by white directors, minority groups, and audiences alike – only then can these unique minority voices be heard with clear, authentic resonance.

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From the tension-filled era of twentieth century Hollywood film, charged with anti-East sentiments and a profound distrust of the Asian race, emerges several captivating yet damaging portrayals of Asian women that continue to be perpetuated in American media today. Two stereotypes in particular — that of the hypersexualized, cunning, and cold-blooded “Dragon Lady” and the submissive, passive “Butterfly” — have evolved during the twenty-first century to cater to the whims of modern American society and to remain relevant to shifting Western perspectives of Asians. These tropes, when consumed by American audiences, are often accepted as fact; this canonization perpetuates insidious racist sentiments that have tangible, detrimental effects on the lives of millions of Asians in America. In addition to the prevalence of harmful, unidimensional stereotypes of Asian women that plague contemporary American media, white-washing and the lack of institutional support in film agencies create a self-perpetuating cycle of underrepresentation that systematically excludes Asian women from the American media industry. Portrayals of Asian women in major roles, in the rare instances that they occur, are tarnished by the distorted echoes of the Dragon Lady and Butterfly stereotypes, providing a narrow and twisted glimpse of Asian women that speaks more to how white, West-

ern writers and directors perceive them. The double quandary of being both a racial and sexual minority in a heavily media-informed society is further exacerbated by the media's unapologetic underrepresentation and degrading stereotyping of Asian women. Therefore, in a predominantly white, male-oriented Hollywood in which representations of Asian women are often misinformed by racist and sexist tropes, there is an ever-growing necessity in the twenty-first century for the increase of positive, stereotype-defying portrayals of Asian women created both for and by Asian actresses and filmmakers.

Although ostensibly relics of a racially-insensitive twentieth century, the stereotypes of the Dragon Lady and the Butterfly have, in fact, merely adapted to the twenty-first century American society's perspective of Asians. The Dragon Lady, with her heartless cunning and commoditized sexuality, has split into several contemporary stereotypes, including that of the ambitious "Tiger Mom," the power-hungry, money-grubbing "matriarch" of the Asian-American family, and the exotic, "sexually-liberated" dominatrix. The 2015 ABC comedy series "Fresh Off the Boat" features the character Jessica Huang, a hybrid of the Tiger Mom and callous matriarch, who not only constantly threatens to disown her children, scolds them for losing touch with Chinese culture, and schemes up potentially illegal methods of making more money in the restaurant business, but also encapsulates other common Asian stereotypes such as the "terrible Asian driver" and the ruthlessly efficient, robotic Asian tropes.<sup>1</sup> Lucy Liu, one of Hollywood's few mainstream Asian actresses, has played countless fetishized roles derived from the Dragon Lady stereotype: examples include *Payback* (1999), in which she plays the leather-clad dominatrix Pearl, *Charlie's Angels* (2000) where she dons Oriental dress to give sensual massages and another tight leather suit as a cold-blooded workplace inspector, and *Kill Bill: Vol. 1* (2003) in which she plays the brutal, inhuman O-Ren Ishii.<sup>2</sup> These descendants of the Dragon Lady dehumanize Asian women, casting them as power-obsessed and highly efficient machines or as exotic sex toys.

On the other hand, the Butterfly's submissiveness and passivity has transformed into the contemporary ideal of dutiful mail-order brides, shy, socially-awkward nerds, and compliant, conforming career

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1 *Fresh Off the Boat*, Directed by Nahnatchka Khan. American Broadcasting Company, February 15 2015.

2 *Payback*, Directed by Brian Helgeland. Icon Entertainment International, 1999. DVD; *Charlie's Angels*, Directed by McG. Columbia Pictures, 2000. DVD; *Kill Bill: Vol. 1*. Directed by Quentin Tarantino. Quebec: Alliance Atlantis, 2003. DVD.

women as members of the “model minority.” The pervasiveness of Asian women depicted as prostitutes or sex workers (especially common in the NBC drama series “Law and Order: Special Victims Unit,” in which the majority of Asian female appearances are those of murdered Asian prostitutes) is a result of the Butterfly’s evolution, as their submissive and weak characterization leads to easier victimization.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the social ineptitude of female Asian nerds, who are constantly depicted as the awkward high school loners pining away for the typically white male protagonist, fuels perceptions that Asian women are both unassertive and unable to assimilate with “normal” society — perceptions that damage Asian women looking to enter business, law, or executive positions in any field. The “model minority” stereotype, in which Asians overall have become the “ideal” minority in their passivity, compliance, and high-achieving academics, is particularly damaging: not only does it create unrealistic pressures and expectations on Asians to perform well in society, but also imply that other minorities (blacks, Native Americans, Latinx<sup>2</sup>, etc.) are not behaving ideally and should aspire to the same level of conformity.

However, readers may question whether any true damage is posed by stereotypes and if an experience as ephemeral and fleeting as watching a movie could drastically influence American society’s attitudes towards Asian women. After all, *Dragon Ladies* and *Butterflies* are merely fictional characters confined to the screen and no more real than computer-generated images or absurd plotlines — right? Unfortunately, the influence of media is not nearly as innocuous as it seems. Countless studies from the mid-twentieth century and onward have revealed that ideas posited by visual media — whether in the form of films, television shows, commercials, or even music videos — both inform and distort audiences’ perceptions of the topic at hand.<sup>3</sup> The most compelling analysis, George Gerbner’s cultivation theory, draws upon a decades-long research project that studied the short- and long-term effects of visual media consumption on American viewers and found that “television makes specific and measurable contributions to viewers’ conceptions of

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1 *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*. Directed by Dick Wolf. National Broadcasting Company Universal, 20 September 1999.

2 Latinx is a gender-nonspecific term used to describe people of Latin American descent that is more inclusive of gender-nonconforming and gender-queer individuals than “Latinos.” For more information, see <http://www.latina.com/lifestyle/our-issues/why-we-say-latinx-trans-gender-non-conforming-people-explain>

3 Claude Steele, Steven Spencer, and Joshua Aronson, “Contending with Group Image,” *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*. 2002.

reality.”<sup>4</sup> Media exposure, Gerbner argues, subtly cultivates specific attitudes and behaviors by suggesting that the world depicted on-screen is an accurate reflection of the real world. For example, one of the studies found that school-aged children, a demographic particularly susceptible to this cultivation effect, who watched more action films heavily overestimated the number of people who commit serious crimes and the amount of people involved in violence in a typical week, and were reportedly more fearful of the everyday world.<sup>5</sup> When connected to negative and stereotypical depictions of race, media-cultivated perceptions of implicit danger not only foster individual sentiments of race-based anxiety but also manifest into collective, societal discrimination against minorities: a “main-streaming,” as Gerbner calls it, of prejudiced beliefs.

From exotic, Oriental sex goddess to submissive prostitute, the perfidious offspring of the Dragon Lady and Butterfly stereotypes are not harmless products of the American filmmaker’s fantasy — every year, they cost the lives and happiness of countless Asian women across the world. The prevalent trope of Asian women as compliant, eager-to-please sex workers has fueled an insatiable Western thirst for Asian mail-order brides and sex partners, leading to the horrific explosion of human trafficking throughout Asia in the twenty-first century.<sup>6</sup> Forced into prostitution, servile marriages, or pornography at ages as young as 12, these women are the nameless and faceless victims of Hollywood filmmakers’ “artistic choices.” According to the U.S. Department of State, of the 45,000 to 50,000 people trafficked to the United States annually, about 30,000 come from Asia (primarily from China, Thailand, and Vietnam) and 80% are women or girls, bought through unregulated mail-order catalogues by American men and coerced into a lifetime of sexual slavery or domestic servitude.<sup>7</sup> After the lifting of Hollywood’s Motion Picture Production Code in 1954 that prohibited the depiction of interracial relationships on-screen, the increase of submissive Asian female and macho white male relationships in American film led to skyrocketing demands for Asian mail-order brides and enabled South Asian sex trafficking industries to thrive.<sup>8</sup> There is a direct, damning correlation between the increased portrayal of the exotic Asian prosti-

4 “Cultivation Theory,” University of Twente. Accessed March 8, 2016.

5 Gerbner, G., & Gross, L. (1976a). Living with television: The violence profile. *Journal of Communication*, 26, 172-198.

6 Lora Jo Foo, *Asian American Women: Issues, Concerns and Responsive Human and Civil Rights Advocacy*, Report. Accessed March 8, 2016.

7 “Domestic Violence Statistics,” American Bar Association. Accessed March 9, 2016.

8 Matt Bynum, “The Motion Picture Production Code of 1930,” Arts Reformation. April 12, 2006. Accessed March 1, 2016.

tute stereotype in American media and America's expanding complicity in the atrocious human-trafficking trade in Asia.

Heightened rates of sexual assault and domestic violence are another bitter reality that Asian women suffer due to the prominently featured stereotype of passive, sexually-available Asian women and the gross exploitation of their alleged docility. A 1990 edition of *Gentleman's Quarterly* exemplifies the Western fetishization of Asian sexual compliance when it lauds Asian women as "small, weak, submissive and erotically alluring... eyes almond-shaped for mystery, black for suffering, wide-spaced for innocence, high cheekbones swelling like bruises" and encourages all men to find an Asian girl of their own, for "she's fun you see, and so uncomplicated. She doesn't go to assertiveness-training classes, insist on being treated like a person... [and] wield her orgasm as a non-negotiable demand."<sup>1</sup> The ideal of Asian sexual submissiveness is used to justify sexual violence against Asian women — or, as scholar Kandice Chuh bitterly explains, "Because Asian/American women are depicted as always consenting, they cannot be raped in the eyes of [society]."<sup>2</sup> A 2002 study on race in pornography revealed a strong correlation between Asians and pedophilia (with common search terms such as "Asian teens" and "Japanese schoolgirls") and that Asian women consistently showed up during a keyword search for "torture."<sup>3</sup> An even graver indication of the Western fetish of the submissive Asian trope is that over half of all porn sites depicting the rape and torture of women featured Asian women as the victim and one-third showed white men as the perpetrator.<sup>4</sup> Although sexual fantasies and fetishes may not reflect an individual's behavior or moral code, countless studies conducted over the past two decades indicate a strong correlation between exposure to violent pornography and sexual abuse.<sup>5 6 7</sup> Furthermore, Asian

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1 Sumi K. Cho, "Converging Stereotypes in Racialized Sexual Harassment," in *Critical Race Feminism: A Reader*, ed. Adrien Wing (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 352.

2 Sunny Woan, "White Sexual Imperialism," *Washington and Lee Journal of Civil Rights and Social Justice* 14, no. 2 (March 1, 2008).

3 Jennifer Lynn Gossett and Sarah Byrne, "'Click Here': A Content Analysis of Internet Rape Sites," *Gender & Society* 16, no. 5 (2002): 689-709. Accessed March 1, 2015.

4 Ibid.

5 N. Malamuth, T. Addison, and M. Koss, "Pornography and Sexual Aggression," *Annual Review of Sex Research* 11 (2000). 26-91.

6 Edward Donnerstein, "Pornography And Violence Against Women: Experimental Studies." *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 347, no. 1 Forensic Psyc (1980): 277-88.

7 Mary Anne Layden, "Pornography and Violence," University of Penn-  
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women are not only seen as willing victims of sexual violence, but also “easy targets” due to their apparent weakness. From 2002 to 2006, 44% of all nonfatal violent crimes committed against Asians were serious violent victimizations (e.g. rape, sexual assault, aggravated assault) as opposed to 31% for crimes committed against whites, and Asian females were disproportionately more likely to experience violence committed by a complete stranger.<sup>8</sup> Domestic violence is also a major consequence of this vulnerability stereotype, as Asian women, especially those of Southeast Asian descent, are 10-15% more likely to experience physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner — particularly partners of a different race — during their lifetime than other minorities.<sup>9</sup> To ignore or dismiss the issue of stereotyping Asian women in media is to neglect the thousands of real women suffering from its devastating consequences.

The harmful stereotyping of Asian women is an unsurprising phenomenon when considering the primary demographic of American media content creators: white men. In a 2015 Hollywood Diversity Report conducted by UCLA, researchers reported that for the majority of the hundreds of television shows broadcast from 2012 to 2013, thirty percent or less of all episodes were written by women writers, and a measly ten percent or less of all episodes were written by minority writers.<sup>10</sup> Most remarkably, not a single television show featured a board of writers in which white men were outnumbered by minorities — racial minorities and women combined.<sup>11</sup> How can we expect positive, non-stereotypical portrayals of Asian women in media unencumbered by racial and sexual prejudices when Asian women themselves are rarely even part of the writing process? Misinformed representations of Asian culture, from inaccurate and offensive depictions of Asian dress, accents, manners, and cultural values that stem from plain ignorance or presumptuous claims (e.g. “I have an Asian friend”) have the power to shape audiences’ perceptions of Asians and lead them towards harmful and unjustified conclusions. *The Dragon Lady*, *the Butterfly*, and *their unsavory twenty-first century progeny* are specifically written by

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sylvania Department of Psychiatry. Accessed April 29, 2016.

8 Jennifer L. Truman, “National Crime Victimization Survey,” U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics. September 2011.; Erika Harrell, “Asian, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander Victims of Crime,” U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics. March 2009.

9 “Statistics on Violence against API Women,” Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence. Accessed March 3, 2016.

10 Darnell Hunt and Ana-Christina Ramón, “2015 Hollywood Diversity Report,” Ralph J. Bunche Center at UCLA. February 2015

11 Ibid.

a white, male Hollywood to cater to the Western male's gaze — which may explain both the widespread prevalence of heroic white male and exotically erotic Asian female pairings in American media and the overall absence of Asian male and white female relationships. These cinematic Asian women, with their hushed, obedient demeanor or seductively foreign allure, are the perfect sexual partners — but never equals — to the powerful, dominant white male. From older Hollywood films such as *Sayonara* (1957), *The Barbarian and the Geisha* (1958), *The World of Suzie Wong* (1960) in which a white man rescues an Asian prostitute from the streets through his love, multiple James Bond movies such as *Dr. No* (1962), *You Only Live Twice* (1967), *License to Kill* (1985), and *Tomorrow Never Dies* (1997) featuring slinky, and occasionally white-washed Asian Bond girls, to modern examples primarily in the action film genre of *The Last Samurai* (2003) in which a blatantly white Tom Cruise in Japan becomes involved with a geisha, *The Wolverine* (2013) where the white protagonist rescues an Asian woman and restores honor to her family, *The Interview* (2014) featuring a North Korean Dragon Lady and a bland white main character, the Asian female has become nothing more than an exotic sexual accessory. Hollywood is simply obsessed with this vision of sexually available Asian women pining for the touch of a white man.

Although they are overwhelmingly outnumbered by stereotypical portrayals, positive, empowering depictions of Asian women in American media do exist and provide an essential illustration of what voices Hollywood can and should produce. Two notable examples include actress Michelle Yeoh's role as female warrior Yu Shu Lien in the American and Chinese co-production film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000) and Lucy Liu's role as Dr. Joan Watson in CBS's television adaptation of Sherlock Holmes, *Elementary* (2012). Although most female Asian characters in positions of power fall prey to the cruel, hyper-sexualized Dragon Lady stereotype, Yu Shu Lien remains kind-hearted and dignified, obtaining respect in society not through her beauty and connection to a man, but through her exemplary martial arts skills. Yu Shu Lien's complex, powerful, and non-stereotypical characterization in the traditionally male-dominated realm of action films is an excellent model for female Asian roles in the action genre that transcends classification as mere eye candy or cold-hearted Dragon Lady.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, producer Robert Doherty's groundbreaking decision to cast Sherlock Holmes' white, male doctor companion John Watson as the female, Asian "Joan

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1 *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. Directed by Ang Lee. Performed by Chow Yun-fat, Michelle Yeoh, and Zhang Ziyi. United States: Sony Picture Classics, 2000. DVD.



Watson” in *Elementary* demonstrates that Asian actresses are capable of taking on any role – even those conventionally bestowed on white actors.<sup>2</sup> Despite creating a female Asian Watson, Doherty strives to dismantle “the idea that a man and woman can’t be together on a show ... without needing to be together sexually or in love” by dismissing the possibility of pairing the now-female Watson with Sherlock Holmes in another trite rendition of the white male and Asian female relationship trope.<sup>3</sup> Yu Shu Lien and Dr. Joan Watson are two crucial, although unfortunately sparse, examples of what positive, empowered portrayals of Asian women in American media can look like and demonstrate the rich complexity of non-stereotypical female Asian characters.

Aside from the issue of heavily-stereotyped portrayals of Asian women in American media, there is the fundamental problem of invisibility — there are simply not enough Asian women on-screen. According to a study conducted by the University of Southern California in 2012, only 5% of all speaking characters in the top-grossing films of that year were Asian, and less than half of those Asian characters were female; even with the minimum requirement of speaking a single word on-screen, less than 3% of these roles are allotted to Asian women.<sup>4</sup> The year 2014 fared no better, reports Dr. Martha Lauzen in her condensed study of on-screen representations of female characters in the top one hundred films of 2014: only 30% of all speaking roles were given to women, and a measly 4% of all female characters were Asian, leading to the embarrassing result of a puny 1.2% of the 2,300 available speaking roles being occupied by Asian women.<sup>5</sup> In fact, American moviegoers in 2014 were just as likely to see an Asian woman in a speaking role as they were to see an alien woman.<sup>6</sup> The percentage of Asian women starring as main characters in any given film or television show is thus incredibly miniscule.

Furthermore, even when roles are created for Asian women on-screen, they are often “white-washed,” or given to white actresses instead who are deemed more capable and more “relatable” to the target

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2 Robert Doherty, writer. *Elementary*. CBS Television Studios. September 27, 2012.

3 Marissa Lee, “Racebending, My Dear Watson!” Racebending.com. September 25, 2012. Accessed April 29, 2016.

4 Stacy Smith, Marc Choueiti, and Katherine Pieper, “Race/Ethnicity in 500 Popular Films,” USC Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism. 2013. Accessed March 3, 2016.

5 Martha M. Lauzen, “It’s a Man’s (Celluloid) World,” San Diego State University Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film. 2015. Accessed March 4, 2016.

6 Ibid.

American audience. Out of the plethora of early examples of whitewashing in 20th century Hollywood comes the 1937 film *The Good Earth*, which portrays the struggles of farmer Wang Lung and his wife O-Lan in pre-WWI China — except both Wang Lung and O-Lan are played by blatantly Caucasian actors sporting heavy “yellow-face” makeup intended to create recognizably Asian features such as slanted eyes and monolids.<sup>1</sup> Producer Irving Thalberg defended his choice of using white actors over Asian actors by declaring “I’m in the business of creating illusions,” implying that the white-washing is merely a natural aspect of spectacle of film and has no real-world implications — when in fact, the absence of Asian leads in a distinctly Chinese film even further limits the already-narrow list of possible roles available to Asian actors.<sup>2</sup> Despite increased awareness and condemnation of the practice in twenty-first century, Hollywood continues its hapless cramming of white actors into minority roles. A few of the endless examples of white-washing in American media include Cameron Crowe’s 2015 romantic-comedy *Aloha*, in which white actress Emma Stone plays the one-quarter Chinese, one-quarter Hawaiian Captain Allison Ng, Dreamworks’ *Ghost in the Shell* (2017) which is set to feature white actress Scarlett Johansson as Japanese policewoman Motoko Kusanagi, and even Indian-American director M. Night Shyamalan’s *The Last Airbender*, where the entire cast of Inuit and Chinese-based characters have miraculously turned white.<sup>3</sup> Every Asian role in these films given to a white actress is one less opportunity for mainstream films to depict an authentic and yellow-face-free portrayal of Asian women and feature the talent — and existence of — Asian actresses in Hollywood.

Several directors guilty of white-washing have attempted to explain their casting decisions in practical, economic terms by claiming that Asian actors are simply not appealing enough to the majority audience and thus not profitable. Dana Brunetti, director of *21* (2008), a film about six, primarily Asian MIT students who are played by mostly

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1 *The Good Earth*. Directed by Sidney A. Franklin and George W. Hill. Produced by Albert Lewin and Irving G. Thalberg. United States: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1937.

2 To add insult to injury, Luise Rainer, the actress for O-Lan, won Best Actress in 1938 for so convincingly playing the role of a Chinese woman. No Asian woman in the history of the Academy Awards has ever won Best Actress — in fact, only one Asian woman has ever been nominated for Best Actress (Merle Oberon, 1935).

3 For more examples of yellow-face and whitewashing, see Jade Tan in the *Dragon Seed* (1944), Genghis Khan in *The Conqueror* (1956), I.Y. Yunioshi in *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* (1961), Hrundi V. Bakshi in *The Party* (1968), Hae-Joo Chang in *Cloud Atlas* (2012), etc. etc.

white actors, claims that he “would have LOVED to cast Asians in the lead roles” but unfortunately “didn’t have access to any bankable Asian-American actors that [he] wanted.”<sup>4</sup> Likewise, Ridley Scott, director of the widely acclaimed movie adaptation of Andy Weir’s novel *The Martian* (2015) that features a blonde, white Mackenzie Davis in place of Korean American character Mindy Park, and *Exodus* (2014), which boasts an all-white main cast despite being set in Africa, justifies his white-washing decisions with the callous remark: “If my lead actor is Mohammad so-and-so from such-and-such, I’m just not going to get it financed.”<sup>5</sup> White-washing in media therefore fuels a perpetual cycle of diminishing representation in which directors claim that there are no profitable minority actors and exclude them from potential star-making roles, thus rendering it even more difficult for minority actors to be profitable.

Despite the compelling existence of a vicious cycle of white-washing, many attempt to justify the lack of Asian representation in Hollywood film by claiming that there are simply not enough Asian actresses and that very few Asian women desire to enter the media industry at all. This purported lack of desire to enter the realm of media is informed by the stereotype that Asians, as a high-achieving, career-oriented race, care little about arts and creativity. There is a prevalent assumption in America that Asian culture as a whole discourages members of its own race from entering the creative arts where they lack the originality and imagination to succeed, and encourage entrance into objective, calculation-based STEM fields instead — for, as former Hewlett-Packard CEO Carly Fiorina describes it, Asians are good at “[taking] tests” but are “not terribly imaginative.”<sup>6</sup> While it is true that certain first-generation and immigrant Asians are under more pressure to secure a stable, profitable job as doctors or engineers to support their families, there is no universal Asian condemnation against art and creativity. This widespread belief that the absence of Asian artists is a consequence of cultural expectations is, in fact, informed by the insidious model minority myth. By idealizing Asians as a well-behaved race with low rates of violence, high levels of education, and a hardworking, disciplined mindset, the myth not only reduces all Asians to robotic humanoids that are efficient yet ultimately incapable of innovation, but also implies that this lack of creativity is a result of their deep-rooted, fundamental culture.

4 Celeste Headlee, “The Whitewashing of Hollywood,” WNYC. July 2, 2010.

5 Nick Allen, “I Can’t Cast Mohammad So-and-so from Such-and-such’ Says Ridley Scott,” *The Telegraph*. November 28, 2014. Accessed March 09, 2016.

6 Tom Huddleston, “Carly Fiorina Says the Chinese ‘Don’t Innovate,’” *Time Magazine*. May 26, 2015.

The reductive generalization of “Asian culture” (as if the hundreds of thousands of unique Asian ethnicities could be lumped into one homogenous group) pressures Asian-American students to conform to the model minority image and steers them away from entering the arts. The model minority myth, coupled with the prominent “Asian nerd” stereotype, causes Asian students who struggle at math or science in school to be mocked for not being “Asian enough.” Although the desire to enter the art and media industry undeniably exists in the hearts of countless Asian American students, it is incredibly difficult to do so when the essence of “being Asian” in America requires that they do otherwise. There is a cyclical nature to this oppression — myths and tropes created by the American media inform society’s expectations of Asians which discourages Asians from entering the art world, and which, in turn, perpetuates the creation of restrictive Asian stereotypes.

Moreover, the absence of Asian women in the American media industry is perpetuated by an unwelcoming, coagulated, cohesive clump of white maleness in Hollywood. Asian women are constantly turned away from the world of film and television due to an overwhelming lack of diversity support systems and the existence of a “bamboo ceiling” that inhibits Asian women in particular from obtaining certain executive positions due to racist perceptions that they “lack leadership potential” or are too indecisive.<sup>1</sup> Young Asian actors and writers are consistently warned against entering a Hollywood where there are very few available jobs for them and an uncertain future awaits— instead, they are encouraged by American filmmakers to “go to Asia” where they are far more likely to be accepted into the world of cinema.<sup>2</sup> The problem with the lack of Asian women in Hollywood is not one stemming from a lack of enthusiasm or willingness to participate in the creation of film and television, but a problem entrenched in the inhospitable, racially-charged atmosphere of American media corporations. Once again, a self-perpetuating chain of exclusion can be identified; thinly veiled racism and an absence of mentors and support systems in a predominantly white Hollywood dissuades Asian women from entering, which only sustains their occlusion from the American film industry.

Although some may argue that the lack of diversity and racial balance in media reflects the overall racial distribution of the United States in which Asians are the minority, the fact remains that Asians are the fastest growing ethnic group in twenty-first century America. From

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1 Jane Hyun, *Breaking the Bamboo Ceiling*. New York: HarperBusiness, 2005. 18-25.

2 Melena Ryzik, “What It’s Really Like to Work in Hollywood (\*If You’re Not a Straight White Man),” *The New York Times*. February 24, 2016.

2002 to 2014, the Asian American population in the United States grew an unprecedented 46% to a population of 19.4 million today, and is expected to grow at an astonishing rate of 150% between 2015 and 2050 to over 29 million according to U.S. Census projections.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, for the first time in U.S. history, the largest sources of recent immigrants to the United States are from Asian countries — the two countries China and India alone have now replaced Mexico as the dominant sources of first-time immigrants, with 147,000 and 129,000 in 2014 from China and India respectively, compared to 125,000 from Mexico.<sup>4</sup> Approximately 80% of all Asian-American women today are either immigrants or foreign-born and have strong, personal ties to their identity as Asians, creating an even more cogent need for culturally appropriate and non-humiliating representations of Asian women in American media.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, Asian Americans exceed the general population, whites included, in smartphone ownership and in the number of households with tablets, smart TVs, and multimedia streaming devices, providing them increased opportunities to access American media in the form of film or television.<sup>6</sup> In fact, Asians consume more media than all other ethnic groups in terms of mean number of annual entertainment purchases (Asians 3.7, total consumers 3.1) and per capita attendance at movie theatres (5.2 for Asians in 2014 compared to 3.2 for whites).<sup>7</sup> The existence of an enormous, ever-growing Asian audience in twenty-first century America that has a powerful, intimate connection to their Asian heritage and culture, coupled with emergence of a new generation of Asian-Americans raised on easily-accessible and identity-shaping media in the age of the Internet necessitates a reevaluation of the heavily stereotyped and pitifully underwhelming Asian representation in Hollywood. There is no justification for the abysmal dearth of Asians, particularly Asian women, in spaces where they are increasingly becoming the primary audience.

The only remedy for the onslaught of misinformed, stereotypical portrayals and overall lack of representation of Asian women in American media is an enormous push for the visibility of female Asian writers, directors, and producers. By shoving aside the predominantly white, male voice that dictates the creation of most female Asian characters on

3 Betty Lo and Saul Rosenberg, “Asian-Americans: Culturally Connected and Forging the Future,” Nielsen. June 11, 2015.

4 Jane Hyun, *Breaking the Bamboo Ceiling*.

5 Ibid.

6 Lo and Rosenberg, “Asian-Americans: Culturally Connected and Forging the Future.”

7 “Theatrical Market Statistics 2015,” Motion Picture Association of America. March 2015.

screen to provide space for actual Asian women, a necessary and crucial voice is given to the community of Asian women nationwide. Although commonly seen in other Western countries such as Europe and Canada, Asian female writers and directors in America remain hidden in the shadows of the looming white monolith that is Hollywood. Brilliant female filmmakers such as Karyn Kusama, whose film *Girlfight* (2000) won awards domestically at the Sundance Film Festival and internationally at Cannes, have not been able to break into the mainstream of American filmic consciousness. Despite the success of a few Asian male directors in achieving breakthrough attention in box office hits, most notably Ang Lee, Asian women remain out of sight in domestic pop culture media. This phenomenon is unfortunate, for female Asian writers and directors consistently create entertainment, be it in film or television, with greater cast diversity than the majority of other minority writers, yet cannot find media support or the audiences to broadcast this valuable diversity.<sup>1</sup> Some may argue that this lack of attention from American audiences is due to the fact that diverse casts do not perform well in box offices; however, the opposite is true, for films with even 10% more cast diversity outperform more racially homogeneous films by tens of millions of dollars in ticket sales, and television shows with around 30-40% diversity (a proportion that realistically reflects the racial distribution of the United States) consistently garner higher ratings than their paler counterparts.<sup>2</sup> The call for the increased representation of minorities in American media is undeniably present, but rarely answered and often ignored.

However, when this call for on-screen diversity is answered in the wider scope of the underrepresentation of all minorities in Hollywood, it is often in the form of tokenism. The reasons writers create token minority characters are manifold: to broaden appeal, create an illusion of cast diversity and inclusiveness, deflect criticisms of racial discrimination, and use race jokes regarding specific minorities without inhibition.<sup>3</sup> This perfunctory inclusion is dehumanizing, and reduces the minority to a mere colorful accessory. On the other hand, however, potential criticisms of tokenism and misrepresentation often cause non-minority producers to shy away from the inclusion of diversity in their writing, which ultimately perpetuates minority underrepresentation. Although these white writers often cite a strict adherence to the mantra “Write what you know” when abstaining from writing people of color,

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1 Darnell Hunt and Ana-Christina Ramón, “2015 Hollywood Diversity Report.”

2 Ibid.

3 “Token Minority.” TV Tropes. Accessed March 3, 2016.

this puritanical avoidance of writing about any perspective outside of one's own is unrealistic: for example, when an author who has never been on a plane in her entire life is tasked with writing a story about a daredevil pilot, does she merely give up? When male producers are faced with the task of creating female characters, do they throw their hands in the air in ineptitude? Are white, middle-class men doomed to a lifetime of solely writing white, middle-class men? Of course not! The feeble excuse of not having the experience to create certain characters is one primarily limited to that of race and has become increasingly prevalent in Hollywood today. When criticized over the lack of casting diversity in her 2012 television series *Girls*, Lena Dunham explains that she, as “a half-Jew, half-WASP” was more comfortable writing “two Jews and two WASPs” as the four protagonists and that if “one of the four girls...was African-American, ... there [was] specificity to that experience that [she] wasn't able to speak to.”<sup>4</sup> Although this concern over an accurate depiction of a minority character appears to be a sensitive and politically-correct approach, it obfuscates the reality that minority representation suffers as a result. As political cartoonist Jennifer Camper explains, “Creating only white characters to avoid writing about race *is* writing about race, albeit in a manner that is unrealistic, sad, and boring.”<sup>5</sup> If content creators only wrote about what they are familiar with, auto-biographical movies about film directors would swamp Hollywood and any genre unrelated to the quotidian experiences of the writer would be nonexistent (e.g. fantasy, sci-fi, historical fiction, etc.). The excuse of cultural unfamiliarity as a justification for meager minority representation is inadequate and simply unrealistic.

A Hollywood screenwriter's lack of cultural knowledge is easily remedied by a process all authors must undertake when writing about unfamiliar experiences — research. In the same manner that an author writing about an aviator may interview several pilots, visit aviation museums, read autobiographies, etc., a white, male producer writing about an Asian-American female should engage in dialogue with Asian women. Author Elisha Lim advises non-minority writers to consult authentic perspectives when writing people of color instead of drawing upon preconceived notions of racial identity: “Base your character, closely or loosely, on a real person. Consult with them as you write it. Let them edit it. Credit them generously... If you can't do this because you don't have any friends of the particular background, then you prob-

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4 “Lena Dunham Addresses Criticism Aimed At ‘Girls,’” NPR. May 7, 2012.

5 Mari Naomi, “Writing People of Color,” Midnight Breakfast. Accessed March 3, 2016.

ably don't have the life experience to write that character convincingly."<sup>1</sup> In the example of *Girls*, Lena Dunham could have consulted with several African-American women to gain some understanding of the "specificity" of experience that otherwise prevented her from writing a diverse cast. Using excuses of cultural unfamiliarity and lack of personal experience to justify an absence of diversity is merely a sign of laziness and a narrow-minded unwillingness to engage in the research of perspectives outside one's own. To write about any unique, external perspective, research is essential — particularly when it is the perspective of a marginalized and constantly misrepresented minority.

Overall, it is crucial that American media not only escape from its self-perpetuating cycles of underrepresentation and racial exclusion by pushing for the visibility of minority actors and directors, but also foster a dialogue based on research and communication to create realistic and productive portrayals of minority experiences. The demand for diversity is present and ever-growing, both on-screen and off, and there is no excuse for the abysmal lack of female Asian presence in the creation of American media. It is not enough for there to be Asian actresses playing Asian roles — there must be Asian women present at all levels of the media creation process as directors, screenwriters, producers, and editors, to not only weigh in on the validity and potential ramifications of certain characterizations but also to construct their own, informed visions of Asian women and the unique, inimitable perspectives they embody. On a broader scope, the ongoing debate over minority representation by white writers ultimately leads to questions of voice, authorship and authority: Who can speak for others? Who can represent someone else, and with what intention? And most importantly, who is speaking the loudest? Writing realistic, positive representations of Asian women is not limited to female Asian screenwriters. White filmmakers can and *should* speak up about diversification in American media— but their voices should never eclipse those of actual minorities. Rather than speaking *for* a race, directors should speak *with* and *alongside* members of the minority to develop constructive, non-stereotypical minority presences on-screen. In doing so, we can slowly dismantle insidious myths, reduce the suffering of those oppressed by stereotypes, and reform American media into an inclusive platform for the authentic expression of all minority identities. This transformation not only requires the conscious, collective effort of directors, screenwriters, actors, and media agencies as a whole, but also that of each individual, who votes for the positive visibility of minority perspectives through personal

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1 Naomi, "Writing People of Color."



**CREATIVE  
NONFICTION**

# CHESTER THAI

## Shores

*The ocean surges into a dark void under the moonless sky. You can't make out any lights on the horizon as you stand on a rocky beach, in front of the swaying hull of a boat. Huddled figures clutching small bags, and each other, stream onto the metal deck. When it's your turn, you pause. You stare across the ocean, and wonder if you will ever make it to the other side. The water laps at your feet, and people tell you to move. You step on the boat.*

When I was eight, Dad and I would ride our bikes along the Schuylkill River on the weekends, when Kelly Drive was closed to cars. One Sunday it was overcast, and the cool, pre-storm wind cut through my jacket as my bike accelerated, my eyes cast out toward the slow undulations of the gray, opaque river. When I turned underneath a bridge, I strayed into the other lane, where a concrete wall blocked my view of the biker who swerved into sight and crashed into me.

Swift crunch of colliding metal, the world spinning in circles. I landed with a jarring thud onto the cool asphalt. As I lay there, watching the shape of my Dad move away from me, I imagined I had finally seen it—a glimpse of the darkness that shrouded the hills of Vietnam, a heavy boat drifting into the unknown.

“Dad!” I called out in a shaky voice. Tears welled up in my eyes. The other biker stood up, and joggers watched from a distance. “Dad!” I felt I had been waiting for this for a very long time.

“I’m going to die!” I cried out loud. The sky grumbled above the Schuylkill River. Fog rolled along the rocky crag that flanked the road. I shouted again, “I’m going to die!” Suddenly, a large figure pulled alongside me. Strong arms reached down under my armpits and hoisted me off the ground.

“Chester, are you hurt?” Dad’s cheekbones were raised into pained dimples, pinching his dark eyes into swollen slits. I hugged him and sobbed into his chest. Even on the weekends, his skin and clothes carried the familiar smell of burning and grease from hours spent by the grill in the cramped, steel hull of the lunch truck.

I sputtered as I choked out words. “Someone, call the ambulance!” No one moved. “Chester, what’s wrong? You’re okay, you’re not hurt.” Dad still held me. Some metal part had scraped my legs, and blood collected in the cracks of my fingers. The other biker stepped out of the small semicircle of concerned onlookers and held out his water bottle.

When I stretched out my hand, he poured a steady stream, cleaning off the blood pooled in the edges of my fingernails.

Dad walked me over to a wooden bench by the river. I waited for him to drive back with the hulking Toyota Sequoia, the car he towed the lunch truck to work with each morning. I did not think about why I said I was dying—instead, I watched the rowers drag their slim vessels onto the decks of the ornate boathouses, saw them looking up towards the sky with anticipation. I would not understand why until years later, when I could think about Dad’s stories without shuddering at night, when I could write them down on paper like adventure books from the library.

Dad did not believe I was hurt, and he was right, I was nowhere close to dying. But for a moment, I wanted to be. I wanted to be close to those events that happened an ocean away, closer to Dad than I could ever get from holding onto him. The rain began to patter against my hair, graze my face—but the truth was, I smelled it before I felt it, the sharp, wet aroma that breathes through a window screen on rainy city afternoons.

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*You walk up the dirt road, past small one-room houses until you arrive at yours. Your mom makes rice on the open fire. When she sees you, she acts despondent. Why are you back? She doesn't fool you—you saw the flash of relief cross her face. The boat wasn't there this time either, you tell her. You know it hurts her to say goodbye over and over, just to see you straggle back each time. So the next week, you leave without saying goodbye. This time you don't come back.*

I knew I was in trouble as soon as I walked into the house. My grandma, who I call Mama, could barely contain herself as she exclaimed in high-pitched, broken Cantonese while waving her arms above her head, until Dad went by her side and asked, “What’s the problem?”

Mama pointed at me. “That crazy boy was standing in middle of the street waving his arms like this!” She demonstrated.

I was, in fact, doing jumping jacks in the middle of the street. I should have known she would watch us from her 2nd floor window—she was probably keeping watch the whole time. While Dad was getting groceries out of the car trunk, I was thrilled to discover, for once, that there were no cars passing either way on north 2nd street, and proceeded to take advantage of this invaluable opportunity to dance in the maws of death.

Dad did not believe her. He did not believe a lot of things his mom

said, and I was too embarrassed to tell him. So I let him yell at Mama.

For most of my life, Mama occupied the 2nd floor of our house in Olney, Philadelphia, while my brother Anthony and I shared a room on the first floor, next to our parents' room. She needed a cane to walk around, and spent most of her days sitting in her large black lounge chair. We ate family dinners every night, and Dad would take the fish we cooked and select the parts of the fish without bone for her, because Mama lost her teeth years ago and couldn't pick out the bones herself. When we went on school field trips, Dad told Mama we were downstairs doing homework. He said we had to do this so that Mama wouldn't worry. Oftentimes she wouldn't believe us either, accusing Dad of gambling at casinos when he was actually at work.

I often found it hard to connect to Mama. She never left the house, except when Dad brought her to the Vietnamese doctor who saw too many patients each day in his small, crowded office, or when we went to restaurants in Chinatown for someone's birthday. I felt that she did not understand my world—she spoke no English, and I had never really had a conversation with her.

I have a particular memory, of Anthony and me playing basketball in our cement backyard. Olney was our playground, and we would ride our bikes along the sidewalks, around the dilapidated houses with shabby windows and the porches enclosed by metal bars. When we dribbled the basketball, the sound of the ball rebounding from the concrete reverberated around the block. One time, some kids from the neighborhood showed up and started playing with us. Mama saw them through the back door and came outside, shouting in Chinese for us to stop playing, to tell everyone to leave. The other kids glanced over and ignored her. Anthony and I were uneasy—we felt something was wrong, but we didn't respond to Mama either. We were not sure how to tell the other kids to leave, even though most of them seemed our age or younger, in third or fourth grade. Maybe ten people showed up in our backyard to play basketball, as Mama continued to call out to us in an increasingly insistent and urgent tone.

The grinding of wheels on the concrete announced Dad's car pulling into the driveway, the steel lunch truck in tow. When he got out of the driver's seat, he told Anthony and me to get inside the house. As we were shutting the metal door, we heard him lecturing the kids that they couldn't just be on other people's backyards, and telling them to go home. Afterwards, he helped Mama stand up from the steps and walk back up the stairs into the house.

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Each night, after dinner, Dad and I watched world news on 6abc

in the living room. Images of the Iraq war still play in my mind—I remember the two news anchors who left the air because one of them was injured by a roadside bomb while reporting from Iraq. After that, during the summer months, we might watch a historical Chinese drama in Cantonese, when I would pick out the words I understood and guess the rest.

One night, after Dad turned off the TV, I asked him again about his stories.

“Why did you leave Vietnam, Daddy?”

*Because there was no freedom.*

“How old were you?”

*Twenty One.*

“What was the boat like?”

*It was really crowded, and I was seasick the whole time. We were caught twice. The first time the coast guard caught us leaving, but people bribed them with jewelry and money.*

“Did you lose anything?”

*No, I had nothing. The second time we were caught by pirates, who we bribed with whatever they had left.*

“How long did it take?”

*A week.*

“What happened when you got to Thailand?”

*I lived in a refugee camp for two years.*

“Where did you sleep?”

*On a tiny floor with many other men. The camp was in an old jail.*

Dad’s stories always seemed so unbelievable, like one of the fiction books I loved reading from the library, which I would carry back home in armfuls as high as my chin. I would ask him again and again, trying so hard to imagine what it was like to be in his shoes, trying to think about how I would act if I were him. I had always wanted to see a picture of him as a kid my age, even though none survived. Maybe a family portrait, a picture of him playing marbles on the street as a teenager, or a shot from when he watched the communist army drive through the streets of Saigon.

“Were you afraid, Daddy?”

*No. I didn’t know how to be afraid.*

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*You hear a thunderous crashing sound at night. Bright lights flare through the window, much brighter than the gunfire you see flickering in distant mountains. Someone stops at the front door, out of breath—a helicopter has crashed down the street, and houses are on fire.*

Red and blue lights flashed through the vertical slits in the window blinds, drawn out in long, thin lines against the ceiling. I crawled on the carpet until I reached the wall, where I extended my arm up—2-2-3-2—and deactivated the motion alarm.

Dad strode across the room and opened the front door of our house into the muggy summer night. I ran to him and peeked outside from around his waist. The warm, solemn breeze spun rose petals, from the scraggly bush next to our door, in circles on our stoop. Fireflies danced in the small plot of grass in front of our house, and an ambulance rested outside our neighbor's home. The family was Vietnamese, I knew—their son and I used to talk to each other from the balconies of our houses. When a police officer walked by, Dad pushed me back into the room, telling me to stay in the hallway. He called out to the cop, "Is everything OK, sir?"

The family's father was stabbed on his porch while out for a smoke. It was like the reports Dad hated watching on the local news, with the names of places we passed by every day, and occasionally the correspondent reporting from Olney. I remember watching from behind the clothesline on the balcony, neighborhood boys plastering the next-door house with paintballs—*WAM WAM WAM*, the splattered bullets clanging on impact with the water boiler.

When I went to my room to sleep that night, I stayed awake in bed. I remembered a book I had read in school recently, in which the main character's best friend dies, and I had cried at night thinking about it. I was afraid of death because I was afraid of the unknown, of what I envisioned as a dark void extending forever and ever, farther than the eye could see. I realized death wasn't something that just occurred between the covers of my books—that although Dad's stories seemed the stuff of lore, his experiences were as real as the summer wind, rushing down a canyon of unkempt row houses to wash over my uncalloused hands, my young face. I wanted to feel that boat rocking underneath my body, the twinkling of stars unable to hold still in the night sky.

After he had shut the metal front door, Dad walked around to all the windows and the back door, making sure everything was locked. I had reactivated the alarm. But something slipped past our deliberate defenses. As I lay in bed, as if it were coming to me from a vast distance, I watched the slow pulse of a firefly's light, ebbing and flowing against the dark ceiling.

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*You step off the boat and immediately fall into the lapping waves of the shallow shore, legs collapsing like jelly from lack of use. Soaking*

*wet, you crawl onto shore and into your new life, the immobile land shaking uncontrollably beneath your stumbling limbs. With some help you rise slowly to your feet, and realize you are standing in a bright field of sunflowers, bowing in waves to the horizon.*

Particles of aquatic dust still float in the water from when Dad rummaged through the pebbles with the vacuum nozzle, sucking up fish poop. The room hummed peacefully with the pulse of the aquarium filter, the artificial current churning clean water through the large glass box, big enough for me to fit inside comfortably. The foot-long silver Arowana fish, mastiffs of their watery world, each with a gray gnarled tooth protruding from the tips of their mouths, loped slowly in circles. The skittish disk-shaped fish, also silver but with red splotches, eyed them nervously.

I leapt off the sofa and sprinted toward the hallway, forgetting for a moment that the fish were easily spooked by fast-moving blurs in the glass. Too late. When I dashed by, one of the Arowana fish smacked its tail violently against the glass and leapt out of the tank. All the muscles in its body thrashed against the ground, spraying fishy water and propelling itself off the ground again and again. I screamed for Dad, who sprinted into the room. He cornered the fish out of water, using a bare hand and a net, and dropped the struggling fish back into the tank, where it jolted around the tank in a few rapid laps before becoming very still.

I think the leaps of the Arowana fish had always shocked me because I saw the tank as a visor into a different world. We controlled everything about the water, from its cleanliness with our monthly vacuum sessions, to its temperature with the heater that ran during the winter months. I would reach out to touch the smooth glass as the red parrotfish kissed my fingers on the other side. I blew up my cheeks at them, moved my clapped hands in undulations, but ultimately they were within, and we were without. I wonder if it was like being born anew, breaking out of the rectangular confines of one's world into unexpected, open space.

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We stayed at Bailey's casino where my Auntie was pit boss and had gotten us free rooms. I wandered through the barrage of slot machine sounds and cigarette smoke, shirt pulled over my nose, until I reached sliding doors facing the sea.

Atlantic City had a long boardwalk along all the casinos with carnival piers jutting out to the water. When it got warm enough in the early afternoon, Anthony and I ran out to stand at the edge of the sting-

ing cold water, afraid to enter any further. Dad smiled at us, beckoning. “Come on, you have to put your whole body in!” He waded into the gray water until he was waist-deep, before bending his knees with a grunt until only his head was visible above the swelling waves.

I pushed slowly away from the shore and dropped my head under the waves. The shock of the cold shot me straight back up, and I paddled my arms and legs fiercely to keep warm, yelling to Anthony through chattering teeth about how cold the water was. Dad was wading toward us in exaggerated steps, his curly black hair plastered against his head, when a large wave caught him unexpectedly from behind and knocked him into the water. He came up spluttering and blowing snot out of his nose as Anthony and I roared with laughter. We jumped in time with the waves, making sure our heads stayed above the water as we threw our shoulders into the impact. We kept ourselves submerged to the neck until the ocean felt warm and the air was frigid. The water mirrored the overcast sky—the sand was littered with cigarettes and soda lids. The dirty salt breeze stiffened our hair as we listened to the calls of the seagulls that searched for bread among the scraps of human lives.

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*Your stomach is inside out from retching bile. The teaspoons of rice you were given have settled into the sea, and your head throbs. Lying fitfully on the floor of the boat, hands wrapped around knees held tightly to your chest, you hear a faint wailing from below deck. The crying grows louder—your eyes fly open. A baby has been born on the boat. Later, when you hold your newborn son at a Philadelphia hospital, when his cries echo through the room, you remember this moment.*

When I think about childhood, I think back to family drives home at night, three generations of us moving swiftly on the Philadelphia highway. Long shadows stretched and slid on the dashboard under the incandescent, soothing orange glow of highway lamps saluting overhead. We would have been coming back from Tai Wu, my favorite restaurant in Chinatown—the sounds of chattering families would have been so loud then, we wouldn’t talk the whole ride back. The only noise was the humming of the highway, the regular thud of the wheels against steel connectors in asphalt.

Dad drove the car, his muscular, tanned arm outstretched, his hand pressed firmly against the top of the steering wheel. I sat behind him on the left seat, my shoulders shrugged, my elbows pressed tightly against my body as I resisted both carsickness and the scratching of my itchy sweater. Mama sat to my right, the darkness of the Schuylkill River



winding its way into sight outside the window as I looked past her. In a moment, Boathouse Row would rise above the highway guardrails, vivid lights adorning the houses reflected against the opposite shore. Dad turned his head back for a moment and his dark eyes met mine. Even before he spoke, though, I knew what he meant. *Show Mama the lights.*

Mama faced forward, serene and unmoving. Her heavy jade bracelet against a blue-veined wrist hung loose. Looking into her face often felt like staring across a dark, vast ocean, searching for a flicker on the other side, some glimmer of a toothless smile. I had always feared this dark, swelling void, unable to fathom what lay between Mama and me. In this moment, though, I reached out and touched her wrist. She turned to stare at me with her sunken eyes, wrinkled eyelids fluttering and mouth ajar in surprise as I pointed out the window.

“Look, Mama.”

The boathouses rose above the unseen flow of the Schuylkill River. The lights etched the buildings from darkness—yellow Christmas lights, outlining the roofs and windows, the doorways and arches. As Dad ferried us through the night, Mama and I watched the lights across the river, together on the same shore for a moment in time, admiring the brilliant glow until it passed from view.

# JULIANA CHANG

## Name Shame

For me, my legal name Ting Wei Chang has always been associated with dreaded AP exams, awkward first day of school roll calls, and long lines at airport immigration. It's never been a name I've liked or used unless out of complete necessity.

Even though Juliana doesn't appear anywhere on any of my legal records, it's the name I've always identified far more with. Juliana is the name I sign receipts with, applied to summer internships with. It's the name I tell the Jamba Juice employee who's making my Mango-a-go-go smoothie.

When my parents first moved our family to America 17 years ago, they immediately made the decision to not go by the Anglicized versions of our Taiwanese names, but instead chose new, American names for us all. My dad, Cheng Ming Chang on his passport, became Calvin, and my mom, Huei Ling Lin in the eyes of the government, went by Michelle. My little brother, the only one of us to be born in the United States, had Spencer Chang written on his birth certificate, his Chinese name an afterthought that took my mom another two years to come up with after his birth.

For most of my life, my legal name has just been a minor hassle, the sort that leads to incidents like my 4th grade yearbook printing two photos of me as the completely identical twins "Juliana Chang" and "Ting Wei Chang." Even after my dad moved us back to Taiwan, I never felt any sort of conflict in regards to having two names. It was annoying, and occasionally hilarious, but never something that weighed heavily on my mind--until I started applying to college.

In the months between application deadlines and results, I remember dreading the moment when my admissions officer would open up my report to see the name "Ting Wei Chang." I dreaded the images of scheming, tiger-mom-raised, test-taking robots it might conjure up, especially considering that I was applying from a high school located in East Asia. I resented my name, and how those three little syllables negated the hours I spent laboring in AP Mandarin, melted me into a piano playing, math loving, tiger mom obeying student who was nothing like me. And so I fought, in every way I could: applying as a Creative Writing major, taking US History for my SAT II, writing about Ovid for my college essays; I did all of these things because they were true to my interests, but I'd be lying if I said they weren't also defensive maneuvers,

covertly trying to separate myself from as many Asian stereotypes as I could while still showcasing my person, Juliana.

In the end, it worked. I ended up in my dream school, where I've continued to write about Ovid and study creative writing. Although I thought getting into college would alleviate my shame regarding my name, it simply morphed into relief that I had managed to "slip by." My Asian-ness, so succinctly presented in the three short syllables of my legal name, had been sufficiently disguised under Latin classes and literary magazine positions so that I could slide past racial quotas and higher SAT standards. Whether I should be happy or horrified, I don't know.

I wonder if these feelings of resentment and shame were what my parents had pictured when they made the decision to rename our family. Were they excited by the prospect of a new life in the Western world, picking out newfangled names like jelly beans in the candy store, rolling each one around their mouth, feeling the way its sound melted onto their tongue? Or were they trying to shield us from judgment, in a country where your name can decide whether or not your job application ends up in the reject pile and introducing yourself as Jae Heung summons questions about your lack of an accent and "Did everyone there really love Kim Jong Il?"

I love my American name, but I also wonder what sorts of fears motivated my parents to rename me Juliana. I wonder if I, so eager to correct teachers during roll call and fill in the "preferred name" box at every given chance, have helped perpetuate a system of discrimination based on race and identity. Is my desire to not be associated with my Taiwanese name and the stereotypes it carries reflective of my discrimination against my own culture?

I hope not. But something about the way "Ting Wei" feels so foreign on my tongue tells me that I should know better.

# TIFFANY CAO

## Intergenerational Sore Throats

A grain of rice in the throat is indistinguishable from the sore throat symptoms of an oncoming cold. The first day I feel the lump in my throat, I, ever hopeful, swallow twice as often and twice as hard as I normally do. When the feeling lasts longer (as it often does), I begin to have inklings that something worse is at play. I bypass the common cold and instead wonder if something is *really* wrong. I play the “Keep clicking Wikipedia links until you get to ‘Jesus’” game but instead of landing on “Jesus,” I start at the “Sore Throat” page on WebMD and keep clicking until I reach a diagnosis that declares me “dead.” I don’t have the time or the energy to meditate on the end of my life, so the remedies on the “Sore Throat and Other Problems - Home Treatment” page will have to do.

***Advice #1: Do not smoke or use other tobacco products.***

When I was little, a sore throat never made me anxious. If it turned into a cold or, better yet, the flu, I had a case for staying home and avoiding constructing Egyptian pyramids and fighting over the sugar cubes to build them. Colds these days have far worse consequences - losing a few hours for homework, the misery of grogginess in class (though these fears may reveal instead how much I have bought into the cult of productivity).

Sometimes, I’m unlucky enough to have Mom call. Sore throats from cheering, cigs, or disease all sound the same over the phone. “*Duyen-ah!*” she will yell, “Take care of yourself!” She launches into a salvo of “you should”s - wear socks, drink tea, sleep... Ginger tea is the remedy she swears by. If she has enough free time, she will rush ship a box of fresh, ground ginger through USPS and throw in a bottle of herbal pills to improve digestion for good measure.

***Advice #2: Gargle with warm salt water to help reduce swelling and relieve discomfort.***

Mom tells me stories of floating on driftwood and brining in warm waters. She had dared to leave Vietnam but when the Viet Kong discovered her body afloat and boat in pieces, they sent her to jail. When I was little, she told me bedtime stories painting sepia-toned tableaus of her

old life. Her brothers, young and foolish, held on too long to firecrackers and biked too fast between cars. She was the wise and athletic older sister, trilingual and destined to live out her agricultural science dream on a farm. Some chapters into an immigration story later, instead of ploughing soil, she was ploughing through linens of hotel bedrooms.

For years, she turned over mattresses and scrubbed bathrooms. She reveled in each five-dollar bill intended for the help, hidden under pillows away from grimy manager hands. Her hotel stint ended suddenly, though, when a supervisor found her white uniform and language impairment particularly sexy. Mom never told me what happened, only concluding with Life Lesson #10086: “Be wary of men.”

***Advice #3: Hot fluids, such as tea or soup, may help decrease throat irritation. Fluids may help thin secretions and soothe an irritated throat.***

In ‘93, Dad moved to Canada to be with Mom. Every night after work, he handed over to her the blisters running along his fingers. I imagine she would cradle his hands, admiring his right thumb, nail split in half, red-black and sewn together like an earthquake fault line. With extreme attention, she’d pick up a sewing needle. Pop, Pop, Pop. Next, alcohol wipes, then bandages. In Calgary, he wasn’t an electrical engineer - just an immigrant in a production line, ineffective gloves his only protection from the scorching water this job required he dip his hands into. At least this job paid better than his stint as a Japantown dishwasher.

***Advice #4: If you suspect that problems with stomach acid may be causing your sore throat, see topic Heartburn.***

Some lost voices persist in the face of time and ginger tea. Sometimes, what you treat comes back because you haven’t fixed the problem, not really. No matter how many cups of tea and salt water you concoct.

I couldn’t speak, Mom. It wasn’t my fault. I drank all of that tea and slept lots. They made the choice for me, the choice to be speechless. Those men who were entitled to my skin and femininity. Their large bodies pressed upon mine. They sent texts screaming, “*I want you to know me in your free time before you graduate.*” Fight, flight, or freeze? My vocal cords froze, immobile, exposed, and cold on a disheveled pull-out sofa.

Brandy Lien Worrall digs into the roots of her breast cancer in *What*

*Doesn't Kill Us* and blames her pain on the "Agent Orange that seeped into Mom and Dad's skin, eyes, noses, mouths, into their blood, mutating despite optimism or blind faith that it was completely harmless." My parents believed in the harmlessness of "make sure you accommodate others, keep them happy." Of "keep your head down and work hard even when you have a workplace bully." Of "women are not too loud and close their legs when they sit and don't dress the way you do."

My dad taught me to read and my mom taught me algebra, but neither taught me to put on my oxygen mask before assisting others. If Agent Orange and alcoholism can seep across generations, why not silence?

# ANONYMOUS

In December 2010, during the week of my 10th grade final exams, my father was arrested by I.C.E. and subsequently deported for overstaying his visitor's visa. I had never known he was an illegal immigrant.

As I reflect upon the past five years of my life without my father at home, I observe that depression, anxiety, and insecurity have all become unwanted friends of mine. I know full well that suffering befalls us all, yet I found that this rationalization of inevitable misery produces only more thoughts of self-destruction and sadness.

Perhaps my greatest sin was acting with apathy and complacency. Filled with angst and loathing, I knew not what to do with my life. However, I put up a cheerful smile at school, and I worked endlessly to cope with my depression. I strived to reach my goals of academic excellence through top grades and getting accepted into top colleges—sometimes I wish that by fulfilling both my father's dream and mine I could somehow bring him back home.

As I internalized my suffering, I let out my emotions and insecurity on my family. I spit poison at my mother and sister for the most trivial of things, and sought ways to avoid accepting responsibility through videogames and idleness. My father would call weekly from the Philippines, but as the months of separation turned into years, I found myself reluctant to answer. The close proximity of my beloved father's voice from the phone only made clear the distance his absence created. I despised myself for not loving my family like I should have.

That following summer, I realized that my self-destructive attitude truly decayed my values and integrity. In a strained telephone conversation with my father, who undoubtedly suffers more than me, he told me, "sometimes I feel like you don't love me anymore." His words pierced my heart like daggers as I burst into tears. My world of apathy and complacency shattered when I realized that I had failed to provide and help the most important people of my life.

I could no longer simply ignore and avoid the suffering of me and my family. Instead of deepening scars like before, I encourage my mother and my sister to eat together once more at the dinner table like a family. I hold my tongue so I no longer shout back at my sister or mother, for I understand their pain as well. When my mother, sister, and father ask, "How was your day, John?" I now tell them every little detail about my day. I remember the importance of family and love and with those values I try to help myself and my loved ones.

Throughout the majority of my high school life, despite the pain and loss, I refused to let this hardship tear me asunder. With the support

of my family, friends, teachers and counselors, I have overcome the psychological and emotional burdens placed upon me and achieved my personal goals as an excellent high school student, water polo player, speech team officer, Junior Statesmen of America officer, and a caring friend, brother, and son. I know that if I work hard, stand with conviction, stay true to my family and my values, that even in the face of adversity, I will succeed.

Thank you for reading about my personal struggle.



# VISUAL ART

# MOMO HOSHI

**Geishas Are Not Prostitutes**



# ANONYMOUS

*I am Chinese-  
American*

*They call me  
Foreigner*

*I don't know  
Why*

*Am I considered  
Perpetual Foreigner?*

*I am my own  
Maker*



# POETRY

# CLARA LUU

## Mid-Autumn

In an affectionate way, she laid the fruits neatly on the table,  
green apples and grapes and persimmons. They looked sweet in the red  
candlelight,  
the spiced sandalwood scent lifting out of the tent's top flap, swirling  
into the deep night  
above us. The delicate teacups with little blue dragons sat in a line, ready  
to receive  
mouthfuls of fragrant oolong tea.  
I stared at the glowing red tips of the incense,  
and watched them ashing into grey.  
Amah started to sing a little song about duck eggs,  
that were so delicious, nobody knew about them. Like they were some  
passed-down  
home-cooking secret, like this very memory feels like a secret that exists  
only in the  
warmth of my mouth and the good faith of my cerebral cortex. Like the  
little yolk secrets  
that mooncakes hold inside, salty orange orbs that you can crumble  
with your tongue,  
savoring the salty chalkiness of dried preserved egg before the bits melt  
in the orifice of  
your moonlight hungry mouth.

## Elegy from an American Grandchild

She is old,  
Her skin a translucent green,  
Pulled smooth in coolness.

She calls out  
It is lonely here,  
It is cold.  
Turn me over, turn me over  
Let me sleep.

Let me fall asleep among visions of homeland  
In candlelight and to smells of rain and ripe fruit,  
To the chanting of monks that echo through small streets  
I'll follow the red tips of incense, follow them home.

At least... I think that's what she means.  
When I was small, she fed me and held me,  
Cradled me, rubbed spicy green oil on my forehead.  
Now I hold her, swollen and fragile,  
And we babble like babies do.

Hello, hello, I love you, are you okay?  
It's okay, it's okay, lay down. Lay still.  
Hello, hello, hello,  
I call out to her in little pieces of Tiếng Việt, tong hùa.

But she cannot hear me,  
My voice fades away in her labored breaths.  
She is drifting, in and out of sleep, in and out of consciousness,  
She wakes up, startled,  
and finds herself stranded again in California,  
She goes back to sleep, tries again.

When she finally goes, I will be even more lost,  
I will be a green wave rushing up onto a rocky shore,  
Separating from the bodies of water that have carried me so far.  
I will be fling myself wholly into a dry land  
that will not always want me, but will consume me, slurp me up.  
I will be a green wetness, swallowed...  
And I will bury my grandmother on American terms,  
Drape her body with beautiful English words  
And blankly watch the sky for white birds.

# JANNA ZOU HUANG

## Egg Whites

In the wake of—

balloon drugs, buses,

sifted dust, couches,

everything was spilling.

A trail of white cream trickles

out in thin streams,

and spirals into the black abyss.

Around and around and around,

until what's left is the natural milky brown

and everything drowns.

Outside, the white water of the morning sky also spills,

pushing into the corners of this pocket of the world

and pulling with it the remains of the previous day.

It engulfs the once vibrant hues of my plum

red toes, my grass

yellow hair, my ocean

blue eyes, eggs,

The egg is simple

and segregated,

The egg white, in its firm and hard-boiled form,  
does not dare to spill into the creamy yellow of its core.

It desperately tries to hold onto something  
when the world is already slipping.

Inside, the white man orders hard-boiled eggs.

He sits, alone, at a table set for four.

The glossy white bulbs are ushered out on a plate,  
and he carefully takes his spoon and delicately,  
surgically slices through the milky flesh—

cuts the egg into halves, then

takes great care in carving away

the revealed egg yolk from the glossy egg whites.

Leaving the half moon yolks in a separate plate, he eats the  
white—sir, have you done this before?

This doesn't seem to be your first time—his

craft, it seems to warn from the egg yolk.

Like a child playing a game of

Red with red, blue with blue, yellow with yellow,

he plays the game of white on his tongue and in his body,

and yellow for the small plate, to be disposed of in the

restaurant trash can, then transported



from a garbage truck, then settling  
into the landfill, decomposing organically amidst  
the shiny plastic bottles, the rusting shards of metal,  
the cardboard.

But, sir, I'm sorry I just have to say—  
do you know about the egg yolk?

The golden sun in the egg that creates life.

An object without form but somehow still  
finds its place in the center, in all its glory.

They say that the chicken is the egg's way of making another egg.

In the fire, the white conglomerates and traps  
this yellow sun in, condensing it in, making it  
unusual in texture and crumbly...

(But who am I to talk about your egg-eating habits,

I suppose it really isn't my responsibility to speak.

I guess I'm just so fixated on this because

eggs, with all their potential for cultivating life,  
were thrown like hand grenades that dropped on my people.)

While I,

in a washed up world, where the cold white light  
already soaks into the private parts of me like seawater,

where the white water is controlled by the moon up in space,  
sit staring at the half-shaded egg yolk moons  
that sit collected on your plate.

# JULIANE TRAN

April 30

Mine is not a name drawn in a lottery of suffering--  
I claim, with the words of the conquered  
Tucked away  
In each trace of my fingerprints,  
In the folds of my eyelids.  
My face is streaked with communiqués of a war among brothers  
Divided in the name of loyalty  
To the greater good--an epitaph nebulous as mist.

Encamped above us the moon  
Lies static, yet seems to crackle.  
I'm the child of a writer who leaned in closer  
To his transistor radio, to snatch each soldier's stutter.  
I'm the child of a writer who mourned her motherland  
Over sheaves of paper in a foreign tongue  
At midnight.  
I'm sitting before a keyboard, my fingers frozen  
With cynicism, observing impassibility  
In peaks of ambition,  
In wounds like chasms.

Despite or because of this, we must write.  
We must pray over each earnest, collapsing face  
We must labor to remember each dusky body drowning  
And urgently we must read the signs of revolution.  
Will this river swell with life, or divide the land?  
When we kneel to drink, will we taste our dead?  
Will the waters of our poetry come to  
Nourish or numb us?

With the inscription of these questions in my hand, it is clear  
Mine was not a name drawn in a lottery of suffering.  
I can be only as scarred as a swamp lotus  
Blossoming from burning tar.  
I will make the lifeblood of people  
Betrayed by their people  
Mean more.  
I will climb the mountain of bodies convulsing with classism,

Trampled and trampling in escape,  
Because my birth carries the legend,  
The burden, and the blessing  
Of a village's weight in chemical weapons.

## Mission Boulevard

Love is growing up the child  
Of Silicon Valley engineers.  
Truly after either the world is  
Yours to conquer.  
You're capable of anything at all,  
having braved the eggshell  
stucco and green maze that coiled down  
to your core.

The place you first laid with a lover  
Was up in the cloud.  
Your parents needed iron gates,  
Firewalls, arching windows  
Through which only sun and moon and light  
Could enter.

Everybody wanted success  
At prices they did not understand,  
Bred high-performance babes who bled out their angst  
Instant message by message, alone at their desks,  
In a silent flare of electromagnetic waves.

Then when they're grown up  
In oceanside cities,  
Opportunities open before them  
Like steamed oysters,  
While they strive for their own tongues to hold onto the pearl.  
Their memories of love are like riding  
A speeding train,  
Geography as a picture show in the night.

Memory can take us back home  
Or beyond  
Like the whirring of a diskhead  
Which beams a lone vigil  
Over our dreams.

We observe ourselves from behind a lens.  
Estimate what investment of love we can garner,  
Our likelihood of return.  
We call these calculations a lullaby.  
Sitting in the passenger car, we hold ourselves close.

# MARK FLORES

## Kowtow

I learned the word from my father  
when he kneeled in front of his father's  
grave, put his hands down  
on the ground

and I watched  
as his forehead brushed the grass  
three times,

the first and only time I saw him bow.  
There was mud on his jeans

and when he stood and looked at me,  
I looked away.

# LAN-ANH LÊ

## The pond that once was but is no longer

I'm tired of the hollow of people-greeting and the repetitive eyes  
the cycles and the mundane whirls of telling strangers  
my name and where I come from and what I see ...  
your name's so hard to remember,  
or does it have a meaning, they say.  
Well since you've asked, dear strangers,  
It means, my grandma used to have a yellow kitchen full of blooming  
daffodils that was  
squandered by the stab of war

look at the clock and see the pinch of hurt, can you take me back  
since when did you ask me to come here for you to  
scrutinize my past or is my past a symbol you are looking for to add to  
your collection.

am I a cultural product worth cherishing to you,  
didn't you know, my incorporation is hindered, stopped at the  
bottleneck gate of American history  
"roots" and "voices," and I am not there now but will be then.

look at the clock and see the fears,  
no, like, you see how the terror just blended into the loss of the flight  
when you sit there and you give me all this lexicon,  
hierarchies, and oppression and cruel incremental wars,  
I laugh and think, how white is history.  
don't you know that the truths behind those spinning whirls of intellec-  
tual abstraction  
sit black and blue like the name that tells you a story  
the name that embodies my grandma's soul since she gave it to me  
does it have a meaning, they say,  
it means being born two generations from the thing we call war, I say,

does it have a meaning, they say,  
it means sometimes I have to stop myself from seeking retribution,  
I say

and to be  
here

everytime the empty resurfaces  
I gotta clamp down the noise that pleads

I am a long way from home  
and  
when you tell me to compartmentalize who i am  
do you think about how  
long, long, long  
the days are, the days i have spent not categorizing  
but re-erecting  
putting the yellow bricks back where they once were

and when that time  
in front of the party when you say i'm the first girl from nam that you  
like  
I wanna laugh 'cos who even says nam anymore  
wanna laugh  
because  
i have traveled these thousands of miles, left behind  
the daffodils sprawling on the dirt that is full of dead full of life  
to come here and be the first person from the place that  
your grandpappies have colonized, and  
bruised  
for you to find attractive,  
so maybe  
i just wanna hold your hand, take you home, sit you on my bed  
and make you have an internal monologue with your beautiful ignorant  
self  
about the truths that  
sit black and blue  
on my back, in my name,  
about how you are so unreal in every sense and I am left so disturbed by  
the rues of your beauty

that's why i'm telling you,  
"roots" and "voices," and i am not there now but will be then  
who even says nam anymore when it was your nation's grandest stage  
your beauty is stifled by your ignorance  
but rest assured  
I will be just the symbol to make your life a little less dull, a little less  
white  
a little less literal  
because you weren't there for the empty,



and you weren't even there for the dryness  
"roots" and "voices," and I am not there now but will be then  
It reminds me, nags at me, gnaws at me:  
you are a product of culture.  
Of the places you remember.  
all your life, deep rocky history, as empty as dry ponds  
remembered as nothing but twisted tales

### healing from anger from (bereavement)

on a clear day, a calf is being carried away on the highway in a truck.  
i am sleeping on my mother's menstrual blood by mistake, when Mợ  
swims toward me in my dream hold-ing an onion. a black sail on her  
back steers her body along the space between  
apartment buildings floating in water. i don't want to get mad again. the  
walls between our places are so thin that even without a passport she  
can break right in.

Mợ lifts up her skirt, the sail on her back wiggling in the wind. glimpse  
of blood under her skirt? my dream series ends at the image of a dump-  
ster filled with only used sanitary pads? i wake up breathing heavily.

...

in waking life, my bed sheets are lily white, clean... under the covers, i  
look down at my feet. by now they are caked in white sand. lost reveries  
crumble onto clean sheets and disappear.  
my feet have been trudging through the mud for so long; a bundle of  
dead gray hair twisted all around my face, preventing me from seeing  
properly —

i'm stubborn and defiant

::

so where should i go

...

another dream:

while my eyes are blinded by coils of foul dead hair, i am still able to  
read so many po-ems about politicized ghosts written by people from  
our region, đồng dương cũ...

in a palace built with emeralds in Đà Lạt, i take shelter from a dust storm — sipping red wine, fingering bullet holes on the wall, unraveling dead hair accumulated from years of unintentional assimilation and white-washing, gullibilities, manipulating and being manipulated,...

on the phone with you... “i understand why you didn’t trust me, girl..”  
from the bed which i’m crashin’ on  
i can see two green people standing in the corner...

...  
ghosts of past femininity come into a room together

when i was four, my mother couldn’t wake up one day, prostrate in bed.  
someone had to come over to clean the sheets dirtied by her menstrual blood. in her sleep, my mother couldn’t have stopped the blood.

...  
manipulative and manipulated people:

when i get up, i walk naked in confusion....., toward the walls. when i scratch against them, my memories ooze into existing waves of our rich complicated literature. i walk into the hole that my scratches have created.

...  
the next morning, my neighbor laughs by our shared balcony’s succulents, saying  
she’s heard me mumbling in my sleep but couldn’t tell my secrets because the murmurs were all in Việt Nameese. I wonder what I was saying in my dream. to my bleeding sleep-ing mom, and to Mợ. i grow up and become impertinent and disrespectful because i re-sent the very way in which i am. A mosquito lands on a dish of pig’s fat.  
good old sea-glass-studded Mợ, wearing a black corduroy leotard, chewing ice, sits in a closet shaped like an ostrich egg.

Mợ loses her uterus and when it leaves, it takes away her favorite plastic ring.

...  
...  
in an empty sport stadium built for the Olympics, i cry in anguish,...  
‘cause you have just called me  
beautiful.

...  
one afternoon after shampooing, sitting on my bed, i hear my father’s

sister's cries coming out of the roots of my hair; the faults of our domestic jealousy;  
in a desert of salted ice, angled against the cliffs, a house.  
inside, somebody didn't clean up that dish of fat and just left it in the kitchen.

...

once, the pouring urban rain catalyzed my speedy discolored healing.  
once,

i was in such a devastated state, i conjured crawling spirits from my imaginaries.

around the old Quarter, you'd find a room with blue lights and moaning in which there was a pink room with feathers. amidst the mildew on the walls are traipsed the ghosts of past griefs.

as if in a dream, you'd find smoke, flying entrails and the weathers recycling.

## Endless Meanders

*"Perhaps the process of self-alienation is a hallmark of both colonization and capitalism. Racial subjects are marked as other, alienated from themselves, from community. They are alienated from a sense of worth. [...] But what is real and what is fantasy in the colonial imagination?" - Viet Lê*

\*\*

*-June -*

What is beautiful and worth pursuing: dream-like vignettes of *A Story in the Process of Self-Alienation*,  
endless projects on staying true and the constant churning and re-making of her identity. The attributes, sugary wholesome person-hoods, bitter shards of marginalization that she have adopted, swallowed, discarded, or internalized, are all worth revising. The act of Surviving Pain and creating artistic expressions about and out of that experience of surviving.

She's beholden to the peoples who have nurtured her, caretakers like her sweet, stern, and unyielding grandmother. Gratitude shaped by a distinct cultural upbringing as elegant as antique blue ceramics. Dutiful sublime water in a child. As this world breaks into a crystal-glazed orb of petrifying beauty every day when the sun comes out, Thảo's entity thaws into ice-cold drinks that percolate through the serene swelling of the south-eastern world's hurt. The orb of pain is soaked in water of remembrance and a part is relieved...

The act of Surviving Pain and creating artistic expressions about that experience of surviving. These are the things she deems worth living for and worth pursuing. Dreams like pink plants try to sprout fast inside the girl's body, an insane over-reaching tenderness.

In a dream, grandmother came back to tease her, joshin', "Exiled vietnamese artists aren't conventional, an exiled vietnamese artist can be a freakish tigress. Exiled vietnamese female youths can grow spikes and turn into nonconformist coyote warriors. Coyotes walk like this. They do their history justice and pride." In cryptic dreams, coyotes experiment with forms to express pride.... But at the top of the mountain, history takes a turn, teaching the coyote humility. Pain of a personal past teaches my child humility. You've been awaiting this lesson. Life offers you some pain, and you will have to happily accept it perhaps because you bear a Third-World body, a woman body, a coyote body, a queer body, a communist body, a historically colonized body, the descendant of a whole family line of Viet-minh and Viet-cong body. And what that body needs to the most is to learn the enlightenment in being resilient — "The coyote is pushed off the mountain and she growls, in her eyes a tiny sharp green glint of fury. Now the coyote has to experiment with forms in order to explore not pride but the illuminating pain that are inevitably pushed upon dogs like her." This body wishes to be enlightened then to express... You underestimate the toxicity of pride, until you live the life that has been slapped onto your colored body. Years of wars and ancestral history can truly open otherwise ignorant eyes. Our ancestors are with us as the thunders murmur... Our ancestors are always here with us,...

*"let me out,"* her body whispers.

Thảo, don't let them do that to me,

*"let me out,..."* i'm your grandmother's soul.

Our ancestors are here with us as the thunders murmur.

Tigress eyes blink glassy tears, when guilt comes, gather constellations of wisdom into a basket.

the fragmented visualizing of a decolonizing world... Soft moaning echoes the past of these green expanses that we have occupied, until she is so enclosed, and spinning, that she stretches fingers against the silvery cobwebs of things that have been normalized in this world. The cobwebs stretch, tear, wound. Velvety web of a girl's mind bleeds into self-imposed impenetrable seclusion. You will take this distress, and you will swallow it, and you will not reject it... permeated by rich fragrances of the earth, the female birds, the lionesses gather around grandmother's hurt heart... a true sad love story, her auntie... "a girl separated from her mother because her mother is being incarcerated for political revolutions" -

When this girl leaves her home she will stay a Vietnamese girl,  
her personal history  
an opened pandora's pox. her body  
a wide open storage of endless thoughts, endless internal gnawing,  
and endless memories,  
slow but palpable healing,  
Her mind runs like this - broken words -  
scrubs, dirt water in the muck, socialism, dance quickly gracelessly,  
scrub, damn colonizers,  
rubbing so hard as to clean it, clean that country, clean those  
peoples, white-wash them, tear them up...

As this world breaks into a crystal-glazed orb of petrifying beauty, every day, when the sun comes out, Thảo's entity thaws into ice-cold water that percolates the serene swelling of this world's hurt. The orb of pain is soaked in her water of remembrance and a part is relieved...

*There is an empty furnished room in the Infinite House, Endless Meanders. Somebody realizes that the spiderwebs of life's loving and true care are so hard to find in a callous world. He is a landowner, but he owns... which kinds of lands? Stolen lands, occupied lands, sweet dying bleeding lands. We, born with forbidden flesh, forbidden bodies, yearn for the lands which the man has stolen, murdered, captured and made his own for the past hundreds of years. Thefts have left this side of the world full of snow-plains without life's whisperings*

*"broken memories fluttering inside the trees moving in the wind"*

---

- *September* -

This emotion is...  
tangerines rotting on the kitchen table.

...

a controversial yellow woman in maturation, skin becoming thinner, crispier by the day. pride and rind unravel.

her over-critical, surrealist dreams subsiding for a new era of lowered expectations. this makes living easy. what does it take for a (một thời) Việt Minh's and (một thời) guerrilla warrior's grand-daughter to appreciate her seemingly over-privileged, self-conscious life settled in Northern America?

...

for how many years of the girl's life has she been listening to father and uncles and aunts ruminating on upheavals of the past and chewing them over. What each broken person in her family has survived becomes a thread weaved through her, deep red swaying unorthodoxy.

each time a grandparent died, they became part of her she wills to remember... cat·a·clysm — “a sudden violent upheaval, especially in a political or social context” — the three wars in Indochina...

In Việt Nam, ceramic bowls painted with bean-flowers began cracking midnight blue the day her grandfather walked by five french soldiers tossing his friends' bloody corpses into the river... You can trace back a thousand more years and realize they all have been caught in a snarling net of being oppressed as well as oppressing. Western women's magazines advise, when you love someone you have to let them go. The question for a vietnamese girl would be, when you love someone, what should you do to their oppressors. open your palm to release the spirit of self-deprecating laughter. split open that spirit, you can find broken pottery.

Mai Lâm's days of self-righteous doctrine are winding down. exhausting was her twenty-first century perpetuation of vehement resistance against white people: french, american, etc. — “our colonizers.”.

Driving down a snowy slope way too fast. later, you'd realize you didn't know what you were doing, chasing justice. a young reckless child tasting bitter fruits of anger left behind by her grandparents. grandfather had five aliases during combat to maintain a nondescript guerrilla identity. bravery and cowardice are indistinguishable when you panic. you pick up that weapon or you hide; in a time of eating dirt and cassava, crawling in mazes and caves, ... sometimes you still have the power of choice... you pick up that weapon or you hide.

Now, onwards to modernity. In her: complications...

# JULIANA CHANG

## things inherited from my mother

my mother tongue, of hot oil and chili flakes  
my height, like a sentence cut short by a sneeze  
my sentences, always cut short by the next thought  
my “accidentally cutting off other people’s sentences with my own  
thought”  
my nail biting habit  
my eyebrow scrunching habit  
my eyebrow pencil collection  
my poetry book collection  
my need to get the last word  
my need to get the last word after someone else tries to get the last word  
my need to turn getting the last word into a screaming match  
my screaming matches  
our screaming matches  
our “walk into your room at 3am to apologize” matches  
my tendency to nag  
my tendency to ramble when unsure  
my habit of taking off my pants when I get home  
my habit of taking off my pants to say, “this is home”  
my dislike of egg yolks  
my dislike of rainy days  
my fear of dark hallways  
my box of nightlights meant for dark hallways  
my belief that inheritance is not a finale but a continuation,

when I was growing in her womb  
my body understood I was becoming an extension  
of the moon, my shadow had all of the sky to grow into.

when she calls to tell me  
she’s taking business classes at the community center now  
I can hear the ghost of the woman she wanted to become  
tumbling down her tongue,  
like a phantom fist someone once pried into a palm,  
like the echo of an old song

she wanted so badly  
to know by heart.





# EDITOR BIOS

**Stephen Murphy Shigematsu (Executive Editor and Faculty Advisor)**

teaches in Asian American Studies, Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity, and Psychology and is co-founder of the LifeWorks program in mindful learning. President of the NPO Nichibei Care, his research on transnational and transcultural themes is widely published in English and Japanese, including *When Half is Whole*, *Transcultural Japan*, and *Amerasian Children*. He received a doctorate in psychology from Harvard University and was professor at the University of Tokyo and Fulbright scholar.

**Mark Flores (co-Editor-in-Chief)** is a senior studying English, Human Biology, and Sociology. He is a full-time student, full-time co-chair of the Asian American Students' Association, and a full-time Ethnic Theme Associate at the Okada dorm. He is also looking for a full-time job. In his free time, he tends to his numerous cats, dogs, fish, bears, cows, sharks, and an assortment of mythical creatures, all either 100% cotton or polyester. He was born in the year of the dog. He barks, but doesn't bite. He's friendly, but not approachable. He drinks tea.

**Debra Tisoy Pacio (co-Editor-in-Chief)** is a recent graduate of the Class of 2015 at Stanford University. She earned a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature with departmental honors for her senior thesis on magical oral storytelling in Filipino-American literature. She currently writes for three divisions of Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County in her hometown of San Jose, CA. As a freelance writer and editor, her current professional goal is to translate her undergraduate objective of discovering unheard voices and sharing untold stories into a career in journalism.

**Surabhi Balachander (Senior Editor, Layout & Design)** is a junior double majoring in English and Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity. At Stanford, Surabhi is part of the Stanford Asian American Activism Committee (SAAAC) and works as an office assistant and peer advisor in the creative writing program. Outside Stanford, Surabhi volunteers with API Equality - Northern California, a San Francisco-based organization focused on building LGBTQ API power. Over the next year, Surabhi will be working on a creative and critical honors thesis exploring the intersections between agriculture and racism in literature.

**Mirae Lee (Senior Editor)** is a Junior at Stanford University, majoring in English and minoring in Digital Humanities. She was the Executive Producer of Stanford's Asian American Theater Project (AATP)'s 2014-15 and 2015-16 seasons and is a current board member, through which she hopes to increase the visibility of issues of race and representation. Mirae is also a research assistant for the Center for Spatial and Textual Analysis, where she hopes to analyze social trends using new methods. She is also a managing editor in ComicsVerse's Culture department, which seeks to discuss significant events and themes in our culture. In whatever she is researching, writing, or producing, she hopes to create a positive change in the world.

**Leow Hui Min Annabeth (Editor, 2015)** is a senior completing her master's in Modern Thought and Literature at Stanford University, where as an undergraduate she also majored with honors in Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity and minored in English. She is proud of her years as a pre-assignee and ethnic theme associate in Casa Zapata, Stanford's Chican@/Latin@ ethnic theme dorm, and hopes to spend the rest of her life working in the field of race-critical literary studies. With research interests in postcolonialism, nationalism, and queer theory, Annabeth has a chapter forthcoming this year in *The Gothic Tradition in Supernatural: Essays on the CW Series* from McFarland Press.

**Juliana Chang (Editor, 2016)** is a third culture kid who spent her childhood moving back and forth between the Bay Area and Taipei, Taiwan. She believes language was mankind's greatest invention, and splits her free time between Spoken Word Collective, Common Origins Dance, AASA, and watching Beyonce music videos.

**Hannah Nguyen (Editor, 2016)** is a freshman currently navigating the hyphen in "Vietnamese-American." She comes from Tucson, Arizona and has developed the power to shoot cacti at people.

**Nikki Tran (Editor, 2016)** comes from a town where the community water tower reads "A NICE PLACE TO LIVE" in Comic Sans. No one besides her finds this very funny. She studies English.

**Hope G. Yi (Editor, 2016)** (they/them) hails from the New Jersey part of New York and likes to ruminate about the psychology of cinematography. They prefer to communicate exclusively in gifs, and their spirit animal is Squidward Tentacles.

# CONTRIBUTOR BIOS

**Aki Yamada** attended Doshisha University in Kyoto, Japan with a Bachelor of Arts in Policy Studies. She continued studying at Doshisha University and received her Master of Arts in American Studies, studying at Stanford University for one year as a Freeman Spogli Institute Visiting Researcher. In 2015 she completed her Ph.D. in Education at the University of California, Los Angeles, writing her dissertation on new Japanese migrants and immigrants living in the United States. Her research interests include globalization, contemporary Asian immigration, transnational identity, and internationalization of higher education. Aki is now working as an Assistant Professor in the Empowerment Informatics program at Tsukuba University.

**Amy Chen** is a sophomore studying Computer Science and Art Practice, an editor-in-chief of Leland Quarterly, and a poet of Stanford's Spoken Word Collective. She is interested in the integration of technology into visual art and literature. An avid believer of taking things as they come, she hopes to do something generally related to that after graduation. It's unclear. Go to <http://amyjchen.tumblr.com/> for a constant stream of thoughts, musings, and things that she thinks are pretty neat.

Hailing from Albuquerque, New Mexico, **Annie Phan** is a senior at Stanford University double-majoring in English and Comparative Studies in Race & Ethnicity. After graduation, she plans on becoming a high school English teacher, incorporating her commitment to diversity, art, and identity into the classroom experience.

**Catherine Zaw** graduated from Stanford University in 2015 with a double major in biology and linguistics, as well as a Notation in Science Communication. She currently resides in warm humid Miami but while on campus, she was a residential staff member of Okada, managing editor of *The Stanford Daily*, and an active sister of Sigma Psi Zeta. She's often found eating breakfast.

**Chester Thai** is a sophomore majoring in Computer Science who is also taking classes in creative writing, history, and sociology on the side. Having delved solely into prose for most of his life, he is thoroughly enjoying reading and writing poetry in his Political Poetry class. He became interested in Asian American community organizing after participating in an Alternative Spring Break trip on Asian American Issues

this past spring break, and will lead the same trip next year. Chester recently joined Stanford Asian American Activism Committee (SAAAC) and, despite his lack of bodily coordination, the hip-hop dance crew Common Origins.

**Clara D. Luu** is a senior in Human Biology. As the eldest daughter of immigrants, Clara did not always appreciate her Vietnamese/Chinese heritage and struggled with cultural clashes for most of her life. Originally from San Jose, she did not come to appreciate the complexity and diversity of “Asian/American-ness” until most of the way through college. She enjoys working with the Institute for Diversity in the Arts and hopes to pursue creative writing, art-making, and arts/media administration after graduation.

**Debra Tisoy Pacio** is co-Editor-in-Chief of the 2015-16 issue of *The Stanford Journal of Asian American Studies*. Read more in the editor bios.

**Grace Chao** ‘14 MA ‘15 co-termed in English with a concentration in Creative Writing and a minor in Human Biology. At Stanford, Grace wrote for *The Daily*, worked at *Stanford* magazine, and played in a piano trio. A native of the Bay Area, she currently lives and works in San Francisco. Find Grace tackling Sunday crossword puzzles, snacking on bread, or reading: her favorite books include *Lolita*, *The Catcher in the Rye*, *Fun Home*, and *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*.

**Holly Slang** is a sophomore majoring in Human Biology and Theater and Performance Studies. She is very involved with student theater and spends a lot of time thinking about how to push the boundaries for representation in the arts. She founded the Stanford Women\* in Theater company to elevate female and non-binary voices and focuses on racial issues as the Publicity Chair for Asian American Theater Project.

**Jade Verdeflor** is a junior majoring in Human Biology with a concentration in Community Health Interventions for Migrant and Minority Populations. Hailing from Temecula, California, she enjoys playing the ukulele and eating churros. After taking an Alternative Spring Break course on Filipino and Filipino American issues, she realized how little she had known about the history of her motherland. This course and the subsequent service-learning trip inspired her to further explore her own Filipino American identity and use her experiences to encourage others to do the same.

**James Huynh '15** majored in Human Biology with a concentration in Cross Cultural Medicine. At the time of his photo submission, he was a senior at Stanford, where he was actively involved in the Asian American, activist, and public service communities. Currently, he is a 2015-16 Fulbright Fellow in Việt Nam. During his time in the Motherland, James is teaching English to high school students in an underserved province of the central region. He hopes to nuance his students' perspectives on America, and bridge the Vietnamese and Vietnamese-American gap.

**Janna Zou Huang** is a sophomore studying Symbolic Systems and is so excited to be contributing to this publication! You can probably ask her anything about the band Arcade Fire, or her thoughts on new media theory, cell phone photography, or the Cloud, and she can talk your ear off for about the next 2 hours. She is a staunch believer that pesto makes any food taste better, that it is worth taking time to read for fun, and that two beds are better than one when considering how to make your living space better. Recently, it has come to Janna's attention that one of her new favorite words is "snorkel."

**Jessica Shindo** graduated with a masters from Stanford's Center for East Asian Studies, focusing on food culture and Japanese cuisine. Her thesis was on unpacking the definition of the newest flavor, umami, and examining who contributes to its meaning and why it magically appeared in the broader food world only recently. Prior to this, she taught English for two years in Okayama prefecture, Japan. She is an ardent believer in the power food has to act as a bridge and gateway to different cultures. Jessica lives in the (east) East Bay and likes to adventure with her Husky, Koda.

**Joshua G. De Leon** is a Filipino American from Long Beach, California, majoring in International Relations and minoring in Creative Writing. He is a member of Stanford's Class of 2017 and an active part of the Filipino and larger Asian and Pacific Islander community on campus. His poem "this is how i'll remember you" seeks to capture a slice of the Filipino immigrant experience through the eyes of a grandson. Josh is passionate about issues at the intersection point of race, policy, education, and environmental justice, and knows he still has a lot to learn – but he's out to try.

**Juliana Chang** is an editorial assistant of the 2016 issue of *The Stanford Journal of Asian American Studies*. Read more in the editor bios.

**Juliane Tran** is a poet, teacher, and entrepreneur. Born and raised in Fremont, California, she went on to launch businesses in academic counseling and fashion design in Houston, Texas, before returning to the San Francisco Bay Area. She is currently at work on her first chapbook of poetry, which has been accepted for publication as a top-five finalist in the Weasel Press Chapbook Contest.

**Katherine Nasol** is a graduate of Stanford University with a major in International Relations and a minor in Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity. She is a staunch activist and community organizer, and her interests lie in immigration, gender justice, and human trafficking. For the past seven years, she has worked in grassroots, non profit, and policy sectors, developing programs that increase opportunities for marginalized communities to pursue their own community social change. She is currently a Peer Support Worker for Family and Children Services' LGBTQ Wellness Program, and the chairperson of Anakbayan Silicon Valley, an anti-imperialist Filipino youth organization.

**Kinjal Vasavada** is a junior at Stanford majoring in human biology (biodesign for human performance) and minoring in archeology (global heritage conflict). Her academic interests span many disciplines including biology, global health, and heritage politics. In her leisure, Kinjal enjoys playing tennis and badminton as well as photography, skiing, and martial arts.

**Lan-Anh Lê** is a Vietnamese artist and writer, based in Oakland, CA. She graduated from Stanford University with a BA in Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity in 2015. She has worked on the intersection between arts and activism with artists from ArtChangeUS and the Ford Foundation's "Future Aesthetics" program, including Jeff Chang and Roberta Uno. Currently, Lan-Anh is working on multiple projects in writing, visual art and film, revolving around the themes of Vietnamese (femme)ininity, intergenerational trauma, and subverting neoliberal hegemony. She is completing an experimental screenplay exploring how memories are stored and processed in the body in relation to trauma and childhood.

**Leena Yin** is a junior majoring in Biology and minoring in extracurriculars. She has been the Outreach Coordinator for the Asian American Theater Project for the past two years and produced AATP's spring show, *Yellow Face*, a comedic satire about racial identity by Stanford/AATP alum David Henry Hwang. She's interested in race/income-based

health inequities, and hopes to go to med school after graduation (if she can get in). In her free time, she can inevitably be found getting boba at Teaspoon.

**Leow Hui Min Annabeth** is an editorial assistant of the 2015 issue of *The Stanford Journal of Asian American Studies*. Read more in the editor bios.

**Mark Flores** is co-Editor-in-Chief of the 2015-16 issue of *The Stanford Journal of Asian American Studies*. Read more in the editor bios.

**Momo Hoshi** is a junior double majoring in Music and Product Design (for now), and minoring in Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity. She is a second generation (Shin-Nisei) Japanese American, which is an identity she is always trying to make sense of. She also has no idea what she wants to do with her life. Some days she wants to be a radical activist jazz musician, other days she wants to be a music and art therapist, and yet other days she just wants to be an old cat lady. Who knows.

**Renee Cai** is currently a freshman who is curious about everything and thus unable to major in anything. Her passions are eclectic, ranging from astronomy to art history, environmental sustainability to language-learning, vegan baking to travel journaling. Through writing, she seeks to explore the intersection of the sciences and humanities, discover hidden connections, introduce creativity to structure, and marry aesthetics to function. This summer, Renee will be doing physics research at CERN in Switzerland on the ATLAS Project and in the process, hopefully learn a bit more about what she wants to do in life.

**Tiffany Cao** is a senior majoring in International Relations. Her past four years have been a journey of realizing that an Asian-American identity is a POC identity and of learning to reaffirm Asian-American narratives, upbringings, and personalities in the face of institutions that place value elsewhere.

**Xiaohui Liu** got her doctorate from Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität (Germany) and master's degree from Fudan University (China). She majored in American cultural history during her doctoral studies. Her main research fields are immigrant studies and food studies. She plans to do future research on the impact of immigrants on natural environment.









