

The background of the cover is a high-angle, wide shot of a valley. In the foreground, there are rolling hills with sparse vegetation. The middle ground shows a vast, flat valley floor, likely a city or agricultural plain, with some structures and roads visible. In the distance, there are layers of mountains under a sky with dramatic, dark clouds and a bright light source on the right side, creating a lens flare effect. The overall color palette is dominated by blues, greys, and earthy tones.

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HENRY LEUNG & IRIS LAW

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FEATURE

SHROUD

Henry Leung

Skylawn Memorial Park in San Mateo housed my uncle's wake that summer. It was ornate in a way that seemed to me especially Western, though I don't know where to point to prove this; death is always expensive to excess. I was angry: The thought of more divisions in our family, this cemetery so far from my grandparents' in Pacifica, where at least the blackened bins of burnt joss paper make the place distinctly Chinese, whatever that means for us this many generations along—

And that my uncle had been converted to Christianity in the last week of his blight, not, as far as I know, from a lifelong anguish with it but from a swift hard-sell when vulnerable, from a pastor who would spend the wake bragging and proselytizing to the rest of us—
And even the address of the place, "Highway 92 at Skyline Boulevard," as though they owned trans-county traffic with their holes in the earth, with these dusty stones, with our decaying bodies.

We arrived, a few dozen of us, cousins, aunts, uncles, children in hushed tow, in the morning in our suits, some blacker than others, and so early that it felt like preparations for a flight. We lined up and sat in the chapel, in dismaying order, family groups rent on either side of the aisle. My uncle's face was printed on a large easel, a picture I recognized from an honor he'd been awarded as a JC Penney employee. Beside the easel: the open casket. Both of these faces stilled and hardened, imperfect memories.

I'd been asked to write something and read from it in the American way of eulogies. I had so little to say except in thanks too late to share: thanks for building my bedframe with his bare hands when we moved to California, thanks for teaching me to crush cans for recycling, and sanding wood and sawing pine boards and sipping tea just right, and driving us all to Los Angeles for a cousin's wedding once, when I was so young that all I remember of it now was a pit stop in the middle of the night at some blue-lit gas station in such a vastness I'd wondered briefly if we were homeless. My mother helped me write a version of his story in Chinese. He'd been the first in our family to swim across the border from Guangdong to Macau during the Cultural Revolution, to stow away to Hong Kong and

make it to America as a refugee. She told this to me in broad strokes at home, sitting cross-legged on a secondhand chair with three oblong lights on the wall behind her, as she rubbed the soles of her feet with her knuckles, as she apologized for not raising me better, as I sat and wondered when my growing-up had come to its end and why I hadn't noticed.

I was undecided up until the morning of the wake. My uncle's daughter waited for me in a lounge outside the funeral home's bathroom. I locked myself in to clean up after using a bad urinal, which spat everything back while flushing. When I came out, and she asked if I still wanted to say a few words, I shook my head no. How could I explain that there was no way to honor him the way I wanted to, in a way that felt sincere?

Later I would write a poem, "On Second Thought," beginning with the lines:

I'm asked to read something at the funeral
so I build my uncle's labors into an edifice.
But the dead die twice in our veneers.

Little window, big cold.

And a book of more poems would come out of that summer's grief and storytelling, in a language and inflection my uncle wouldn't have understood, but with a binding and a price tag which might have made him proud.

Until then, I sat in the pews between my mother and older sister. When it was our turn to rise and see the body, my mother's knee buckled as she wept. My sister put her arm around her, rubbed her back. I thought I should too, but I didn't know how. I looked down at the man I'd often thought looked a lot like me, or the other way around. It was like when I looked at old black-and-white photos of my father, long dead, and I'd see a past where I might end up.

We sat again, and the ceremony continued. Each of my uncle's siblings went up one at a time to cover his body with a colored sheet, a shroud. First his brother, who'd flown from out of state by himself. Then my mother, one edge of the red shroud at a time. She'd already tucked in the third corner when someone said my sister and I should get up and help her. I was blocking my sister from the aisle. I froze in my seat.

We watched her finish the last corner. If I could forgive myself for not moving, I'd say it was best that she had this moment for herself.

VISITATION

Iris A. Law

Monterey rolls in, bringing with her sudden sea weather that settles in, glowering, over the hills. Inky, wet storm clouds vein through the city. Miles of rain turn to ice overhead.

When she lifts, she leaves behind tokens: stray seabird feathers; a faint scent of iodine that lingers in doorframes and windowills; gull bones; a fragment of porcelain spoon - snippets that freckle the welt of my days. nights. When I'm lonesome for water, I follow the blooms of old salt past the tracks; I look to the coast; I drink up the landlocked sky.

DEPARTURE

Iris A. Law

As the wheels fold up into the body of the plane, I cannot help but cry, just a little. No heaving of the chest, no wailing. Simply a tense weeping without sound, letting the water gather lightly in the crevices of my eyes as the cards slip from my lap.

Something to do with the stone angel yesterday - collapsed in grief over the tended grave, unmoving in her anguish as the jays climbed, scolding, over her head and neck.

All we could do was stare at her from across the iron railing, not daring even to touch one other for comfort, sun-soaked, untenable, miles between our fingers and her faceless, marble grief.

FOX AT MIDNIGHT

Iris A. Law

The girl reborn.

When the men in masks
were tired of me, they lit
a fire beneath my feet, floated me
into the September morning,
brown paper lantern ballooning
into the plum-blue dark.

They had touched me
with dirty fingers, had pressed
my palms to something hard
and wet. It had gleamed
gunsoot and all black.
It broke my skin like glass.

Soft wax, pretty ashes. Paper fox
creeping into burrow before
the burned-out dawn. The moon
slept softly on the Bay while streaks
of light leaked from between
its teeth: cold, sticky, red as blood.

AWAKENING

Iris A. Law

Light from within the tide pools. The water etches
jagged peaks. Slim fingers pierce the surface,
fumble on kelp-slick rocks, grip. Take hold. Pull.
Something wet shivers behind the dock. A body,
inching belly-to-mud, crawls up out of the sea.

I. POETRY

*“We must march onward, bear witness, and work with a conscious
effort to build a magnificent, dynamic canon.”*

- Marilyn Chin

GRANDPA'S GARDEN

Ngoc Luu

Peach and nectarine trees.
A kumkwat sapling
and lemon grass. An orange tree
covered in white fluff, overrun by ants.
Squash weaving itself in and around
a gray wire fence. In the distant corner,
a cluster of lean sugarcane.
The fig tree stood in the middle of the garden.

My cousin and I often played
by the orange tree. Chinese jump rope.
Kung Fu fighting. He-Man. She-Ra.
One Halloween, Grandpa
bought plaster masks, painted like faces
worn by Chinese opera singers.
They were thick, heavy and stifling.
Mine was white covered in delicate
strokes of black, beginning
at the tear ducts, running below the round
rosy cheeks, and meeting on the forehead.

He and I also played in the church
parking lot across the street. We climbed
the roof of the garage and peered
over it, smiling, at our feat.
We stayed there, hidden,
by its low walls until dark,
until there was nothing left
but the sound of crickets.

SILENCED

Sandy Chang

Grandchild

His son and daughter-in-law were at work, his daughter was at school, and his wife was at the garden picking the chili peppers before they wilted from the winter chill. He sat in a chair looking out the window, listening to the faint heartbeat of the clock behind him. A child appeared from the kitchen holding a knife. Muab rau kuv! The child stopped and stared at him blankly. When the man stood up from the chair, the child started to run but tripped on a toy. He could almost hear the moment flesh gave in to metal.

Stroke

While resting on a hospital bed, he looked up at his daughter who was talking to the doctor. His daughter turned to him and told him that there was blood in his head and that they were going to poke a hole through his skull to suck out the blood. After the surgery, she told him that he could not stay out in the sun too long and that he could not carry heavy things. They might as well have made him a woman.

Copper

He had heard stories of America from his friends and relatives at the Thai refugee camp – of the green land that flourished under the always-shining sun, where money was earned easily, and where his children could live like kings. Looking at his son, he realized he had been lied to. His son's clothes were washed with blood, face was bruised black, and on his arm was a dark tattoo that marked his allegiance. Help me, Father. He turned away. You are not my son.

Opium

Gunshots roar in the distance. His family huddles deeper into the covers of a thick Laotian bush. He turns to his wife, whose face is covered in dirt and grime. In her arms, his small son shivers. We continue at dawn. Rest for the night. He hugs them both in attempt to keep them warm. The sudden movement causes the baby to wail out into the night. Yelling from a distance. He covers the baby's mouth

with his hand. Running footsteps. He pulls a small lump from his pocket and slips it into the baby's mouth. The baby suckles on it and falls immediately to sleep. He pats his pocket to make sure he has enough to last the journey.

Prisoner

The soldiers come to his village and announce that if the men do not join their army, they would burn the village. Worried and scared for his family, he runs up to the men dressed in green and brown uniforms and tells them that he would like to join. They herd the group to a camp not far away, where hundreds of other men stare gauntly at the new arrivals. They give him a rifle half his size. They tell him he has to use it.

Wife

I decide to accompany my friend to a nearby Hmong village, since he wants me to meet the love of his life. We spend half the day walking on a long dirt road, and when we reach the village we head toward a small wooden hut near the back. I stop halfway. I catch a glance of a beautiful woman, of her long black hair and pale, moon face. Aware of me, she slowly peeks up from the cloth she is sewing, and her almond eyes catch mine. Her cheeks blush a flaming red. Glad that I had picked it along the way, I take out a crumpled flower from my pocket and offer it to her. "Can I talk with you?"

MOTHER'S DAY PHONECALL

Aldric Ulep

'you should talk to grandma'
more like i should
learn *how*
to talk to grandma

'agingsingpet ka agbasa' [focus on your grades]
'wen grandma' [yes grandma]
'saanka ag ob-obra la unay' [dont let your job get in the way]
'mayat ti basa ko grandma' [my studies are okay]

*i hadnt the heart
or vocabulary
to tell her it wasnt true*

working a mere
eight hours a week
for a hundred dollars
to do poorly in classes
my mom is paying thousands for
(what the fuck am i doing?)
– things i could not communicate

"hello grandpa"
'hi barok, kumusta?' [hi son, how are you?]

his voice trembles,
'saan makanggeg ak' [i cant hear anything]
he wasnt talking
because he thought he couldnt hear me
i wasnt talking
because i didnt know how

(where are those damn tissues)

'kayatha agsao ti basit ni mommy' [mom wants to talk to
you again]
"mom i had to work hard
to hide the sobs
again"

'hapay agsangangit ka?' [why are you crying?]
'maka sangangit ak pay' [stop you're making me teary]

these tears of frustration:

i
cant talk
to those who taught me how to speak.
she complimented my use
of our native tongue
when all i did was throw stabbing wordcouple
and drop short childish phrases –
english tinged with a fake accent

im learning chinese in college
a class some strangers (undergrad aid donors)
are paying thousands for
when my own language
the very language of my mother
is a stranger to me –

like my grandparents

a.j.u.

MY FATHER'S ALTAR

Niysaubnusi Yue

It stares at me
With its inviting stance
the calm, the stillness.
I stare back empty minded.
It whispers the essence of burning joss sticks softly
into my skin, Invading my
soul with morals and
tarnishing my sins.
Giving me breath
As if I would seek it
after floating
up from the deepest oceans.

It bears the light
holding a lit candle, blinding me from
lies, seducing the thought of hope.
It flaunts the taste of magnificence
Gold and Silver,
the jingles from the bells,
his hands, firm with strength
the resonance of a gong played by the spirits,
the glorified secrets
cover the pathway to another world of
holy opium and scandalous medicine.
My father's altar cries with hymns
Where did she go?
Come...

Back
Home.

ASHES AND DUST

Justin Lam

*My parents gave me a book telling me I was made of dust. But you,
you are made of ash.*

But we're not so different, you and I. I of dust and you of ash... why
you're only a little darker than I am. My parents have a fear of the
dark, more so than me. I'm not talking about the dark that comes
with the night, but the darkness of the human heart, which is often
the darkest of all.

I would rather be made of ash than of dust. I, made of dust, am much
more common than you, made of ash. You find dust everywhere.
Where do you find ash? Only at the mausoleum. You are exquisite,
you are rare, you are special, you are ash, and maybe, just maybe,
you are death? You are made from the remnants of death, and that
makes you life. I am made of the flecks of discarded life, and that
makes me death. Through a ritual of fire you come into existence.
While me, me I am from the refuse of living beings.

Ash is the stuff of Mother Nature, launched from the great Earth's
bowels. Dust is the stuff of us insignificants. You are the stuff of vol-
canic eruptions, belching thick dark smoke into the sky to smother
the world. Ash rained down on Pompeii, ash rained down on Sodom
and Gomorrah, ash rained down on Atlantis, ash destroyed the old so
that there could be the new. What did dust ever do but gather?

Surely then, you, a being of ash, is surely much more useful than
me, a being of dust. You are the stuff of cosmos, and I am the stuff of
ordinary. From the ashes, the phoenix rises. From dust? Well, maybe
an allergy.

My parents tell me to be careful of ashes. They are dark, they tell me.
Stay away, they tell me. I disagree. I think they are beautiful, much
more worthy than those of dust. I see you, made of ash, for what you
truly are!

All this talk of worth, all this comparison, I find myself repeating
myself, so maybe I will just say this:

Ashes from ashes
Dust from dust
We may look different
But in you I trust.

OKAY

Justin Lam

The lioness storms in
And a flash of metallic blue
Vanishes under the sheets
What are you doing?

Nothing

How can you be doing nothing?

THIS IS IMPORTANT, you've wasted

The last hour on NOTHING?

I was looking for something

What were you looking for?

Information, about tomorrow.

Oh tomorrow.

Yeah, tomorrow.

I need that information.

Okay

I'll print it off for you

So what have you been doing

For the past two hours?

I said, I was looking for information

Stop wasting your time

I'm not wasting my time

Print off that information for me

Okay

When do you have to be there tomorrow?

Eight thirty

Eight thirty? Idiot child, I have to go to WORK!!!!!!

Okay, okay, you can drive me down earlier

Why didn't you give me the information earlier?

Sorry, okay?

Didn't you know that I had to go to work tomorrow?

Okay, okay, jeez

Don't jeez me, you crazy, stupid child

Why are you still awake? You should sleep

Okay, okay

I wanted to eat something

Well you're not. You're going to sleep.

Okay, okay

What are you wearing tomorrow?

The thing we bought yesterday

Well you're going to wear that all day

What?? There's NO way I'm wearing that all day

You are now

But I don't –

Have you prepared anything for tomorrow?

No....

Then too bad

Okay, okay

Are you done packing?

Almost

Why haven't you finished packing?

You had the last two hours

Okay, okay

I will

I said you had to finish tonight!!

Okay, okay

I get it

And print that stuff off

Okay, okay

It's printing

Why can't you be more responsible?

Okay, okay

Why can't you be a better child?

Okay, okay
I'm very disappointed in you.

Okay, okay
Why can't you be smarter?

Okay, okay
Why can't you work harder?

Okay, okay
Why don't you love me more?
I'm going to bed.

Okay, okay
Good night

The blue reappears
And snaps shut
The line cuts
But not before

Okay, bye.

NOT SO,
SEA _____

Mg Roberts

1. Mother remembers time through wet. Dry. Wet seasons.
She talks about earth between toes, fabric wrapped shoulder to wrist to
mimic long sleeves. She talks about ten siblings that appear
and disappear in times of drought.

She says, "Victor and Mariquita are the two that survived".

2. In a jungle sometimes people disappear.

2. Mother raises her hands, pretends to pull on a pair of gloves—taut arms
reach out to sea. She shows me thickened skin in dark circles:

holed-palms.

"This is how you lead kalabaw into and out of field".

THIS REFRACTED

FAILURE _____

Mg Roberts

3.
With downward-arc'd lips, she talks about her own mother's death.

“Broken heart,” she whispers.

“Never married.”

3.
Mother runs her thin brown fingers across my scalp, stares into the textured, stucco of the apartment, its orange walls breaking into 4ths, 8ths, and 16ths. Tears pool in crouched corners, her eyes far away.

She says, “The day my Lola died the living fanned out in rows of tiny black dots.

She says, “You have her hair”.

I.
Memory is like when the light leaks out and the desire to stop reproduction and the desire to procreate become the same thing.

A diagnosis is a moment of inexplicit clarity, blurred identifications hemmed in by bones. Bones resembling anything but beauty produced on film.

How can I make things any clearer here? Can I say the making of important things is like an axis, the study of tectonics? The making. Make.

II.
I want to define elegance. I want to examine the arrangement of all its letters, its violence before you. Are tulips elegant? I mean redemptive. Transferable.

Are red tulips elegant?

The thought spills out, everything spills out of it, everything spills.

III.

Memory is like a mirror producing impressions of refracted failures, where images of tragedy appear: your head bobbing in and out of a toilet, a pool of vomit, two men having their way with you in that cheap hotel room, its green shag carpet, its layered smoke penetrating everything.

Such perfect arrangement of the letters required to spell catastrophe.

IV.

This is a splinter of impressions you know you will never forget. You repeat the memory when you sleep. The memory repeats.

Today the ospreys are building nests in cell phone towers and all I can think to say is *those are not trees*. There are stick-piles making and making.

Light leaks from compacted branches with such inexplicable clarity, where I wept and wept.

ASTERS

I. _____

Mg Roberts

What/When presents itself through stretched time, through a waiting
room's white sterility. Born in clustered petals, right leg clenched in
midwife's grasp.

What/When is unable to breathe on her own.

What/

When is not breathing as she should.

I can put together any-

thing but this scene:

[a calculated sentiment] folding wings against an
spine.

arced

Watch as the midwife marks every possible line, as in the
collection of cells, so carefully without need for light.

When asked to lie down I am impossible. I do not scream, but look
closely at the red vase on the bedside table, at the

sunflower in
bloom:

SAID TWINE TO TUMBLEWEED

Esther Lee

You are dead to us, You-Me, the parents say,
expunging “You-Me” from the family tree.

You-Me sighs: My nature my grave
mistake? They reply, You-Me
We’ll re-instate our love only
if you band your disjointed finger, if you

bark as we do. The brother chides,
Otherwise You-Me, returning

home will be impossible. Consider blood
money your last gift,
the sister writes. For no

good, You-Me’s nature exposed
to elements, like church
bells clanging on
every corner, maddening.

Can you see the hundreds of little flowers growing on a disk?

Pressing palms together, steeppling
gers, bow my round head to look down at fin-
I open my mouth for this hands.
poem: all this sinew and imagine purple
—veins— petals into forcing skin and
every piece of
air
too.

BREATHING DEMONSTRATION

Esther Lee

for Marina Abramovic

in bath water she immerses herself—
one leg at a time,
to the waist then chin,
eyes cinched, nose a sinking
periscope, mouth
pursed, and holding—
submerged she hears
a muffled return.
after one minute and
before breath elapses

[44 seconds...]

2 minutes, 28 seconds...

3 minutes, 13 seconds...]

with hands gently braced
upon her hands, you lean down
below the waterline and press lips to hers,
replacing your former
breath, and pushing in new air.

VOWELS OF RUST, CONSONANTS OF PAPER

Esther Lee

for my sister

Previous night's dream recurs: your sister sinking
toward the lake basement, how she turns
away yet still returns, blurriest of foreign tongues.
Transposed upon her are faces of children. You wonder
(though the forest remains a smug, silent green)
which plants are edible and which are poison, whether
the parcel of rust bobbing on the water waits for
a christening, its movement a disturbance
to fish, scaring them to the lake floor. Beneath
your sister's bed: green water and paper
that tears itself and two small beds, unmade.
In the interim she folds more paper boats
too garish. Doctors say, *Parcel of rust*. You wince—
knuckles calloused from grit—and while crossing
the cattle guard, you spot two wooden boxes, nested,
one slightly smaller than the other. Up close
they pixelate less and less. You ask your sister,
a bird hanging from her beak: *How do you walk
away and still return?* The light moving across
her face creates the narrative of you both, running
in reverse, your laughter mistaken for gasping.

SENT MAIL

Kazim Ali

Lost in your inbox collecting dust, a letter from madness

Always silent unable to say where are you

Night the silent whisperer friending you without saying your
connection

Sending messages every day asking “brother do you believe in
god?”

Have you been touched by alarm yet?”

I give you the river and lie down for the part where you split me

From the banks, one silver minute beyond vision

I requested your guest book but you fled into darkness

So I interrogated everyone left, reft the searchlight from the
search.

Death, the last virus, crashes every system,

You're a citizen of the country that isn't on any maps

You said BRB so I just dote on the ground, far from home

Waiting for your answer, the chat window open forever

THE ROAD AT ACHE

Kazim Ali

I was whispered along the road at Ache
toward the sun-puddled gate

the sum of yearning for
whatever makes you emptier

better weather, the absence of bees
but the year tells it better, all the hives

unraveling into summer, little mouths
flooding the May air to stillness.

My telling tints the blue air
whiter, storm-white open ear

listening to what will unspool next,
clover, apple-trees, and to what

I owe the mysterious reciter arriving
driving out dry the flood month

spelling me in every direction, unclear but
swarming, given this my year to hear

URDU

Kazim Ali

Can't even to India return I return

First writing then to read I learned

Cloudy-cloudy bright always and cold

Disappearing places I my way storm

I ocean to then moon abscond

Departure before from sweeping sore

Someone my book inside urdu has written

How coalesce these storms

Exercise endless claimed and mapped

How will I never will I learn

RANDOM SEARCH

Kazim Ali

to the TSA

Who will in the night unpetaling lose himself in fealty

His crime heartbreaking, confessed and festering

What undresses in the ground, lost in perjury

If you don't understand who will

He's to be tried for the nearly unforgivable sins of naming
ordinary stars after himself, drinking coffee without labor laws

The whole idea is that your life is an understatement

Wishing you could translate your lust, faking like you care

Marking time by the icicle melting from the eave

Dare not swear it, even to save you

Chaste and chastened, he is touched by you

his body changes as he sinks under your hands

The world's opulent answer, his silent umbrage

A submerged body arrows to the surface

Not by intent but because it is buoyant

He wants to save you, wants to save everyone

When you're finished with him, hand him back his glasses

he tells you to renounce meat and demand an end to inheritance

Tells you to recite Arabic in the gate area

What else is left but to be human here

PHENOMENAL SURVIVALS OF DEATH IN THE MOUNTAINS

Kazim Ali

1.

Jacketed by mountains does the self of sulfur
send itself to rock or vapor
Cleft do You breathe my surface
Beneath or above the earth's surface
When in the valley I collapsed in sound
I dreamt of a man his hands bound
By shafts of sun and cloud
Saying, "I am Saint Everyone.
In my pocket a spool of piano wire."
Awake in the predawn
I will fill this coffin of stone

2.

Awake I unchime
Tickets to heaven all validated, declined
On the third night thrust
The monsoon, my Saint Everyone lust
Played out and the cloud-craft
Unloosed from the rock pier, reft
by thunder. Abandoned by death
Wandered the unmarked road
Where my bones still lie in the earth
Amid yarrow and madder and woad

3.

If you press your ear to solid stone
Will you hear the body's hard equation
Turn solvent as it quivers

Monsoon a doorway to forever
Took oars away and promised
Saint Everyone carried only orchids
You are not buried, have no money
Body hold fire, hold water and loam
Practice the early primal tunes
Night long fled but aloft unseen
Pierced I am by moon-stunned noon

4.

A cres of sky shine cobalt blue
In my locket tides of dirt spill new
Outward I am borne
To myself sworn and inside worn
From this shore I windward grow
Endless border cross
My first body built sturdy from loss
My second in spans of cloud and snow

GREEN KISS

Yael Villafraanca

carrying a threat of joy, an honorable knight: there's your look:
smoke casting brief ribbons of shadow: grip the blade with my hand,
a signal: your look for me your face for me alive in me: I've decided:
I'm telling you this now that I've shown you my naked lesioned
back:

there was a child who learned to catch geckos and nothing else: you
still move like this, with as much attention and I promise to take you
crabbing back east: allure for soft shells: you have this for me: two
buses and a train across the peninsula: seven years in famine circling
the beloved city: I return to the old words: knowing no other way

say what you mean: only I can't, I keep beginning and beginning:
there was a child crouching outside a locked door: you're still here,
even when you're not, it still happened, I still lived it: I gave you
the comb and you put it down and used your fingers instead: you
made up a name for me that no one else knows: you said you weren't
thirsty but your eyes gave you away: this is what you know of shel-
ter:

that I can come back: that I do: the girl still strong in me: when you
sleep, I slide the nail with one swift motion into your temple: lead
you off this planet: you'll know me, I have promised for you: the feel
is a slow wild taking in

II. SHORT STORIES

*"Words are tricky. Sometimes you need them to bring out the hurt
festering inside. If you don't, it turns gangrenous and kills you. . . .
But sometimes words can break a feeling into pieces."*

- Chirra Banerjee Divakaruni

THREE QUARTERS

Mark Flores

I was never the type of person who had problems answering questions on standardized tests, but every time I took the SAT, without fail, someone would always ask about the race question.

“Which bubble do you fill in?”

Out of context, the question sounds ridiculous, but considering my home state of Hawaii’s origins as a plantation conglomerate of immigrants, it’s not strange to be multiracial. In fact, my cousin is the only one in his kindergarten class of just one ethnicity. A good number of the population is “hapa”, or mixed race—the very word comes from Hawaiian Pidgin, which itself was made up of borrowed words from other languages. As a result, quite a few people are 50%-50% in terms of ethnicity. But the SAT only lets you bubble in one answer.

Due to sheer repetition, I’ve memorized the standard answer—pick the one that you identify with more. But what does that mean? Is it the one that you look more like physically? Is it the one that you identify more with culturally? What if the two are in conflict? Needless to say, there was always someone who struggled to answer the question.

But it was never my struggle.

While I’m technically multiracial myself, it was never really an issue. I’ve always been Asian, and I’ve always been Chinese. It was how I was born, it was how I was raised, and it will be how I die. It was something I’d never thought to question.

I’m $\frac{3}{4}$ Chinese, but there’s something special about $\frac{3}{4}$. It means my ethnicity comes from both sides of my family, and while I’m of mixed race, it wasn’t a matter of “using chopsticks with my mother, and using a fork with my father”—we’d always use chop-

sticks.

My mother is full Chinese; her brother-in-law is the current President of the Hawaii Chinese Chamber of Commerce; her grandfather, my Tai Kung, immigrated on a boat to the U.S. to get an education. She grew up on her grandmother’s bitter herbal Chinese remedies, and meals of jook, jai, and a whole host of other foods that became a staple of family gatherings.

My father is $\frac{1}{2}$ Chinese, $\frac{1}{4}$ Filipino, and $\frac{1}{4}$ Hispanic. He was born in Hong Kong, and most of his 6 siblings are fluent in Cantonese. I’ve been told he has an accent, and the first time he hugged his brother in years was after they took a trip together to visit his home village in China. His mother lived in China for nearly her entire life, cannot speak or read English well, and never fails to tell me how proud she is about my academic achievements. His father is my only grandparent who is not full Chinese ($\frac{1}{2}$ Filipino and $\frac{1}{2}$ Hispanic), lived in Manila his entire life, and also is fluent in Cantonese.

I’ve never been to a family gathering where noodles were not served, I consider my astrological sign a “wood dog”, not Cancer the Crab, and can scarcely remember not being able to use chopsticks. Every so often, I’ve been seen sporting a bowl cut; when I smile, my mom reminds me to make sure my eyes have not creased into a squint, and as a child, apparently, I would sing Chinese opera with my grandmother. My paternal grandfather never did anything to advance the culture that he grew up in—I never questioned his earthly, rich, skin tone, and I don’t think I even realized he wasn’t Chinese until late elementary school. Hispanic or Filipino culture was just never a part of my life.

Needless to say, I’ve always felt full Chinese. My features reflect this as well—my face is relatively flat, my hair has never been anything but perfectly straight, the bridge of my nose is too small to support my glasses, and if I shaved my head and not my face, I’d undoubtedly look like some sort of Chinese sage. The only thing that could possibly indicate anything otherwise is my last name, Flores, which is certainly not Asian. It’s strange that a last

name, supposedly a gift from my ancestors, is something that has always seemed foreign to me, and has dragged behind my every step like an forgotten secret, a stain upon my Asian character. I'm not "pure" Chinese, I'm "diluted", and my last name is forever a reminder of this split bloodline. Of all the other names my grandparents wear—Chong, Lum, and Ching—I got stuck with Flores.

But this had never really been a problem for me, at least until I came to college.

Here at Stanford, with my name displayed on my door, I became more than just "Mark", I became "Mark Flores". Whereas my last name and I had previously existed in isolation with each other, in college, it became a necessary brand used to distinguish me from the hundreds of other students. It's strange that with the addition of this last name, I seemed to lose my ethnicity.

I had never really been questioned before about my race—it was relatively clear from the way I looked that I was Chinese. But here, with this burden attached to my name, my face became deceiving, a mismatch with the moniker of my ancestral line. People would give me curious looks, as if they weren't quite sure exactly what to think of me, or of this name. My last name became a sort of screen, a prism, filtering the impressions of the people around me, as my Asian appearance began to crack, and morphed into something different entirely. If I was no longer Chinese here, what exactly was I then?

I didn't know.

This all came to a head on Chinese New Year this past winter. As per custom, the younger generation receives red envelopes, lai see, filled with money as a gesture from the elderly. It was always one of my favorite holidays—I'd receive money (from both sides of the family), with no expectation of reciprocation. This year, it would be a bit different.

One of my neighbors decided that he wanted the entire dorm to celebrate Chinese New Year. As full Chinese himself and fluent

in Cantonese, I figured Chinese cultural celebrations should defer to him—after all, what did I know? He decided to give all the Chinese people in the dorm a red envelope with \$2 each, as a gesture of cultural pride. But, he wasn't quite sure what to do with all of the "mixed" Chinese here.

He proposed giving out money proportionally to our racial backgrounds—100% for the full Chinese, 50% for the half Chinese, and 75% for people like me, and the rest of Chinese agreed. It was a kind and benevolent gesture to be sure, and everyone was just eager to get something. I suppose logically, it made some sense, but it also made me profoundly uncomfortable.

Was I somehow not really Chinese? Was the ¼ of me that was not Chinese something dirty, something wrong, something spoiling my Chinese lineage? I certainly was raised to be full Chinese—I had the same family as my full Chinese cousins, I ate the same food, I did the same things, and even looked the same way. Was this somehow "not good enough"? Why did I have to be treated differently?

That same day, another (full Chinese) person questioned if I actually was Chinese. When I told her I was, she didn't really believe me.

I went to sleep unable to put the issue to rest, and on the actual New Year's Day, I received no red envelope. I was told that the "donor" had decided to call off the whole thing, from the same girl who wondered about my background.

I think I will always have doubts.

Later in the week, after calling my grandma and wishing her a happy new year, I checked my mail and received some red envelopes from my extended family. I appreciated the gesture, but it wasn't able to fill the doubt that had seeped into my heart. What was I, really? Did I even count as Chinese?

I would like to end this narrative stating how I found some

middle ground between my internal ethnicity and my outward ethnicity, but I received no such revelation. Still today, I don't know what I am.

But this question is not like the SAT, with a 5-hour time limit, and there is no right answer. I do not have to choose between two (or more) answers to bubble in, and I have as long as I need to define my identity. I have slipped on the struggle of the multiracial in this scientific, polarizing, categorizing world of ours, and I will fit the mold of whatever person I wish to be. I will find my own definition of race, and will conform to no other standards but my own. I am more than just my background.

I am not just $\frac{3}{4}$ Chinese, I am a whole person.

PERPETUAL FOREIGNER

Christina Nguyen

She basked in the realm of the Heavenly Kingdom. When she stood, draped in the red glow and the light of yellow stars, I wanted to bring her to my empire. With convincing words and strength of posture, I tried to woo her. She remained – fixed, frozen, caught in-between – so I offered her exotic seeds. Even though she knew what they were, she could only understand a little of what they meant. So she took them, bit them, and exploded them. Their juices, flying out as blood-soaked shrapnel, stained her innocence. Some of the seeds were hard, some were sharp, but all of them sealed her fate. Forced to leave, unwilling as she was, she turned to me.

She came to my empire in hovering metal coffins in the sky. She came as they turned into falling balls of flame. She came to my country, flailing over and through the water. She came to me in wooden caskets, barely large enough and often too small. The black fingers covered her, swallowed her, and pulled her into the depths of the ocean. Still she came to me because she had no other choice. She had already taken the seeds, bitten them, and exploded them.

A refugee in my land, she is discontent. She curls into her enclave, barely venturing out. I admit that she is more than I thought. She takes what she wants, what she can, from all I have to offer. Ambition gleams in her dark-brown, almond shaped eyes. Originally she had not the faintest notion of being the queen of my lands; now it is hard to say whether she will ever stop climbing up, ever stop moving forward. But I cannot hold her here. While she is gone, her home suffers.

Her home sinks into the gray of hopelessness. Orange toxins still fall like snow. The cold ruler keeps a tight reign and the people struggle to make their voices heard. Their slow, aching limbs stretch to rise, but the culling of the wintry despotism keeps them grounded. Her mother reaches out, calling, demanding, and denying that she is gone. The constant monsoon rains mirror the mother's tears. Her

mother stubbornly refuses to yield to my demands, clinging to her heavy red cloak while reaching for the green prosperity of spring.

THE GRASS PULLED UP

Bushra Rehman

Eventually, I will hold her forever. Already, she is bound to me. Growing, changing, she adapts until it is no longer Hell. Even if only warily, she calls my empire her home. She knows that everyone in the Heavenly Kingdom perceives her as a foreigner, a stranger. For

all that, inwardly, she knows she is not dead; she knows she still does not belong in my lands. She is the perpetual foreigner.

Roadside, Florida
August 1997

When she returns home, it flourishes. So with spring a new life and a new prosperity comes to that land. But that is no longer her home – and neither is my land.

The grass pulled up like snakes climbing their way to heaven. My boots were shot. They used to be baby blue, but now they were dirty grey, like a mouse. Natalia was standing in the road hitching, her thumb stuck out, her shoulder turning brown in the sun. Cars kept passing us, and I couldn't believe it. How come no one was picking us up? We were two cute girls, at least I thought, but then I looked at us again and saw two caramel girls made darker from the sun and dust we kept kicking up. We were flying and in love, but getting a ride...well that was near impossible. Meanwhile, an army of mosquitoes was happily creating trails of blood on our arms.

"Maybe if we don't stand under these trees the mosquitoes will stop bothering us." I looked at Natalia hoping she'd agree.

She lowered her arm and started massaging her shoulder.
"We're not having any luck in this place anyway."

We walked down the road a bit, but of course, the mosquitoes had wings and had no problem following us.

"If I had one wish," Natalia said, "I'd wish for a bottle of Bug Off."

"Why wouldn't you just wish for all the mosquitoes to die?"

"That's mean!"

"Oh God. I forgot you were a hippie. Well, why wouldn't you just wish for a ride to get us out of here? Or even better, why wouldn't you just wish for our own car?" I imagined us in a hot, red, topless car with the windows rolled down, blasting Velvet Under-

ground into the lush green of Florida.

“I’ve got simple needs, Razia, simple needs.”

Another car whizzed by. “At least the mosquitoes like us.” I tried to slap one off but missed. I looked at Natalia and threw my mosquito-bitten arms around her. It didn’t matter about the heat.

Natalia laughed and squirmed but then bit my ear. “More bites!” She pulled me back into the shade of the trees. “Forget these stupid drivers.”

She threw herself down on the ground and tried to pull me down with her, but I pulled back. “We can’t get more dirty! People with cars probably already think we’re going to mess up their seats. Maybe we should stand here with mops, so we’re more easily recognizable. Third World cleaning ladies.”

It was so bad, we both started giggling. We were lucky we didn’t miss the car. I heard the sound of wheels from far off first. My head snapped up, and I quickly jumped out into the road and flashed my thumb. By some miracle, the car stopped. It was a Chevrolet and green, like Army but without the camouflage.

I looked back at her. “What do you think?”

“We can’t walk all the way to Key West.”

When we got up to the car, we saw an old man and woman up front. I hesitated. There was a large crucifix with a bleeding Jesus dangling from the rearview mirror. I wasn’t used to seeing Jesus a lot, and the sight of him bleeding away was always a bit of a shock.

“Hi!” I said in my perkier voice, trying not to look at Jesus’s scarred body.

“Where you girls heading?” the old man asked. His teeth were denture perfect.

Instinctively, my finger shot up to my one crooked tooth that was always trying to climb over the others and jump out of my mouth. Probably the only chance I would ever have for perfect teeth was going to be when they all fell out and I got dentures. Of course, the way I was living, who knew if I would ever be able to afford dentures, or if I would live that long.

“We’re heading to Key West,” Natalia said, seeing I was going off into one of my reveries.

“We’re heading to Miami, girls. You’re welcome to come along.” He turned to his wife and said, “Honey, put in those Irish tapes.” And she did. We entered the car to the strains of what sounded like pagan Gaelic music.

Natalia and I scooted in like two little children. Inside, the seats were clean, shiny leather and a darker olive. My sweaty legs immediately stuck to the leather. I saw the old man looking at us in the rearview mirror. It always happens so fast. One minute you’re on the road, and the next minute, you’re in a Chevrolet listening to Irish music with an old man and woman who love Jesus. I sat back and started checking them out.

The power dynamics of hitchhiking are weird. In exchange for a ride, you’re expected to be entertaining or an open throbbing non-judgmental ear. Natalia and I had sat through long tirades about broken marriages and selfish children. We’d listened with mock empathy to one yuppie man’s existential despair. We’d heard at least seven stories about how much more fun it had been to hitchhike in the Sixties and how two attractive young girls like us shouldn’t be hitchhiking at all.

The old man was wearing a black suit and had heavily-dyed black hair. The woman was wearing a navy blue dress and you could tell she had never, nor would she ever, unless she was hit by lightning or otherwise enlightened, wear pants. I became very aware that Natalia and I were both wearing pretty tight ripped-up jean shorts. Plus,

Natalia was wearing a T-shirt that said “Blam!” in large red letters across her chest.

The man’s eyes in the rearview mirror were now twice the size they were when we first got into the car. I suddenly knew we had made a mistake. It always amazed me the way some religious people, it doesn’t matter what religion they are, go ga-ga over a little bit of skin. It burns me up. The old man’s eyes shifted from my face to my breasts then to Natalia’s and back. Somehow, he still managed to drive straight. I had to give him credit for that.

When I looked over at Natalia, I could tell she was starting to get really upset. She was no naive cat who had just hit the street. She looked directly into the rearview mirror, and he looked away quickly. His wife didn’t seem to notice anything. She just kept changing tapes, listening for half a minute, then popping the cassette out again and replacing it with another tape of unrecognizable music. I guess she didn’t like Irish music.

I decided right then and there that I didn’t feel like being in a peep show, not to mention one with an indecisive DJ, so I did what I did best. I started talking. “That’s quite a crucifix you have there.” I said. I thought if I brought up the topic of religion the old man might remember some of the commandments. Maybe there was one in there that told you not to ogle young girls.

My plan worked for a second. He started looking at Jesus’s naked flesh instead of ours, but then he turned back and looked us up and down as much as that was possible through the rearview mirror.

“Why you girls heading to Key West?”

“I have a friend there,” I said. “She’s getting married.” It was a lie, but it was better than sharing the truth, that we were on our way to spend time with Natalia’s hippie friends who lived in a beach trailer in Key West.

Plus it was one of our games. Natalia and I would tell fake

life stories to the drivers until we started to feel our lies might be real. Maybe we could have parallel lives, ones we’d be able to access as soon as physicists figured out how to move between wormholes.

“Marriage! Is that right? Marriage is one of God’s greatest gifts.” The old man looked at our thighs as if we were chicken being picked out at a church BBQ. “But where are my manners? I’m John and this here is my wife, Joy.”

“I’m Natalia, and this is Razia.” I was grateful she had taken the first step. You would think it would be a simple exchange, but I’d learned once leaving Queens that saying my name, Razia, wasn’t simple at all.

He looked at us, and I could tell he was weighing our features, deciding which foreign countries we could possibly be from. We could pass for so many. At least he was looking at our faces and not our chests.

Natalia was a mix of many things: Egyptian, Italian and New England White. In short, she looked more desi than me. Dark and pretty, she got harassed in every gas station and deli we went. “You Indian? You Pakistani? You Bangladeshi? Will you marry me?” She would roll her eyes and sometimes leave without paying. The men would scream from behind, and she would turn back and say, “Are you that cheap? Well no then, I won’t marry you.”

“I’m Pakistani,” I said in a clipped tone, hoping he would get the hint, but knowing he wouldn’t.

“Pakeestan!” he mispronounced in American. “I was in Karachi in the Seventies.” He looked at Joy. “That was before I found the Lord and before I met my better half.” Joy paused in her tape pushing and smiled. I could see the precision of her white buck-teeth.

“Partition, terrible thing the way the natives turned on each other right when the British left!”

Natalia quickly put her hand on my thigh and squeezed my knee to calm me down so I didn't get one of my "Racial Rage Fits" as we jokingly called them.

He noticed our touch and his face stiffened. Damn, these religious people with their eyes like hawks. You have to be constantly vigilant when you're sitting in the seat of judgment. I caught myself, judging. I guess I hadn't shaken off my own religious training.

"Sooooo . . ." he stretched it out like a long, low tire letting out air. "When are your weddings?" He made sure it was plural to avoid any confusion.

Outside of the car, I thought I saw two ostriches running for their lives in the Florida bush. I answered honestly before I could stop myself. "I don't want to get married." It was just a knee-jerk reaction from all the years of answering back to meddling Pakistani aunts who seemed as if they had only one pastime: trying to get the girls in the community married. As soon as they finished with one, they pounced on another. Before the blood was even dry.

"Oh come now." From his voice, I could tell he was going to start preaching, "Marriage is a blessing given to us by our Lord. Haven't you read the Bible?" He didn't wait for a response. "And the Lord God said, it is not good that the man should be alone, I will make a helpmate for him." That's Genesis."

"Amen," Joy said. I jumped. I had almost forgotten she could speak. I suddenly had a fantasy she was like a blow-up doll toy who said "Amen," on cue. My skin prickled from the bottom of my neck up into my hair. Was she a doll? She seemed so stiff. I started to panic. Had her amen sounded real or like some kind of cheap playback machine? But then I remembered her changing the tapes. Could a blow-up doll change tapes?

John winked at us through the rearview window. Joy noticed the wink and was roused from her road coma. No, she wasn't a doll. "It's all in the Bible," she said, "every direction we need to know for life."

She looked over at him with a simpering look, and he glowed down on her with a spark of lust. Oh goodness, they were turning each other on.

"Yes." He reached out a wrinkly hand, one that seemed it had been in a sitz bath for a week and grabbed her thigh. "The Lord says, 'Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife. And they shall be one flesh.'" Natalia looked over at me alarmed. I wasn't feeling too well myself.

Joy turned around, and I nearly jumped. Joy's face close up was caked with make-up, thick foundation, fuchsia lipstick, and green eye shadow up to her eyebrows. It was scary. I had been so distracted by Jesus and the old man I hadn't looked at her too closely. She looked from me to Natalia. Her words were covered with spit. "Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled, but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge!"

My stomach felt tight. The air in the car felt impossible to breathe. This was why I had left my family in the first place, so I would never have to feel this way, trapped and preached to. I pinched Natalia's leg.

"Ow. What are you doing?" she whispered. "Psychos," I mouthed silently. She nodded, but John thought she was agreeing with him.

"Isn't that right?" He reached over and pinched Joy's thigh hard. She winced and then turned and smiled. From the side, I could see her front teeth were coated with lipstick. That's strange. I hadn't noticed it before.

"But where are our manners, Joy? Moslems don't believe in our tenets." He shrugged. His whole body loosened, and for a second, in the rearview mirror, he looked like a normal person. "Well, I guess we'll all know what's what on Judgment Day!"

He started singing:

The other night as I left the meeting
God's spirit bade me stay
But I said not tonight, for next week only
I must go and dance with the gay.
After that I'll go and get converted
And be a Christian bright
But alas, too late, I see the folly
By saying not tonight.

Natalia and I stared at him. He had no idea how appropriate his song was.

John's voice was shockingly beautiful. Suddenly, I felt jealous. I'd never been allowed to sing myself. It was forbidden in my Orthodox Muslim family. Not knowing what to do with the heat of my feelings, I rolled down the window. The air felt cool and fresh, wet, full of sweet smells I didn't recognize, ones I wanted to breathe in.

John abruptly ended the hymn. "What are you doing?! Can't you see the AC is on?"

I heard the sound of Irish flutes being dragged through mountain passes and Joy mutter something under her breath. I thought I heard "Heathens." I suddenly missed the mosquitoes like they were long lost friends.

"Careful." Natalia put her hand near my thigh. I bit down on my lip.

But that was it. I started looking along the side of the road for a sign. Then I saw one. "Food Gas Lodging," a blue square against the wet Florida green.

"I'm not feeling well. Maybe we should pull over. You can drop us off at the next rest stop."

"Oh no-no-no-no-no." He shook his head vigorously. I said I was going to take you to Miami, and I'm going to take you to Miami. Be-

sides, two young girls like you shouldn't be hitchhiking. I wouldn't be able to forgive myself if I left you back on the road for any sick person to pick up." He nodded gravely.

Joy backed him up with an "Amen." Was that the kind of thing someone said "Amen" to? I didn't think so. John looked at her sharply. I guess it wasn't. Joy fidgeted in her seat, and I felt her shrink into herself. She started changing tapes again, putting one in, listening for a minute, and then switching to another tape of unrecognizable music. Outside, Florida was waving by us. Lizards stuck out their tongues and millions of insects buzzed.

"Does your family know you're hitchhiking? That you're out here?" He looked at me through slit eyes. I got a chill down my spine and not one that was from the AC either. Of course no one really knew where we were. We hadn't told anyone we were hitchhiking. For the first time, real panic, not just the slight intimation of it, hit me. He gave me a sick smile. "I wouldn't think people from your country would allow their daughters to go hitchhiking."

My heart contracted. I looked over at Natalia and felt an overwhelming desire to protect her from the world. Even though it would probably be the other way around. I started formulating a plan. It was something my health teacher had told me to do if I was ever in danger. There was a rest stop 5 miles away, so I had a few minutes.

Natalia looked straight into his eyes through the rearview mirror.

"The first hitchhikers were just travelers who hopped onto caravans on the Silk Road. Didn't you know?"

John laughed. "Is that so?" His eyes shifted to Natalia to get another look at her breasts.

I took the opportunity and leaned forward, stuck my finger down my throat. The bagels and butter Natalia and I had eaten in the morning came up fast.

The man and his dentures started rattling. Yomih had gotten on his

black suit. "Jesus Christ!" Joy gave him a swift look, but it didn't stop him. "Why didn't you tell us you were feeling sick?"

"She did." Natalia looked worried until I winked. She shook her head, then looked at him. "We're sorry, really sorry. Could we just pull over at this rest stop?" The exit was right there. "We'll help you clean up."

Yeah right we were going to help them clean up. Natalia and I were going to scram as soon as we could, leaving him and his wife in the parking lot wondering why it was taking us so long to get paper towels from the bathroom. That car was going to stink all the way to Miami, and we were going to hop into the back of a Pepsi truck where the driver would let us sleep in peace for hours.

As we took the exit, he was fuming. The backs of his ears were red. He wasn't looking at us anymore as he drove his olive green Chevrolet down the ramp. Natalia looked at me and smiled. I looked at her, wiped my mouth and smiled back.

THE MYTH-O-MALOGICAL TALE OF HAWAIIAN SANTA

Lee Tonouchi

I admit. I losing it. Any moment now I might jus buckaloose! Maybe it's cuz dis gotta be da stupidest tourist question eva posed to me during my fifteen years driving dis trolley bus. Maybe it's cuz of dat crazy omreal magazine article I jus read about da future of Hawai'i nei. Maybe it's cuz dat article finally made me realize dat da American Dream I been chasing, while trying for maintain my unsteady and junk paying job, must not apply to Hawai'i people. I guess up till now I nevah notice da fine print where da ting says "American Dream only applicable in the continental United States. Offer not valid in Hawaii." For some reason, us, we always no count, brah. Like how if get one fast food commercial on TV, half da time da Hawai'i price not going be what dey say, cuz dey flash da disclaimer, "Prices may be slightly higher in Hawaii". Or like when we mail order stuff and dey charge us "international" shipping. Like what is dat? And even when I call 'em up for correck dem for let 'em know dat da battle's not yet won and Native Hawaiians still fighting for sovereignty, dey jus respond with one "Excuse me?" Like dey no catch on to da joke das not one joke.

It's probably one combination of all of these tings perculating, so when my passenger Omaha, Nebraska ask-es me "Do you folks have Christmas in Hawhyah?" I no can handle. I know it's almost Christmas, but I got no Christmas spirit in me. I used to da stupid questions like if we live in grass shacks. If we have electricity. If we surf. If we surf to work?!

I admit, das da kine images those picture postcards perpetuate. So maybe it's not entirely da fault of da stupid tourist that they're misinformed. But c'mon. Christmas? I tinkin brah, get Christmas all ova da world, you tink Hawai'i is dat exotic and far away dat Christmas no can reach ova hea? I almost crash my trolley bus cuz I too busy rolling my eyes cuz da question soooooo mento. Das when I get one idea.

Hearing dis tourist's question brings me back to da time my good friend Braddah Mike wen mail me dat lettah from when he went Big Island for do his research projeck for get his PhD. Dat wuz nice of him for correspond I remembah tinkin'. Cuz usually if Braddah Mike goes someplace I no find out about 'em till way aftah he comes back. I opened da envelope and Scotch-tape to his lettah wuz what appeared for be one little piece of gravel. In his lettah he explained how he wuz mailing me one souvenir, one small rock he got from Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park, da home of Pele, da Hawaiian Goddess of da Volcano.

Ho, I wen let-a-go da lettah so fast. Sucking Mike. Why wuz he cursing me I wondered. Da superstition goes, you not supposed to steal Pele's rocks. Everybody know dat. When you go dey always telling how each year people disregard da warnings and decide for snake some. But eventually dey all get sent back. On display wuz some of da actual lettahs from both Locals and tourists explaining how dey took rocks and brought 'em home and dey wound up with all kine bad luck so das how come dey mailed 'em back. Some people loss all their money. Some got all kine mysterious illnesses. Some loss their jobs, their homes, and/or their loved ones. Some died, so their relatives wuz da ones who sent 'em back, cuz dey ne-vah like come dead too.

So what da heck wuz Braddah Mike doing I wondered. What I eva did to him? I called 'em up for broke his ear ova da phone. Das when he explained to me what he found out in his research. He said da story of Pele's Curse nevah have no basis in Hawaiian mythologies. In 1946 one park ranger wuz tired of people desecrating da landscape so he wen go invent da story of Pele's Curse. Yet, even though he made 'em all up, word spread and eventually ukuplanny people fo' real kine believed. And not jus tourists. Locals too. Even Locals who wuz Hawaiian. So da whole ting's fo' fake, but Braddah Mike said das da powah of superstition and belief.

Wit dat theory in mind, I figgah I go take dat park ranger's story and do 'em one bettah. Instead of getting tourists for stop taking it'sy

bity rocks, I decide my myth-o-ma-logical tale going get tourists and speculators for stop snaking whole chunks of land and driving up real estate prices so everyday Local folks like myself no can afford. When tinkin' about how I going respond to Omaha, I make da decision dat I going forego all sense of job security, cuz not like get such one ting nowadays anyways. Wit one sly kolohē kine grin I tell da guy, "Of course we get Christmas in Hawai'i."

As we head along da coast up to Hanalei Bay we pass by all da Diamond Head homes and Kahala side mansions dat I nevah going afford. Das when I get on da mic and I ask my passengers, "Since Omaha wen ask, who like know da story of Hawaiian Santa?" Palm Beach, Lake Forest, Oak Brook, Tokyo, Westport and Malibu all chime in "Yes, do tell."

But before I can even start dey already bombardin' me wit questions. I dunno why tourist people always gotta interrupt. "Where does your Hawaiian Santa live?" "Does he ride a sleigh?" "Do you have reindeer here?" And of course, "So are all your toys made of Koa wood?" I feel like telling da guy, yeah brah, alllll Local people shop at Martin & MacArthur. In fact, I even planning on selling my giant flat screen HD TV and my entire home entertainment system. . . so I can buy one niiiiice koa papahclip.

All my life I been catering to da tourists. In high school I took Japanese as my second language instead of Hawaiian. Imagine dat. And I not even Japanese. But counselors told me Japanese mo' bettah cuz I can use 'em for get one job later on. So I took 'em, even though wuzn't interesting. Japanese tourists probably not too impressed by my remedial mastery of common Japanese phrases like "Onamae wa nan desu ka?" and "Genki desu ka?" What's your name? and How are you? I also know "Gorufu o shimashoo ka?" Would you like to play Golf? But I nevah really had da chance for use dat one cuz like I can afford for take up golfing. Da only Japanese phrase I use on one consistent basis is "Nihongo ga wakarimasen," which means I don't understand Japanese, which I suppose is little bit ironicals cuz I telling dat to dem. . . in Japanese. Maybe das why dey always look at me funny kine.

Since small kid time everybody wuz always telling me how we gotta do everything for show da hospitalities to da tourists. Even da hotels I go, dey all fully kowtow to all da visitors. I found out couple hotels wen even ban Braddah Iz. You can believe dat? First I heard dat I wuz puzzle. I wuz like how can you ban one dead guy? Das when my friend wen go explain how wuz Braddah Iz's music dat wuz ban. At da hotel my friend Koza work at, he said it's cuz "Hawai'i 78" wuz playing in da lobby so one tourist lady wen go complain about how da song made her feel unwelcome so management wen go react. Or maybe I should say dey wen overreact cuz dey wen go ban all songs made by Hawaiian song legend Israel Kamakawiwo'ole. I could maybe see how da song "Living in a Sovereign Land" might upset some tourists, cuz it alludes to da overthrow of da Hawaiian nation and wanting sovereignty for da Hawaiian peoples. But to me "Hawai'i 78" is more about what we going do about rampant over development. My friend says da part da tourist lady probably nevah like wuz da part dat goes "All the fighting that the King had done. To conquer all these islands, now there's condominiums." He said it probably made her feel guilty for staying at da hotel. I couldn't understand how stopping da song from being played wuz going soothe her guilt. Wouldn't it make her feel even more guilty cuz she wuz helping for hide da truth? I no can understand tourists.

From small kid time, our kupuna always emphasized how we need da tourists. Our elders, our teachers, all told of how tourists is good for us. Kinda like vegetables, bland, but full of richness. And how we need tourists for keep coming back, cuz dey keep our economy going. But what dey nevah fully understand is so what we do when da tourists return, but nevah go back? According to da article I jus read inside Honolulu magazine, da statisticians predicting dat by da year 2020 Hawa'i going get more people born outside ova hea living hea than those who wuz born ova hea. In oddah words planny Hawa'i people going be force for move away. I know some of these newcomers going be immigrants cuz Hawa'i get one history of immigrant labor from way back in da plantation days. But da article said most of da new residents is going be rich mainland transplant

peoples. Cuz seems like getting for be das da only people who can afford for ova hea.

"No worry," I begin "All your questions going be answered during da course of my myth-o-ma-logical tale." I scan my rearview mirror. I see all eyes stay transfixed on top me. Well, on top da back of my bolo head anyway.

"You know how da Haole Santa lives in da North Pole? You tink das extreme? Das nahning. Hawaiian Santa, brah, he live in. . . da volcano. I know Maibu ova dea looking at me like he no believe. Well, he can go check 'em out den. See, cuz before time, back in da ol' hanabatta dayz, one good Hawaiian man named um, Kalikimaka, yeah, Kalikimaka. He wuz weary. He wuz tired of big multi-national corporations bullying him off his house on da beach so dey could make all their fancy hotels. So for get dem for stop hassling him, he wen decide for hele on."

"Den later when Kalikimaka we go move up da mountain, rich real estate developers wen go muscle him out again so dey could build all their luxury homes wit da scenic views. Kalikimaka wuz tired fighting so he wen decide for move again. Dis time to where nobody would boddah him. Straight into da volcano."

"When people saw da guy who wen jump into da volcano dey assumed he wen commit suicide. Da story wuz even in da papah and had his obituary too. It said Kalkimaka wuz one good natured man. Always laughing and smiling. Das why all his friends called him uh, 'Mele' Kalikimaka cuz he wuz always so happy."

"But affah awhile Kalikimaka came not so merry. Living in one volcano can do dat to you. Picture living in Ewa side, no more air condition, and get all kine fumes coming from Waianae landfill. Smelling da pilau air everyday, Kalikimaka started for come bitter and resentful. You know how Haole Santa get elfs. Well, Hawaiian Santa get menehune. Menehune is da opposite of elfs. Same height but opposite. While elfs is benevolent and dey make tings for give away, menehune is mischievious and dey like for steal. At first

Kalikimaka did kolohē rascal kine stuff for get back at people. Like he would enlist da help of da menehune and have dem steal tings for fun. Like cameras and purses from tourists when dey parked at Pali lookout and left their stuffs in plain view on top da front seat wit da window down. But while wuz fun for see da angry look on da tourists' faces when their stuff wuz gone, Kalikimaka still wuzn't satisfied."

"Cuz still had rich people buying Hawai'i up. So Kalikimaka decided for do what da state couldn't do. Back in da 70's Governor George Ariyoshi wen go enact da law where public jobs could only go to Local residents. Da tinkin' wuz das going deter outsiders from moving ova hea. Cuz how dey can come one resident if dey no more one job? And how dey can get one job if dey not one resident? And for long time da law wen fly. And wuzn't until recently dat couple Florida guys wen sue and so da ACLU wen complain cuz dey said das illegal discriminations and da Hawai'i law wuz actually unconstitutional. Da ACLU legal director revealed how "It sends the message that nonresidents are not welcome." I thought wuz obvious from da beginning when dey made dat law, but actually took da lawyers 27 years for figgah dat out. Go figgah.

Instead of using da legal system, Kalikimaka wen decide for resort to his own methods and use fear tactics. He imagined he could scare off newcomers if he spread da rumor dat da island wuz going sink if had too much people. And naturally da areas dat would be first for go would be all da rich beach houses and luxury condos dat transplants love best. But to his chagrin, dat still nevah scare people away. I guess cuz da rich people tink different from regular people. Most everyday people, dey see da water stay rising dey go "Flood, flood, run away, flee for your lives." But rich guys is like "My goodness, I do believe the tide is unusually high. I suppose we'll just have to finish our martinis on our luxury yacht."

"And so, wuz back to da drawing board for Kalikimaka. So you know how Haole Santa get his sleigh with his reindeer, Hawaiian Santa get his outrigger canoe pulled by his nine wild puua. But look Palm Beach ova dea. She saying but pigs no can walk on water. Das

right. And what? Reindeer can fly in da air? See, same smell. So what Kalikimaka wen use his magic canoe for do? He wen go far out to sea, den taking his magic lasso. Cuz Kalikimaka's uncle wuz one paniolo so he had da kine cowboy background, ah, li'dat, ah. But using his magic lasso he wen go lasso. . . da sun. I know West Port ova dea saying, but wouldn't da sun burn da rope? Das true, true. But what West Port dunno is Kalikimaka wen go catch da sun. . . nighttime. Plus his rope wuz magic, so leave it alone. So anyway, what's da point in dat? Da point wuz he wen do dat for talk stories with da sun for convince da sun for turn up da heat on da tourists. Das why, you no notice, Japanese tourists, Haole tourists, Chinese tourists, dey always getting really bad sun burn, like dey look like dey in one constant state of embarrassment. Most people tink ah, stupid tourist, why dey jus nevah use sun screen. But really no matter how much sun screen dey put, still no work. Das cuz in actuality tourists is getting '15.2 degrees of extra' sun. I kid you not."

"Still yet, skin all burn, everything, people continued for move hea. Luckily, Kalikimaka had one more trick left. So you know how lately been having lotta vog coming out from da volcano? Das cuz of Kalikimaka. Scientists say might get health risks cuz all da kine chemical elements coming out in da fumes. What da scientists dunno, but people believe is dat in those fumes is one gas dat affects all recent transplant people. It gives dem one perpetual sense of feeling unwelcome. You hear all da time, right, about people who move here and dey jus no fit in. Dey like da scenery, but dey hate da people, dey hate da food, and dey hate da culture. An'den dey put all da blame on da Local people for making dem feel excluded, while at da same time dey stay making da gates on top their gated communities more extra higher. Yeah, wassup wit dat? Some transplants can be weird like dat. But da gas only has one lasting affect on da bad apples of da newcomer lot. Eventually cool transplants who down with Local culture going forget dey evah felt anything. Lotta times da newcomers who do da most complaining, dey usually da first for go. For proof you could ask dem. But dey gone already. Nevah to be heard from again."

"And so dat concludes da legend of Hawaiian Santa." Nobody says

anything as I pull into Hanalei Bay. I dunno if it's cuz dey distracted by da view as we drive down around da bend or if it's cuz dey rethinking "Oh, wherever shall we buy our retirement homes now?"

Part of me wonders if Braddah Mike going be upset at me or what for making up stories and misrepresenting da Hawaiian culture. Cuz I no tink he wuz mad at da park ranger who made up da story about da rocks. Da guy had good intentions. I figgah I actually helping Braddah Mike out. Cuz if my story catches on den das going be one whole noddah dissertation topic he can write about one day and he can get one noddah Phd.

I park my trolley bus and make some quick kine announcements.

"No forget for bring your valuables. Cuz we not liable. You nevah know when going get menhune. Remembah now, no walk too close togeddah. Make sure you spread out da weight." I smile little bit to myself when I notice Omaha and Malibu, stepping gingerly off my trolley bus. I give dem all one shaka for tell 'em goodbye and I give 'em one friendly reminder, "Meet back in two hours. Have fun. Relax. Take deeeeeeeep breaths. Let it all in. And no forget, Mele Kalikimaka!"

III. ESSAYS

*"You think you got something big to say? Something momentous?
Or is it what you had to memorize in order to escape the men with
lightning in their eyes?"*

- John Yau

HOW THE RULES OF RACISM ARE DIFFERENT FOR ASIAN AMERICANS

Matthew Salesses

My senior year in Chapel Hill, I finally got up the courage to take a course in Asian American literature. Stupidly, I treated it as a little experiment. As an adoptee, I had grown up with white parents in a white town in rural Connecticut. My only knowledge of Asian culture was Chinese food and, when I was growing up, a number of meetings of adopted children that still haunt me, though I realize that my parents had my best interests at heart. They had taken me to these meetings for connection, but what I remember was the disconnect: the awkwardness of forced interaction between children who thought of themselves as white and didn't want to be shown otherwise. We hated being categorized as adoptees, or I did and I read those feelings into the others, who to me did not seem friendly, or familiar, only more strange for their yellow faces.

Those meetings made me feel classified by my parents as other. One of the things I most remember from that time (and from books like *We Adopted You*, Benjamin Koo) is the common experience that the adopted child has when one day he looks into the mirror and all of a sudden realizes that his skin color is not the same as his parents'. Up until that moment, he sees himself as white (in the case that the parents are white). I saw myself as white. When I closed my eyes, or when I was in a conversation and seemed to be watching from above, I was a skinny white boy, a combination of my parents, just like other kids. Sometimes, if I am being honest, I still catch myself looking down at my conversations with white people and picturing myself, in that strange ongoing record in my head, as no different from them. As a boy, the one thing that nagged at me was the flatness of my nose. I was constantly tugging on it, thinking that I could stretch it out and thereby gain acceptance.

But let me pause here for a moment. This is going to be a difficult essay to write, and I want to prepare myself—and you, reader—by coming at this topic from a larger angle.

It seems to me that a similar type of self-contextualizing (through race) happened on a grand scale in Asian America as Jer-

emy Lin took over sports news and much of AA media references last spring. With Lin's rise, there was a feeling, a swelling collective feeling, that we Asians were no different from the other people we see on national TV, almost exclusively white and black. That we were Jeremy Lin, able to play as well as they in "their" arena, the ability of Jeremy Lin pointing to a potential in all of us. The writer Jay Caspian Kang said something to this effect in his Grantland article: "The pride we feel over [Lin's] accomplishments is deeply personal and cuts across discomforting truths that many of us have never discussed. It's why a headline that reads 'Chink in the Armor,' or Jason Whitlock's tweeted joke about 'two inches of pain,' stings with a new intensity. Try to understand, everything said about Jeremy Lin, whether glowing, dismissive, or bigoted, doubles as a referendum on where we, as a people, stand."

When the disparagements came—as we feared and maybe suspected they would but hoped they wouldn't—it was like that first time looking in the mirror. We realized that for all of Jeremy Lin's accomplishments, we as Asians are still different, are still seen differently than other races by the vast majority of Americans.

The truth is, racism toward Asians is treated differently in America than racism toward other ethnic groups. This is a truth all Asian Americans know. While the same racist may hold back terms he sees as off-limits toward other minorities, he will often not hesitate to call an Asian person a chink, as Jeremy Lin was referred to, or talk about that Asian person as if he must know karate, or call him Bruce Lee, or consider him weak or effeminate, or so on.

Bullying against Asian Americans continues at the highest rate of any ethnic group. I remember, when I was taking the Asian American literature course, an article in a major magazine that ran pictures of (male) Asian models above the tagline, "Gay or Asian?" I remember a video that went viral last year in which people explained why men prefer Asian women and why women dislike Asian men. Some of the women on the video were Asian American.

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As I said, I was treating the AA literature course as an experiment. There were a few white students in class who laughed at the "Gay or Asian?" tag and found little offensive about it, at least until pressed. Maybe the first sign that my experiment was working

was the anger I felt toward them. The test, you see, was secretly how Asian I was, or maybe whether I was Asian at all. It was something to do with discovering myself, and how much that self was formed by my birth, which I knew nothing about, and by my birth mother, who had abandoned me, and by the country that had raised me while leaving scars of unknown origin on various parts of my body.

College can be a chance to remake oneself, or to get closer to the foundation of oneself that one gradually moves away from under the influence of peers. I had, in fact, as soon as I got to UNC, attempted to join the Asian American club, but I couldn't get over how cliquish they seemed, embracing their strangeness, while the truth is that I was trying to get away from those differences. Soon I found myself, with this second chance, once again trying to be accepted by people who looked like my parents, telling myself I didn't want to be Asian if this was what being Asian meant, being birds of a different feather, expected to be an automatic friend because of race. I had, as you can see, my excuses.

Yet somewhere inside of me, I must have felt that I was growing further from myself. Racist jokes were told with alarming frequency for a school billed the "most liberal in the South," and I was friends with two groups: one mostly white, mostly Southerners in the same dorm; the other mostly black, with whom I played pickup basketball. They joked without censor. I had a girlfriend whose aunt and uncle lived in North Carolina, and when we went to visit, they would say that at least I wasn't black, often before some racist diatribe. This seemed the predominant sentiment then. At least I wasn't _____.

I was taking the AA course to find out what I was. I hadn't read much Asian American literature at that time—I think almost all I could add to the class discussion was Michael Ondaatje—and a couple of books planted seeds in me then that would grow into a certain self-awareness later in life. I will always be grateful to Don Lee's story collection, *Yellow*. In Lee's stories, Asian American characters experience racist incident after racist incident, but these incidents are mostly background to their lives as sculptors, surfers, lovers, etc. The characters are very much of the world in which they live, the world in which I lived and a different world than the one in which white people live with the privilege of their color.

In class, the white students were incredulous. They claimed such acts of racism could never happen with such frequency. Yet if anything, to me, the racism seemed infrequent, and with minimal effect on the characters' lives. I had grown up constantly wavering between denying and suspecting that my skin color was behind the fights picked with me, the insults, the casual distance kept up even between myself and some of my closest friends. Sometimes—in retrospect: oftentimes—these incidents were obviously rooted in race. I have been called "chink" and "flat face" and "monkey" many many times. And it is the context of these words that make a child grow uncomfortable with who he is, that instill a deep fear in him. (As a side note: I am married now to a Korean woman who grew up in Korea, and when I mentioned the "flat face" slur to her, she said, "but your face is flat." Yet how different was this from the leering way it was said to me as a child, something she hadn't felt as a Korean in Korea.) I was afraid, back then, of myself, as if there were a little Asian person living within me that was corrupting my being, taking me away from the white person I thought I was.

There are still incidents from those days that I cannot get out of my mind. I remember watching, in one middle school class, a video meant to teach us that blackface and sculptures of big-lipped black people and stereotypes of watermelon and fried chicken were wrong. Later that same year, one of my best friends drew a picture of a square with a nose poking off of one side. I knew this was me even before he said it. Sometimes my friends would ask me to do the trick where I put my face against the table, touching both my forehead and my chin to the wood. I thought of this as a special ability, but underneath, I knew I should be ashamed.

I would bet that this friend does not remember drawing me in that one science class. We often drew together. He was in all of my classes that year, as we were allowed two friends to share a similar schedule, and I was the only one who requested him. That he wouldn't remember this drawing is part of the problem, I know now. He thought of the picture as a joke, though I had never seen him draw caricatures or draw anyone else so simply. Surely a part of him knew what he was doing but didn't stop him. There was no video to tell him not to—there was no one to tell him not to, even me. I pretended it didn't bother me.

That was the same year my closest childhood friend suddenly cut me off. We had been inseparable, but at the start of that school year, he made fun of me and seemed to use this attack to springboard into popularity. I spent many nights during those first few weeks of school crying myself to sleep, not understanding why we weren't friends anymore. It is a wound that still hurts—as I type this, I find my face heating up and my breaths deepening. I still don't understand completely, but I can point to the fear that this was due to the color of my skin, more than anything, as an indication that it indeed was. I understood even when I didn't understand, as children can. In response to the students who didn't believe the frequency/viciousness of the racism in Yellow, the professor showed us an interview in which Lee says every incident in the book has happened to him. Or perhaps I found this interview later, I don't remember now. As a matter of research, I thought I would ask a few Asian American authors I know about racist incidents in their books that are based on events that happened to them. Earlier this year, Salon ran a piece by Marie Myung-Ok Lee about a bully who made it into her novel and whom she finally, after many years, confronted. I heard from several writers about experiences making it into their books: how they were unable to get away from writing about those experiences, as unable as they were to stop thinking about them, but hardly anyone seemed to want to call out those past attackers. I spoke with one writer about the condition of anonymity, as the people who had hurt him most were those closest to him.

I think what all of this says to me is that 1. these things happen to all of us, and 2. they leave the type of mark that we cannot escape, that we return to again and again, as writers do.

*

A few years after UNC, when I was an MFA student at Emerson College (where Don Lee got his MFA and then later edited Ploughshares and taught), there was a rumor going around that in the original workshop stories from Yellow, the characters were white.

That Lee made them Asian later. I'm not sure the truth of this statement. In fact, I'm not interested in the truth of it. I'm more interested in the fact that this was a rumor at all. This was something people wanted to talk about, and talked about as if the truer versions of the characters were white. If Lee did use white characters, originally,

he is not alone. I know many Asian American writers who refuse to write about Asian Americans, out of a fear of being typecast, or a fear of being seen as “using” their ethnicity, or a fear of being an “Asian American writer,” or something. And really, I understand that. I have been one of those writers. This may not come as a surprise, at this point in this essay, but for a long time, I wrote only about white characters. I wrote about them because I grew up with people like them, but also because they were the people in books and because I, too, feared the label, or at least told myself I did. What that fear really is, it seems to me now, is a fear of not being taken as seriously as the White Male Writer, who has so long ruled English literature. The breakthrough came when I started to be able to read my own stories objectively. Something was not making sense. Why were my characters who they were? I inserted plenty of flashbacks and backstory to try to “explain” them. But in the end, I realized that what they were missing, in many cases, was a crucial piece of me that had gone into them. They were Asian, like me. Many of them were adopted, like me. The original characters were not the true characters. And “changing” them to Koreans made everything make sense.

*

For my day job, I organize a seminar at Harvard on the topic of Inequality. I attend these talks both out of responsibility and out of interest. But after two and a half years, I can only remember Asians being mentioned twice, once in direct response to a question by an Asian student. I remember sitting beside another Asian American student and listening to a lecture earlier this year. He said something like, “Nobody ever talks about Asians,” and I said, “Asians don't exist in Sociology.” We both laughed. It was a joke, but it stung with a certain truth. The time Asians were mentioned not in answer to a question was in reference to university admissions—a heated topic now in the AA community—as numbers show that students of Asian descent make up a disproportionately large percentage of admissions to top schools.

Often I have heard Asians talking about these percentages with pride, even in responding to racism. If attacked, they “point to the scoreboard” of college admissions. Yet it is a very real complaint that Asian descent seems to count against us in those same admissions numbers. Both Harvard and Princeton are currently under

investigation on charges of racism toward Asians, whose grades and SAT scores, on average, must be higher than those of other races in order to gain admissions. Many Asian Americans are responding by marking the box on applications that declines to indicate race, something I cannot help but read symbolically. I confess that I would give my daughter that exact advice, in admissions: not to reveal her race. The accusation is that schools have capped their “quotas” of Asian students, and this is why Asians need to score higher, because they are competing amongst themselves for a limited number of spots. Most Asians accept the unwritten rules, pushing themselves or their children harder. But why should they, in a country that prides itself on equal opportunity?

To bring up college admissions is often to be met with the complaint that we should be happy with the success we have. In fact, success is often used as a justification for why Asians are ignored in discussions of inequality. I was forgetting a third mention of Asian Americans in the seminars: as a group other immigrant races should look toward as an example of successful assimilation. Why aren't we happy with our disproportionate admissions and the many children who grow up to be doctors and lawyers, pushed by their parents? (The more sarcastic answer: why aren't white people happy enough with EVERYTHING?)

Jeremy Lin, early in his success, was called out by boxer Floyd Mayweather as only getting the attention he was getting because he is Asian, since every day black athletes accomplish what Lin has and receive no fanfare. Or something to this effect. Other journalists responded by saying Lin is getting the attention because he worked so hard and is the ultimate underdog. Both these points, it seems to me, have a lot to do with race. Why was Lin an underdog, ignored by scouts when he had succeeded at every level and outplayed the best point guards he faced (see: John Wall, Kemba Walker)? Writers always seem to mention how hard Lin works, and often mention this as a trait of Asian Americans. They mention that he went to Harvard, how smart he is. They mention that he is humble. When I wrote about the “Chink in the Armor” headline here, a commenter responded by pointing to Asian Americans being too respectful to speak up against racism. This respectfulness, he said, was something he admired about Asians.

It is hard to call someone who thinks he is complimenting you a racist. But the positive stereotypes people think they can use because of their “positivity” continue (and worsen) the problem. Thinking you can call an entire race “respectful” is thinking you can classify someone by race, is racism. Which is what is happening to Jeremy Lin when he is called “hard-working” instead of “skilled,” when his talent is marginalized by a writer who sees him as the Asian American stereotype, the child of immigrants who outworks and outstudies everyone else. Mayweather has one point, at least—other athletes work as hard or harder than Jeremy Lin. I've seen the videos of Lin's workouts, how intense they are, how long, but this is not unusual for a basketball star. Read about Kobe Bryant's work ethic, or Ray Allen's, either of which put Jeremy Lin to shame. Jeremy Lin is the success he is because of his individual talent, not because he is Asian American. His ethnicity, I would have to argue, was only a factor in him having to “come out of nowhere,” since that was where Asians have been relegated to in sports.

After ESPN ran the “Chink in the Armor” headline, the writer of the headline made a very defensive apology in which he claimed to be a “good person” who didn't know the weight of the word he was using. He was fired, and this apology came afterward. When he was first fired, I felt sorry for him. I didn't think he deserved to lose his job but then his defensiveness came and took that sympathy away. Some on my Twitter feed suggested he didn't know the term because of his young age. He was 28. I was 29. “Chink” is a very common term, probably the most common slur against Asians, and this was a writer and (I'm assuming) a reader who made his livelihood online. I find it impossible to believe that he hadn't come across the term in some way. It bothers me to see people make excuses for him. “I'm sorry, but” is not “I'm sorry.” If you believe you can get away with the excuse, then what is that telling me?

*

A few years after I graduated from UNC, I decided to go to Korea. I had never been back. I was still writing white characters, though I had let a Korean American slip into my novel in a supporting role, a character who never finished his sentences, who was always cut-off or cutting himself off. I was still searching for that Korean part of me. I had spent a long winter in Prague as one of the

only Asians in the city, strange in a strange land. In Korea, I fell apart immediately. I ended up losing twenty pounds in two weeks, and I would have run back to the States if not for meeting my wife.

But then a strange thing happened. I got used to seeing Koreans, and was surprised whenever I saw a white person. And after some time, not like the sudden realization in the mirror but a gradual process, I began to see myself as a person from this country. I wrote my first story with a Korean character, and something in it, the vulnerability, the honesty, clicked. In Korea, I had different differences than in America. Not that race was out of the picture—the biggest shock to people was my culture, in spite of my skin color, my inability to speak Korean—but it was like looking at race from the inside out, the opposite of how I had been forced to see myself my whole life. It was a lesson: that I had control over my differences, that I could choose to build them up or break them down, that they were not simply genetic, something that had never been true in America.

IV. RESEARCH

“But truly fundamental insights such as those of Darwin or Watson & Crick are rare and often subject to intense competition, whereas development of successful techniques to address important problems allows lesser mortals to exert a widespread beneficial impact for at least a few years.”
- Steven Chu

PROBLEMATIC REPRESENTATIONS OF ASIAN AMERICAN MEN IN HOLLYWOOD PRODUCTIONS

Kelsey Dang

“If you want to be cool, if you want to be the hero, if you want to get the girl -- our popular culture seems to say -- you can't be Asian.”
(Robert M. Payne)

It is quite effortless to name Hollywood's Caucasian leading men; Matt Damon, Ryan Gosling, George Clooney, and Channing Tatum are a few who come to mind. But what about Asian American leading men? The pool of options becomes profoundly smaller, and the names more obscure. Few people can recognize Asian American actors Jason Scott Lee, John Cho, Will Yun Lee, or Daniel Dae Kim. Asian Americans are underrepresented in film and television, and the number of Asian Americans on screen fails to account for actual population demographics. According to Screen Actors Guild Casting Data Reports, Asian Pacific Islanders “held only 3.8% of all TV/Theatrical roles in 2008,” a percentage “far less than the actual percentage of the API population in the U.S. that same year” (Rabena). When Asian American actors do receive roles, they often play sidekicks or unattractive characters. Historically, Hollywood has relegated Asian American male actors to stereotypical roles including martial arts master, villain, technology nerd, model minority, or asexual clown. This casting pattern continues today. Absent are portrayals of Asian American men as soldiers, lawyers, father figures, or romantic leads.

A range of scholars have found that when it comes to Asian American representation in the Hollywood entertainment industry, the images are overwhelmingly negative (Marchetti, Ono and Pham). With regard to Asian American masculinity on-screen, many scholars agree that Asian American males are often portrayed as asexual, homosexual, or effeminate. Celine Parreñas Shimizu, Associate Professor of Film and Performance Studies at the University of California at Santa Barbara describes how such representations are “straitjacket sexualities” in her book *Straightjacket Sexualities: Unbinding Asian*

American Manhoods in the Movies. Shimizu also details how Jeff Adachi's documentary on Asian men in film and television, *The Slanted Screen*, addresses the conflation of race and gender when it asserts that “racial wounding is masculine wounding” (Shimizu). In a similar vein, the Media Action Network for Asian Americans lists “Asian male sexuality as negative or non-existent” as a common stereotype in its memo to Hollywood entitled “Restrictive Portrayals of Asians in the Media and How to Balance Them.” Professor Hermant Shah from University of Wisconsin-Madison's School of Journalism and Mass Communication argues that Edward Said's seminal work *Orientalism* can be applied to Hollywood's treatment of Asians. Said argues that Westerners view the East as different, backward and weak. In Asian Americans and the Media, Kent Ono and Vincent Pham argue that when media producers typecast Asian American actors in particular roles, their decisions imbue such negative stereotypes with widespread social power. Indeed, researcher Helen Kar-Yee Ho from the University of Michigan draws from her interviews with Asian American young men to argue that in formative years, individuals turn to media images for identity construction. In “Negotiating the Boundaries of (In)Visibility: Asian American Men and Asian/American Masculinity on Screen,” Ho evaluates recent roles available to Asian American men in primetime television. The author suggests that the ideal Asian American portrayal is one in which the actor is present, but not highlighted as different.

Several sources I identified commented on norms and practices within the entertainment industry as reasons behind the prevalence of Asian stereotypes in Hollywood today. In his paper “Representation of Asians in Hollywood Films: Sociocultural and Industrial Perspectives,” Ji Hoon Park identifies media producers' fear of alienating white audiences as one reason stereotypes are preferred in casting. In her piece, “Performing Race, Negotiating Identity: Asian American Professional Actors in Hollywood,” Nancy Wang Yuen identifies stereotypes as a painless way for writers and producers to establish a character. Through her interviews with current Asian American actors, Yuen highlights how the young people respond to racialized characterizations. Joann Faung Jean Lee's book, *Asian American Actors*, chronicles the career frustrations of experienced Asian American actors in New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles

with regard to roles void of realistic character development.

In this paper, I argue that Hollywood's continual adherence to stereotypical roles for Asian American men negatively alters society's perception of Asian American males and affects the sense of identity of the average Asian American man as well as the identities of the actors who fill the stock roles. First, I make the connection between media representations of Asian Americans and societal perceptions of Asian Americans. In this section, I will describe the common perception of the Asian as the perpetual foreigner or the "Other," according to works including Edward Said's *Orientalism*. Next, the essay will address problematic portrayals of Asian American males and comment on the paucity of leading romantic roles for Asian American men; I will focus on two films to evaluate their characterizations of Asian men. I will conclude with a discussion on Hollywood practices and casting decisions. In this final section I will review recent casting decisions of this decade for Asian American men in primetime television.

Part 1: Media Stereotypes of Asian American Men and Their Larger Implications

Media representations of Asian Americans dramatically influence societal perceptions of Asian American males because people draw from characterizations of groups found in the media to form their understanding of reality. Media studies scholar Helen Ho declares, "What is commonly circulated in cultural discourse and exchange has the power to define and guide interpretations of others" (Ho 13). Since film and television are such effective forms of communication, the images they create produce a profound effect on an audience's social perceptions. In his book *Public Opinion*, Walter Lippmann explains that media have the power to shape the "pictures in our heads" (Lippmann 29). He warns that "the pictures inside people's heads do not automatically correspond with the world outside" (31). The problem arises, then, when people rely on media characterizations of certain groups to form their attitudes toward those groups. When Hollywood perpetuates negative stereotypes of Asian American men, those images lead to the persistence of incorrect perceptions of Asian American men in society at large.

Origins of Asian American Male Stereotypes

Some of the most common stereotypes of Asian American men found in media productions past and present include: the foreigner, the villain, the kung fu master, the model minority, and the asexual buffoon. Most of these characterizations are couched in historical prejudice toward Asians in America. One stereotype frequently employed in the media is that Asians in the United States are forever foreigners; they can never fully assimilate and remain outsiders in society. This perspective follows Edward Said's description of "Orientalism," in which Westerners view an individual from Asia as an example of the Oriental, an alien "Other." Said explains that the Oriental is commonly interpreted as strange and not to be trusted (Said 40). Historically, Westerners have viewed the East as different and backward, an attitude that became so pervasive that it was assumed to be "common sense" (Shah). The stereotypical Asian American acting roles of the perpetual foreigner, the villain (embodying a threat to the Western way of life), and the exotic martial arts master are all a result of past prejudicial notions of Asians. These stereotypes normalize the concept of white superiority and non-white inferiority, and they reflect the "imperialist white eye" that Stuart Hall claims is ever-present in media representations of race (Hall qtd. in Park 4). Furthermore, restricted portrayals of Asian Americans often treat a character's "Asianness" as a defining personality trait. Professor Joann Faung Jean Lee of Queens College, SUNY asserts, "In essence, Asian presence in Hollywood film remains a prop" (Lee 7). The Asian American role most commonly lacking in emotional depth is that of the model minority, but all Hollywood stereotypes of Asian Americans are static depictions. Professional actor Billy Chang laments, "Emotions are what acting is supposed to be about. The funny thing is that with Asian American roles you get parts that basically have no emotional content whatsoever. They're just filler roles" (47).

The final "filler role" that is valuable to dissect is that of the asexual buffoon, a role that prevents the possibility of Asian American actors playing leading romantic men in television and film. The roles of "the villain" and the "martial arts foe" are the stereotypes most clearly linked to the historically prominent fear of "yellow peril" in America, a fear which "combines racist terror of alien cultures,

sexual anxieties, and the belief that the West will be overpowered and enveloped by the irresistible, dark, occult forces of the East” (Marchetti 2). Yet the “asexual buffoon” role is also linked to the perceived yellow peril threat, which the United States’ wars with Japan, Korea, and Vietnam helped to perpetuate. In fact, the emasculation of Asian American men in Hollywood can be traced to an effort to ward off xenophobic anxiety over power relations (Ono and Pham 71). Simultaneously, the notion of Asian American men as feminine is also linked to the past concentration of Asian male immigrants who took over “feminized professions” in the late 19th century, working in tailor’s shops, laundries and restaurants because they were barred from heavy labor jobs. David Eng, author of *Racial Castration*, explains that these Asian male immigrants lived in bachelor communities that were “physically, socially, and psychologically isolated,” communities which “might easily be thought of as “queer” spaces” (Eng 18). Past discrimination toward Asian male immigrants is largely the cause of the stereotype of the asexual buffoon and has therefore led to the severe lack of lead romantic roles for Asian American men in today’s Hollywood environment. Scholar Celine Parreñas Shimizu describes the common media portrayals of Asian American males as asexual, homosexual, or effeminate as “straitjacket sexualities,” representations that “inflict racial wounds, pathologize gender, and construct an abnormal sexuality” (Shimizu 18). When standard notions of masculinity are considered abnormal for Asian American men, desexualized, socially inept, comedic roles are all that remain for Asian American male actors with regard to romance.

Case Studies: Hollywood Films

To evaluate the types of romantic on-screen interactions available to Asian American male actors, two films are worthy of consideration: John Hughes’ 1984 teen movie *Sixteen Candles* and Justin Lin’s 2002 youth drama *Better Luck Tomorrow*. *Sixteen Candles* provides a limited, demeaning role for its Asian American star while *Better Luck Tomorrow* provides a dynamic, stereotype-dispelling role for its main Asian American character. In *Sixteen Candles*, Gedde Watanabe portrays Long Duk Dong, a foreign exchange student who fulfills the stereotype of the foreigner as well as that of the asexual clown. To begin with, the name “Long Duk Dong” relies

on a homophobic locker room joke that tells the audience early on that Watanabe’s character will be a source for laughs. In one scene, a gong plays as Dong’s visage appears on the screen. He is eating dinner with his host family who looks at him as a specimen. During the dinner conversation, Dong mixes up a word and everyone at the table laughs at him, including children who are much younger than he. The character looks down, embarrassed. Looking at Dong, Grandpa announces proudly, “He does the dishes and helps with the laundry, you betcha.” Here, Long Duk Dong clearly follows the stereotype of the foreigner who does feminine work. Later in the movie, Dong fulfills the asexual clown stereotype when he is romantically paired with a masculine, female jock named “Lumberjack.” Instead of attracting a typically beautiful girl such as the main character Samantha, Dong is romantically interested in a female larger and stronger than he. Thus, the representation “aims to provide comic relief” while feminizing Dong and “constructs [his] sexuality as aberrant” (Ono and Pham 71). The character remains one dimensional throughout the film.

In contrast to Long Duk Dong, Ben Mamabag (played by Parry Shen) contradicts Asian American stereotypes in *Better Luck Tomorrow*. At first glance, high schooler Ben acts as a model minority, set for an Ivy League school after college. He diligently prepares for his SAT test mightily and is involved in many extracurricular activities. However, as the movie progresses, it becomes evident that Ben is a model minority who behaves badly. Ben gets involved in helping other students cheat on tests, experiments with drugs, and, most shocking of all, participates in the murder of Steve, his love interest’s boyfriend. Yet in the end, it appears Ben “gets the girl,” Stephanie, when the two share a kiss and drive away together. Here, the character of Ben ultimately defies the model minority stereotype and proves to be a sexually desirable romantic male lead, a rarity in Hollywood films. While *Better Luck Tomorrow* should be applauded for its daring portrayal of Asian American male youth, director and producer Justin Lin faced a range of difficulties in the production, distribution, and reception of the film. Because of *Better Luck Tomorrow*’s all-Asian American cast, Lin recalls “countless predictions about the impossibility of the film’s success,” and he experienced extreme pressure to “change the characters to white ones” (Shimizu 19). MTV Films, the studio behind the movie, told Lin that there

was no “Asian wedge” in the market for his film (Ho 4). After Better Luck Tomorrow’s debut at the Sundance Film Festival, Lin was criticized for his failure to portray the Asian American community in a positive manner. Following Sundance, the film met with limited box office success (Ho 3). The response toward Better Luck Tomorrow demonstrates that Hollywood has much left to achieve in the realm of acceptance of diverse, non-clichéd stories with multiple Asian American leading characters.

Effects of Stereotypes on the Asian American Male Viewer

Just as film and television stereotypes of Asian American men profoundly influence audiences’ real-life perceptions of Asian Americans, media representations also enormously impact Asian American males’ perceptions of themselves. In her interviews with 27 Asian American men, researcher Helen Kar-Yee Ho of the University of Michigan found that with regard to media depictions of Asian American males, “the stereotypes listed by interviewees, while not reflecting any essential Asian American characteristics, constitute a very real, genuine discursive reality for Asian Americans as a racial minority in America” (Ho 50). Ho discovered that with only stereotypes as potential role models, the men she interviewed “have grown up in an era of absence: they have developed self-concepts without any identifiable narrative presenting what it means to be Asian American, in day-to-day experience as well as in the media” (52). The lack of realistic portrayals of Asian American men communicates that Asian American men are insignificant and undesirable. This in turn can disturb Asian American males’ sense of self-worth, especially in terms of dating. A 1998 psychology journal article entitled “Getting the Message: Media Images and Stereotypes and Their Effect on Asian Americans” reports that Asian American men struggle with confidence in their dating choices because of “the consistent messages... equating beauty and attractiveness with White in this society” (Mok 199). Since positive Asian American role models are crucial to the formation of strong identities, it is valuable to consider what the ideal Asian American male representation would be. Ho suggests that the ideal portrayal is “simultaneously visible and invisible,” meaning that Asian American men should be present in narratives but not emphasized as different (Ho 37).

Part 2: Current Hollywood Norms and Casting Practices

Why do the aforementioned stereotypes of Asian American men persist in Hollywood today? Americans have arguably moved beyond “yellow peril” fears, and Asian American men in reality occupy a variety of professions vastly different from martial arts teachers, delivery boys, dishwashers, or computer technicians. Still, Hollywood relies on certain characterizations of Asians for a variety of industrial and sociocultural reasons, all at the expense of the actors who fill the roles.

Recurrence of Stock Characters in Hollywood Productions

Quite simply, Hollywood utilizes stereotypes because they are an easy, safe choice in making a movie. From a narrative perspective, “stereotypes are maintained because of their valued narrative economy” (Berg 42). Charles Ramirez Berg explains that stereotypes “require little or no introduction or explanation, and because they are so quickly and completely comprehended as signs, stereotypes are an extremely cheap and cost-effective means of telling a movie story” (ibid.). In an environment that involves enormous pressure to produce a “box office hit,” producers need to create characters that audiences will accept instantaneously. In other words, casting directors work under credibility guidelines and intense time constraints and turn to set characterizations, “conforming to prevailing notions of social categories,” as a type of insurance for success (Park 9). Additionally, Park suggests that stereotypes prevail in Hollywood productions partly due to media producers’ fear of alienating white audiences. This notion stems from greater racist sensitivities in society, namely that non-Asian consumers are uncomfortable with positive portrayals of Asians involving status or success (Cohen qtd. in Park 14). To please the largest market segment, then, Hollywood restricts Asian American men to narrow representations. Mass marketing strategies are largely to blame for the misrepresentation of minorities on screen.

The final reason Asian American actors find themselves being typecast is due to the gross underrepresentation of Asian Americans in Hollywood as a whole. In “Performing Race, Negotiating Identity: Asian American Professional Actors in Hollywood,” Nancy

Wang Yuen shares that “whites make up nearly 80 percent of feature film writers, 70 percent of television writers, and the majority of the industry’s directors, producers, and executives” (Yuen 253). Further, a 2006 UCLA study based on Internet Movie Database data found that in 2005, 81 percent of all lead acting roles in Hollywood went to whites. Only 1.8 of lead roles went to Asian Americans (Robinson). A Screen Actors Guild study laments, “In the few instances when [Asian Pacific Islanders] are cast, APIs primarily play supporting or minor roles” (Rabena). Asian American actors’ access to leading roles is highly limited; the same study reports that “it remains uncommon for prime-time shows to feature more than one regular API character, if at all” (ibid.). Hollywood casting director Jane Jenkins confirms that it is “definitely harder for minority actors to get good [agent] representation and to get work” (Jenkins qtd. in Robinson). Thus, in white-dominated Hollywood, the lack of diversity in acting, casting, producing, and writing jobs leads to stale, inaccurate representations of minorities, including Asian Americans. Yet if Hollywood continues to perpetuate the same characters for Asian American men, audiences will never grow accustomed to seeing Asian American male actors in stereotype-defying roles. An examination of recent television casting decisions unfortunately shows a perpetuation of this trend.

Television Roles for Asian American Men

To ascertain the current state of roles available to Asian American actors, it is helpful to examine prime-time television shows of the last decade. Two recent popular television dramas feature Asian American men. Though the programs have been celebrated for their diverse casts of characters, both NBC’s *Heroes* and ABC’s *Lost* restrict their main Asian American actors to roles of foreigners, despite the actors’ ability to speak English flawlessly (Ono and Pham 8). On *Heroes*, a drama about a group of people from around the world who discover they have superpowers, Masi Oka portrays Hiro Nakamura, a Japanese programmer who finds he has the ability to bend time. At the height of *Heroes*’ popularity, entertainment magazines applauded Oka for making the role of geek “chic,” but it remains that Hiro fits the stereotype of an Asian character as a technology-loving nerd. Compared to the other male heroes

on the show, Hiro does not follow standard notions of masculinity. Throughout the show, Hiro is commonly found in “schoolboy” attire, wearing slacks and cardigans. He also displays childlike behavior in the episodes, which decreases his possibility of being a strong romantic contender. Furthermore, Hiro is never allowed to freely pursue his love interest, Yaeko. As part of the plot, Hiro’s white friend Adam also is interested in Yaeko. As a result, “when Hiro kisses Yaeko, he knows his romance will betray his friendship with Adam. Because of this, ‘he cannot take pleasure in the act and even looks pained while doing so’ (Ho 174). Hiro’s other love interest in the show is murdered early on (“Seven”). Thus, following a typical Hollywood pattern, *Heroes* fails to permit Oka to perform as a male romantic lead. Instead of portraying a manly, powerful superhero, “Oka’s performance is comedic, and centers on a meek demeanor, slapstick humor based on his small physical stature, and general awkwardness, all qualities...labeled as stereotypically Asian” (Ho 177). Though he possesses superpowers, Hiro’s naiveté hinders him on the show, and he never truly “gets the girl.”

Similar to Masi Oka’s character in terms of language barriers, Jin-Soo Kwon on ABC’s *Lost* is the only major character who cannot speak English at the start of the show. Daniel Dae Kim portrays Jin, a Korean man trapped on a mysterious island with several other survivors after a plane crash. In contrast to Hiro, Jin is immediately understood to be very masculine; he is protective of his wife, possesses a muscular, toned body, and is of stoic character. However, Kim still plays a stereotypically Asian role: that of the foreigner. In the pilot episode, Jin offers raw sea urchins to the others on the beach, but they are not interested in his food source because they find it strange (“Pilot: Part 2”). Additionally, Jin’s ethnicity is misidentified several times on the show. In one episode, the character “Harley” incorrectly calls Jin and his wife Chinese (Yuen et al. 17). In another episode, “Sawyer” refers to Jin as Japanese when he says, “I traded Mr. Miyagi the last of my water for a fish he caught” (“White Rabbit”). Jin is very much “othered” in *Lost*: his difference is highlighted as foreignness because he eats raw sea urchins, cannot communicate in English, and falls prey to the struggle of non-Asians to correctly identify his race. Overall, while the roles of Hiro and Jin are progressive in some ways, they still marginalize the Asian char-

actors. Though Hiro possesses superhuman powers, he is incapable of achieving characteristics of hegemonic masculinity. On the other hand, while Jin is quite masculine, he is perpetually a foreigner on the Lost Island.

Effects of Stereotypical Roles on Asian American Actors

How do Asian American professional actors react to the restrictions of Hollywood's acting environment? In her ethnographic research with twenty actors, Joan Faung Jean Lee found that though they fundamentally disagree with racialized portrayals, many Asian Americans accept stereotypical roles simply in order to gain industry experience. This follows one of the "Identity Harms" of ethnic stereotypes listed by Russell Robinson of UCLA: "taking on an identity the actor loathes" (Robinson). If they fight against stereotyped roles in auditions, Asian American actors report that they will not get the part (Lee 34). In an interview, actor Raymond Moy says of limiting roles, "The anger?...It's something that I think is there being a minority, growing up in a country that's a majority... You'll never be treated like everybody else for the most part" (33). For Moy, being pigeonholed makes him emotional. Asian American actors' experiences playing inaccurate ethnic characterizations can negatively affect their sense of belonging in the world.

How to Begin Eliminating Stereotypes

In order for more realistic, multi-faceted roles to be offered to Asian American men, marketing executives must first appreciate the purchasing power of the Asian American audience. According to a report on the Asian Pacific Islander market commissioned by the Screen Actors Guild, "APIs are currently the most affluent racial group in the country," and "Asian American households spend more on entertainment than any other minority households" (Rabena). According to the National Consumer Expenditure Survey, in 2007 "a total of \$11 billion dollars was spent on entertainment by Asian American households alone." Furthermore, the report uses U.S. Census Bureau data to find that "over the past three decades, APIs have had the highest growing population rates of any racial group in the nation" (ibid.). From a business perspective, the Asian American market segment is highly desirable, and marketers need to

support projects that offer API consumers accurate, varied portrayals of Asian Americans in order to tap into this source of revenue. The other initiative that will change the Asian American media landscape for actors is the expansion of the number of Asian Americans found in creative roles in film and television. In the documentary *The Slanted Screen*, Darrell Hamamoto, UC Davis professor of Asian American Studies, asserts that "in order for Asian Americans to have a substantive presence in film [and] in television, they must enter into the ranks of producers, directors, writers, [and] executives as well as being performers." Asian Americans, he says, "need to be there where the decisions are being made." Increased numbers of Asian Americans in directing and producing roles will lead to more accurate and equal representations of Asian American men in media creations.

Conclusion

The Hollywood practice of consigning Asian American men to negative, stereotypical portrayals and excluding them from positive leading roles establishes a color line for Asian American actors that cannot be crossed and sends a message that Asian Americans are unimportant and invisible. It demonstrates implicit racism present in Hollywood casting habits through denying meaningful roles to Asian Americans. Because media representation is so closely linked to people's perception of reality, society's view of Asian American men has little chance of changing as long as Hollywood restricts the acting roles available to Asian males in America. Stereotypes of Asian American men are rooted in historical prejudice toward Asians in America. The solution to eliminating stereotypes is two-fold. Marketers must appreciate the value of Asian American audiences' purchasing power and push for realistic programming that appeals to the Asian American consumer. Simultaneously, Asian Americans must infiltrate the ranks of Hollywood media creators and producers. Only then will restricted, shallow characterizations of Asian American men begin to disappear.

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MY MUSIC IS SILENCE: ASIAN-AMERICAN YOUTH AND THE MODEL MINORITY MYTH

Tiffany Dharmma

My living room piano speaks loudly through its stillness. Drawn to the haunting beauty of its polished black wood, visitors would constantly inquire about the dust on its keys. As its former player, I was expected to replace the quiet with a symphony; only a weak voice would answer. *I used to play; but I don't know how to anymore.* They were never satisfied by this reply: *Surely, you must remember something!*

Instead of sonatas or fugues, what I remember is ten years of conflict. Since the age of five, one of my mom's greatest goals was for me to become an accomplished pianist. Unfortunately, five-year-olds are not known for their willingness to devote their time to Chopin. My mom went through great lengths to get me to stay at that piano bench. Although her aspirations came from a good place in her heart, the frequent result was crying and yelling from both ends. Though the ferocity of the battle muted after a few years, any natural love for piano was effectively crushed. I did not ever play for joy or pleasure. Nevertheless, my mother's pressure to perform became my own. As dozens of recitals and competitions passed, the community praised my talents and congratulatory ribbons accumulated on the walls above the piano. I must have memorized hundreds of pieces of classical music during my decade as a mandatory musician. After passing the most advanced level of performance exams with highest honors, I had finally accomplished what my mom had wanted. That was the last time I ever touched those keys.

When I share this story with other Asian-Americans, many of them can commiserate. While certainly not universal among all classes and communities, this acute and unyielding push to excel is such a common narrative in Asian-American households that it is now an object of lore. The conglomerate of societal and parental pressure directly targets academics and extracurricular activities. It percolates outward to affect aspects of Asian-American life and seeps inward as high standards are internalized. The commonality of

this cycle of expectation, external pressure, and assessment has even become a part of cultural myth. Asian-Americans are seen as the “model minority,” a hard-working, ambitious, and prosperous group because of inherent cultural values. While this is a reductive generalization, their statistical prevalence at top universities and in white-collar professions seems to support this stereotype (Fong 1075). Amidst the distracting decorations of success, one crucial question is often overlooked: what casualties result from this constant pressure to achieve?

I forfeited the piano, but much more is at stake. Many sacrifice their emotional well-being, their passions, their identities; some even give up on life. First and second generation Asian-American adolescents have internalized model minority standards of success with devastating results. Because education occurs during developmental years, these attitudes leave a deep, psychological imprint on involved youth. The idea that self-worth is restricted to quantitative measurements becomes ingrained in their consciousness, building from childhood and peaking during their undergraduate years. Psychological anxiety and mental health problems are prevalent even amongst those who attain the highest standards. Not only is this constant burden of expectation overwhelmingly stressful, but the myth also stifles individuality and normalizes self-sacrifice during a critical point of development when young adults begin to make independent choices and craft worldviews. The pressure on Asian-Americans to succeed becomes a feedback loop of burden and self-repression, perpetuating the model minority myth by encouraging conformity to its clichés.

De Capo: The Beginning

Asian-Americans have struggled with societal connotations of the model minority myth for decades. The term “model minority” was first used by sociologist William Petersen in a 1966 New York Times article titled “Success Story: Japanese-American Style,” (Fong 1975). Petersen praised Asian-Americans as an example that other minorities should emulate. Citing their academic and economic success, he lauded their ability to overcome obstacles like the World War II internment camps and stated that “every attempt to hamper their progress has resulted only in enhancing their determination

to succeed” (Fong 1075). Petersen attributed their perseverance to cultural values of self-help and self-discipline, which are traits that continue to be associated with Asian-Americans today. His article’s explanation for their quantitative achievements gained popularity and spawned further discourse on the subject.

In addition to coining the concept of the “model minority,” Petersen established cultural difference as the basis for their success. This weaves subtle racism into the superficial flattery of the model minority myth. Because Petersen’s definition emphasized cultural disparity, Asian-American success became a foundation for societal separation. Indeed, cultural values play a significant role in Asian-American values because a “majority of them have only been living in America for two or fewer generations” (Iwamoto 80). Especially in Eastern Asian societies, Confucianism has a strong influence. Its tenets of respecting others and cultivating the self through study and work inculcate a “strong belief in meritocracy” that many immigrants maintain (Li 145). However, the reduction of Asian-American persistence to the mere transplantation of Confucian values from the East to West encourages awareness of distinction (Chou 222). It enables a perceived dichotomy between hemispheres to develop, representing the myth’s veneer of orientalism and cultural determinism (Chou 218). Binding Asian-Americans to the continent of Asia separates them from mainstream America, reinforcing the idea of otherness. This suggests that “no matter how well Asian-Americans assimilate, they are at best the model minorities instead of becoming part of the majority” (Chou 222).

A stereotype of foreignness emerges from the model minority myth and presents obstacles in the Asian-American pursuit for social acceptance. Although overtly racist policies like the Chinese Exclusion Act are a thing of the past, *de facto* discrimination is manifested through marginalization and ignorance. An underlying current of exclusion manifests itself daily through questions like “Where are you *really* from?” or “What are you?,” which Asian-Americans report receiving on a regular basis (Iwamoto 79). Because Asian-Americans are seen as foreigners, model minority rhetoric sometimes expresses anxiety and “fears of losing strength and the will to lead in the context of Asian domination” on an international and domestic level (Fong 1077). Immigrant success is an occasional

source of antipathy for the threatened Caucasian majority, as well as other minority groups who feel demigrated by model minority rhetoric. Even when achievement does not breed hostility, it contributes to ignorance. Blinded by the façade of success, many Americans dismiss problems in the Asian-American community. Thus, the model minority myth presents Asian-Americans with a burdensome dilemma: Success is the means toward societal acceptance, yet it is also a criterion for exclusion and misunderstanding.

Allegro: My Tempo Must Be Fast if I Want to Keep Pace

The nuanced duality of success as a mode of acceptance and exclusion adds to a feedback cycle of pressure. Cognizant of racism and other societal obstacles, Asian immigrants feel the need to work even harder to improve their condition of life. Because early Asian immigrants were excluded from labor unions and had very few options for employment, they saw “schooling as one of the only avenues left for their upward mobility” (Lee 54). Relying on the meritocratic systems of their homelands, immigrant parents believed that education was the purest means for their children to attain a better life. Despite the elimination of de jure discrimination, this conviction persisted over time. A 2009 psychological study found that anxiety over a perception of foreignness caused parents to emphasize academic achievement as a “means to achieve higher social status and overcome potential discrimination” (Benner and Kim 873). Parents perpetuated these feelings by instilling a similar, anxious drive in their offspring. Interviews with Asian-American valedictorians and other top ranking students reveal the commonality of their motivations: “We know we are a minority in this country, and we have to do better than other Americans. That’s the only way we’ll have a chance” (Hsia 92). Excelling in school, attending a prestigious university, and earning a comfortable living in a white-collared profession became the immigrant American Dream. Sadly, Asian-Americans felt that twice as much effort would be required to attain it. Perceived racism indoctrinated immigrant parents with the pressure to succeed, and this anxiety contributed to the flourishing of a new stereotype: the model minority.

The cultivation of this uneasiness moved model minority expectations from a societal to parental basis, and Asian-American

familial structure was especially conducive to this development. Traditional values like “honoring parents, not bringing shame to the family, and placing family before the individual” facilitate molding a disciplined work ethic (Fong 1075). The close-knit “family-centered nature of Asian families” also causes pressure to become an especially consumptive part of the lives of Asian-American youth (Lee 53). Parental pressure is especially onerous in Asian American communities because the burden of familial honor and advancement is placed on the child. In interviews conducted by New York University, a Chinese-American undergraduate claims that “parents believe that how kids do in school reflects on the entire family” (Teranishi 72). Asian parents view their children as extensions of themselves, so excellence in education is a family affair. The combination of home life and educational expectations contribute to schooling’s omnipresence. A Harvard student who was interviewed for CNN’s “Asian in America” supports this claim: “I know that family and education were most important in my family. It’s one of the best aspects of Asian-American culture. It’s a double edged sword though... because it can be brutal.”

A salient example of the overwhelming parental pressure exerted on first and second generation Asian-Americans, New York Times bestseller *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* describes one mother’s merciless integration of home life and academic expectation. Exalting a harsh parenting style as typical of the “Chinese way,” Yale Law School professor Amy Chua proudly shares the secrets behind her daughters’ success. Pushing her children to excel in all subjects, she finds that it is “crucial to override their preferences” because “nothing is fun until you’re good at it, and to get good at anything you have to work” (Chua 43). She talks about excoriating her daughters publically to yield better piano performances, admitting that she even withheld bathroom privileges until one child could adequately play a difficult piece. To counter those who are shocked at her austerity, she maintains that everything is done in her daughters’ best interest: “Chinese mothers believe that the best way to protect their children is by preparing them for the future, letting them see what they’re capable of, and arming them with skills, work habits and inner confidence that no one can ever take away” (Chua 182). In her explanation for why such harsh parenting is necessary, she

conveys why hard work, education, and anxiety over the future are underlying Asian-American themes in the push for success. She has raised her children in this manner since they were young, and this trend toward accomplishment at all costs only increases as higher education approaches.

One of the most significant ways in which Asian-Americans evaluate availability of future opportunity and achievement is college prestige. In a 2009 survey, researchers polled Caucasian and Asian parents and children to assess what factors influenced their decision in choosing a university. While parents and children of the same ethnicity tend to value the same ideas, this study found a striking difference between races. University prestige was the number one factor for Asian-American parents and children 52% and 42% of the time; contrast this with Caucasian parents and children, who valued rankings as paramount only 10% and 9% of the time (Dundes 139). This places significant pressure on children to attend a high-ranked university. An Asian-American high school senior says, “I’m expecting myself to get into a top ranked college – I mean, the greatest colleges there are. I’m shooting for a Harvard or an MIT” (Teranishi 40). When asked why prestige had such weight, Asian-Americans cite reasons like educational value, job opportunity, and financial security (Dundes 139).

Unfortunately, the perceived societal obstacles that prompt Asian parents to worry about the future may not be a figment of imagination. Given the emphasis on attending a selective college, an especially poignant example is alleged discrimination against Asian-Americans in elite university admissions. An article in the *Washington Post* proposes the possibility of a “deluge of Asian-American applicants” causing “the nation’s most elite colleges to try to keep their numbers down through secret ceiling quotas and/or racially discriminatory selection policies” (Gervasi). The model minority threat has caused concern that schools like UC Berkeley are becoming “too Asian” and infringing on the “time-honored ideal of campus diversity” (Gervasi). Although the Deans of Admissions of several Ivy League colleges deny racial bias, Asian-American admission rates are still lower than those of the general population and continue to decline each year due to the number of Asian-American applicants (Hsia 93). This has contributed to a mindset in which these students

feel that they are fighting for select spots that are allotted to them at these elite institutions. As prestige frenzy worsens, the academic quality of minority applicants increase; thus, the level required to remain competitive is growing higher (Hsia 127).

While societal exclusion sets a rapid pace for success, parental pressure intensifies the beat of the metronome. Even though tiger mothers have disciplined their children to practice until perfection, key notes are being missed. A second generation Asian-American hints at the looming storm of discordance: “Our mother is proud because [we] are excelling in respectable post-secondary institutions, but the price of success was our severed relationship” (Nguyen 36). And while college life generally marks a decline in parental influence regardless of agreement, model minority expectations no longer need to rely on society’s betrayals or a tiger mother’s criticisms to exist. The burden of entrenched perspectives doggedly follows Asian-Americans to university life and beyond. Since messages of expectation and assessment have been drilled into their minds since childhood, Asian-American undergraduates inherit these high expectations and begin to apply them of their own accord.

Crescendo: The Pressure Inside of Me Is Increasing

Adopted model minority pressures assume a life of their own and continue to build during the college years. While young adulthood is wrought with tension and anxiety for adolescents of all ethnicities, racialized expectations add to the pressures that Asian-Americans face. Caught within the expectations of American society and Asian heritage, adolescents feel a “restricted sense of identity and limited choice” for everything from personalities to occupations (Yoo and Burrola 116). This feeling of internal conflict is usually generalized under the umbrella term of stress, which the Society for Research into Higher Education defines as an “imbalance between environmental pressure and the capacity to meet that demand” (Fisher 2). This feeling of overwhelming anxiety is perceived whenever there “is a low personal control or jurisdiction over the physical, psychological, or social environment” (Fisher 2). These demands include society’s expectations, parental anticipations, and internalized drive, with each perpetually nagging voice always expecting the best. This model minority environment contributes to the second

component of stress: a feeling of powerlessness.

Because internalizing societal and familial expectations results in constrained individualities and perceptions of narrow choice, Asian-Americans feel like they have little control over life decisions. Driven to attend the most prestigious colleges, students assume similar pressures when choosing undergraduate majors and professions. A psychological study found that “Asian-American college students were the most likely to have their major or career choice influenced by parental views, even when not explicit” (Tewari 468). Asian immigrant parents have a tendency to indoctrinate their children with the idea that science, business, or engineering fields were superior. Students swallow expectations to pursue these areas of study, which were successively linked to a push for careers that had higher social statuses and more promise of economic stability (Li 41) In an essay detailing his conflict over declaring a philosophy major, a Korean-American college student writes that “I resisted thinking of myself as an “English” person as opposed to a science person largely because it would have been hard to square with a sense of self-worth centered on intellectual proficiency and academic commitment” (Patrick S., 42). His cultural programming causes him to downplay his intelligence and interests, resulting in inner conflict. A Vietnamese-American undergraduate shares a similar story of how he had always thought of medicine as his “preordained profession” and had become so accustomed to the idea that he was at a loss for any other calling (Nguyen 22). A lack of control over external demands results in stifling and overwhelming amounts of stress.

This inner struggle between model minority expectations and individual desires causes psychological damage in Asian-Americans at rates higher than the general population (“Asian in America”). A study conducted on first-generation undergraduates found an “achievement/adjustment paradox” because “Asian-American students report poor psychological and social adjustment” despite their external markers of success (Qin, Way and Mukherjee 481). Frustration and alienation, elements inherent in the teenage experience, are intensified due to unique standards placed upon the Asian-American community. Recent evidence indicates that Asian-Americans “were more likely to be depressed, to feel hopeless and to have contemplated suicide” than their Caucasian counterparts (Thompson 22).

Even more grievously, Asian-Americans are more likely to attempt suicide, and a statistical analysis of campus deaths finds that “suicide accounts for a larger proportion of the deaths of 20-24 year-old Asian-Americans than for European Americans” (Leong 417). Though cases of suicide may be extreme, their relative statistical prevalence deserves attention. At Cornell University, whose student suicides are as well-known as their strong engineering program, the high percentage of Asian-American victims has prompted university officials to install a special task force targeting their mental health. A psychologist on this panel addresses the connection between accumulated pressure and the prevalence of mental illness: “The stereotype for Asian and Asian-American students is that they are academic machines, but we see a lot of emotional pain here. We see the human side of that and those stereotypes cause hurt and keep people from seeking care” (Ramanujan). Model minority stress is both a source and perpetrator of suffering.

Pressured to hide imperfections, Asian-Americans conceal psychological damage and do not receive desperately needed treatment. Studies have shown that they are “at greater risk of not seeking help to deal with their personal academic and mental health problems” (Yoo and Burrola 116). Because suffering and working hard are accepted parts of Asian cultural values, discussion of psychological health is not only tense, but actively discouraged. In CNN’s “Asian in America,” Dr. Sanjay Gupta explains how “In Asia, any time we talk about depression, it’s a sign of weakness.” Just like academic success reflects on a family’s reputation, the stigma of mental illness as a flaw impacts their honor: “Asking for counseling is very embarrassing for the whole family, because whatever you do, it represents the family’s name” (“Asian in America”). A student interviewed in an academic study echoed this idea, believing that “admitting his academic and personal failures would cause his family to lose face;” he struggled on his own, which eventually “left him feeling isolated and depressed” (Lee 61). In addition to preserving familial honor, the value placed on self-sufficiency is a factor in emotional subdual. A second generation undergraduate who struggled with depression explains the Japanese concept of *meaku kakat-era dame*, which directly translates to “Do not unnecessarily burden yourself onto others” (Hirashima 104). She says that she deferred

seeking help because “there’s a mentality among Asians to be tough and to not let other people see that you actually have feelings – to cover up pain, anger, frustration, and depression” (Hirashima 104). This dangerous theme of suppression extends beyond psychological health. In multiple ways the Asian-American melody is lost in a cacophony. Because personal expression is forced to harmonize with external and internal pressures, an original composition becomes undetectable. Afraid that they will “risk the shame of not living up to the model minority myth,” Asian-Americans tune themselves to match the expectations placed upon them and relinquish their independence and creativity in the process (Yoo and Burrola 116). This compliance carries the greatest implications for the future. To blindly struggle toward model minority expectations is to conform to its limited ideals, to gloss over its grievances, and to perpetuate its hostile existence. Depriving them of voice, the myth forces Asian-Americans to compose their own undoing.

Sotto Voce: My Music is Not Heard

Pressured from all sides, Asian-Americans have been taught that self-repression is model behavior. Their silence has become anticipated and rewarded. Because racism’s specter continues to haunt the Asian-American experience, mainstream society has encouraged conformity by punishing difference and praising assimilation. Compensated by recognition and high marks for performing like model minorities, young students “censured their own experiences and voices” to gain “acceptance from the dominant group” (Lee 9). Internalizing expectations from this early age, they continue to believe that their status would rise if they “lived up to standards,” and others admitted that they have “silenced behaviors and experiences that failed to measure up to the model minority standard” (Lee 117). This stereotype survives because “it tells Asian Americans how to behave” and convinces them that it is in their best interest to “pose no threat to the White establishment, to take things quietly, to not complain, and to not fight back” (Li 184). Programmed to equate conformity with success, Asian-Americans strive to please others at the expense of their own expression.

Because Asian-Americans are consistently pressured to fit expectations, silencing individuality has become normative. Taught

that she was “never supposed to raise her voice,” a college student realizes how passivity has become ingrained in her nature (Hirashima 96). Asian-Americans opinions have been discounted at all stages of development, and they have come to accept this as ordinary.

Compare the following statistic: Caucasian students valued “happiness” and “fit” most when selecting a university 67% of the time, but only 28% of their Asian-American counterparts ranked their own well-being as highly (Dundes 139). Individual desires are always the first sacrifice in the calling for success; they are a necessary casualty in the quest for something higher. Nevertheless, this mission never ceases. Even for those who have been accepted into a selective institution, they must “pursue a particular degree to please family members rather than to advance their own interests,” a pattern that holds truth for vocational choice as well (Li 26). Each sacrifice surrenders a part of the self until there is nothing left. A first generation undergraduate laments that “You tend to be what they expect you to be and you just lose your identity. You just lose being yourself and become part of what someone else wants you to be” (Lee 59). Even for those who realize that the model minority myth is negative, a study demonstrated that its internalization can still “significantly influence stereotypic-consistent behaviors regardless of personal belief” (Yoo and Burrola 124). Although dissociation from one’s environment is difficult, silence only strengthens its hold. A revolution of sound is needed to reclaim identity and break the institutionalized cycle of pressure.

De Capo Al Fine: Starting Over from the Beginning

An old friend of mine is familiar with this struggle. With over 230 strings under a combined tension of twenty tons, the piano is no stranger to pressure. The correct amount of force produces the notes that make beautiful music possible, but too much stress will make the strings snap. Already at a disadvantage for not being cast from high carbon steel, people flirt with the same danger: They need to speak when this pressure is too great. Because adjusting tensions is unique to each piano and dependent on the variant interactions between notes, Asian-Americans must direct their own fine tuning. At an especially critical juncture, first and second generation young adults control the continuity of the model minority myth in their

hands. They can rewrite the composition, replacing its disharmonious song with music of their own conception.

The polished black wood calls out to me in stillness, and this time I answer with a liberated will. No one is there to tell me what or when or how to play. I choose to sit in the old chair, and my fingers run tentatively over the keys as my soul begins to stir. At first it is a shaky melody, but then it grows louder, gains momentum, becomes unstoppable. Sounds imbued with my individual heart and flair echo off the walls, banishing the silence once and for all.

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THE LUCKY 16%: ASIAN AMERICAN COLLEGE ENROLLMENT AND THE JOURNEY TO GET THERE

Kyle Abraham

I. Introduction

I am about to log on to Dartmouth's Application page to see whether I got in or not. I really do not want to check right now. Ugh... it's so hard. If I don't get in, there must be something wrong with me... that I didn't see... and that they [Dartmouth College Admissions Officers] saw, but I don't think that there is anything terribly wrong about me. [Pause.] For the past two weeks I have been calming myself down. If I don't get it, it's ok; it's their loss; and it's not my loss. [Long pause as she checks the status of her application.] Oh my God.

(Ivy Dreams! 1/10 Intro)

In spring 2006, high school senior, Michelle, anxiously checks the status of her college application to Dartmouth College. Fortunately, for Michelle, she is granted admission and becomes a part of Dartmouth's Class of 2010. However, Michelle's experience awaiting her admissions decision is filled with large amounts of anxiety, and perhaps she is not exaggerating when she feels that there must be something wrong with her.

For Michelle, she is extremely happy to be accepted to Dartmouth College as one of the few lucky Asian American students admitted to one of the Ivy² League schools. Her self-deprecating thoughts of doubt and worth are not uncommon for many college applicants since the number of college applicants continues to increase. The increase in number of students in higher education may parallel *the increase in competition for college admission across the United States. From 2000 to 2012, there was a 6.2% increase of students attending college in the United States (National Center for Education

1. Ivy Dreams is a ten-part documentary video posted on YouTube that traces the college application experience of 4 high school Asian American seniors applying to Ivy League schools.

2. Ivy League classification brands eight schools for its common interests in sports and athletics. These include Brown, Columbia, Cornell, Dartmouth, Harvard, Pennsylvania, Princeton, and Yale (Letchin).

Statistics). While the number of students in higher education continues to increase, the enrollment at selective colleges remains at a plateau or decreasing, especially in America's most selective colleges like Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and Stanford (Caldwell). In particular, Asian American enrollment of eight Ivy League schools in the last two decades converges to 16% of the undergraduate population (Unz). Consequently, this apparent cap on Asian American enrollment intensifies competition for limited spots at selective colleges, which may take a toll on their mental health.

Thus, the goal of this essay is to outline a rationale for a continuing dialogue among the relationships between higher education admissions outcomes and the college application experience for Asian Americans. Based on personal experience and mental health studies among Asian Americans, my central assumption is that a majority of Asian American college applicants experience uniquely high magnitudes of anxiety during the process. This claim should not be treated as a monolithic view of Asian American because there are a handful of Asian American students that do not experience large amounts of anxiety when applying to college. However, this essay focuses on a portion of the community that does. In this essay, I address three main questions: Why do many Asian Americans experience so much anxiety when applying to college? What are the implications of this anxiety from the college application experience? What can be done to prevent and reduce the amount anxiety for Asian American college applicants?

This essay proceeds into four parts. In Section II, I discuss the current debates of college access for Asian Americans. In Section III, I take a historical approach to explain the current status of Asian Americans college access. In Section IV, I elaborate on negative implications from the college application process from a cultural perspective. In Section V, I conclude with suggestions to improve the experience for Asian American college applicants.

Before moving further, it is important to recognize the importance of disaggregating generalizations made about the Asian American community. However, it is also important to discuss the Asian American identity. First, Asian American refers to all whom self-identify as Asian that lives in America, regardless if they are permanent resident or not. The figure below delineates Asian coun-

tries according to United Nations classifications, which may be used for assistance in classification. Thus, any identification with these countries deems an individual an Asian American. Second, while race and nation being major identifiers, Asian ethnicities are considered as well. Certain ethnicities, for example, the Mien people do not pertain to a particular country because they are nomadic hill tribes (Ng). To clarify another group of people that is often lumped with Asian Americans, this essay considers Pacific Islanders as not part of the Asian American classification despite popular tendency among literature. While Pacific Islanders may share comparable circumstances and struggles, this paper aims to focus on Asian Americans with the effort of disaggregating generalizations made about the Asian American community. Furthermore, while it is important to make assumptions about Asian Americans, this essay concentrates on how society treats Asian Americans as a whole in education.

Table 1: United Nations Classification of Asian Countries (United Nations Statistics Division)

Region	Code	Countries
Central Asia	143	Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan
Eastern Asia	30	China, Hong Kong, Macao, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Mongolia, Republic of Korea, Japan
Southeastern Asia	35	Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao's People Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Viet Nam

Region	Code	Countries
Southern Asia	34	Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Cyprus, Georgia, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, State of Palestine, Syrian Arab Republic, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Yemen
Western Asia	145	Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Cyprus, Georgia, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, State of Palestine, Syrian Arab Republic, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Yemen

II. College Access for Asian Americans

The demographics of Asian Americans in higher education continue to change, and colleges and universities across the nation are forced to deal with the increasing number of Asian American students. One view is that Asian American students are overrepresented in colleges throughout the United States. As of April 1, 2010, 17.3 million people in the United States reported Asian for at least part of his or her racial and/ or ethnic makeup (2010 U.S. Census), composing 5.6% of the national population. In the same year, Asian Americans made up 6% of American college enrollment (National Center for Education Statistics). Thus, from a national and quantitative scope, Asian Americans are indeed overrepresented in higher education but not by much. Public perceptions of this overrepresentation are reflected in certain media.

For example, an undergraduate student from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), Alexandra Wallace, posted a racist video ranting against Asians on YouTube in March 2011. Among her offensive generalizations was a comment about “hordes

of Asians” that UCLA accepts every year, which is 36% for 2012 (UCLA Undergraduate Admissions). Other elite schools that reflect this high Asian American representation include California Institute of Technology (Caltech), Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Stanford University, and University of California, Berkeley (Cal). The matriculation rates of Asian Americans among these colleges are representative of the high Asian American population densities of nearby metropolitan areas (2010 US Census Briefs). These cities are extremely culturally diverse because the minorities are the majority. Although Asian American enrollment rate seems disproportional to the Asian American population at these schools, this overrepresentation is only characteristic of a couple of America’s few elite colleges (Takagi 158).

Conversely, scholars and activists in the Asian American community dispute this overrepresentation in other elite colleges, such as the Ivy Leagues. One contentious claim argues that the Ivy Leagues practice an unofficial quota system strictly for Asian Americans (Miller). Publisher of *The American Conservative*, Ron Unz, discovered that for the last two decades Asian American undergraduate enrollment at the eight Ivy League schools converged to 16%. Assumptions of discrimination and quota systems used against Asian Americans at these elite schools are almost statistically impossible to refute (Geier), and the twenty-year plateau of Asian American enrollment does not keep up with the increasing Asian American population in the United States. In comparison, when comparing elite schools to other institutions that maintain race-neutral or race-conscious admissions, the increase of Asian American population is generally reflected in Asian American college enrollment (Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund). The empirical evidence regarding relationship between the Asian American population and Ivy League school enrollment may indicate an institutional bias against Asian Americans. The YouTube video by Alexandra Wallace and the UCLA Associate Vice Chancellor response that followed continue to surface from various leaders in education and activists across diverse backgrounds, it is important to examine the demographic changes of Asians American students in higher education from a historical perspective.

III. Historical Explanation

The apparent discrimination of Asian Americans at Ivy League schools may be explained by examining the birth and evolution of college admissions. Although systems of higher education have existed since their inception at Oxford and Cambridge in England (Darwall-Smith x), it was not until about the late 19th and early 20th century that colleges began denying admission to certain campuses. Some of the initial prerequisites included passing standardized tests similar to the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), devised in 1926, and the American College Testing (ACT), created in 1959 (Fletcher). Even though the goal of these tests is to guarantee that students were prepared to for the academic rigor of college courses (CARE), prejudices and discrimination played a significant role in the early manifestation of college admissions.

The earliest universities in the United States, like Columbia, Yale, Harvard, and Princeton, dominated in popularity and credibility for their high scholarship and years of existence (Leitch). These colleges maintained their elite statuses because most of their students were wealthy, Caucasian males of Protestant Faith and often legacy students (Levine 139). Furthermore, these colleges did not grant equal access for other spiritual gender, and ethnic groups. The initial prerequisites were passing standardized tests, which were biased toward the elite that could afford adequate schooling. Once Jewish students started to outperform their elite counterparts, the complex admissions system was created to weed out undesired minority groups such as people of color, women, and Jews especially (140). The new admissions system, created by Dartmouth College President Ernest Hopkins in the 1920s, used nine elements³ when reviewing the applicants (141). However, societal prejudices made it difficult for Jewish and other minority applicants by making them appear less qualified. For example, anti-Semitism was fairly strong, preventing Jews from participating in extra-curricular activities. Because Jews also lived in close-knit communities with strong culture and tradition, Jewish applications may seem homogenous. President Hopkins

3. The nine-element plan consisted of the following features in order of importance: exceptional scholarship, high scholarship, personal ratings, priority of application, the principle of occupational distribution, the principle of geographical distribution, Sons of Dartmouth Alumni and Dartmouth College Officers, Low Scholarship, and selection based on qualifications and not guaranteed housing (Levine).

intent was to build a diverse class, but many admissions officers who did not share the same desire to recruit more objectively biasedly rejected the homogenous Jewish applicants and selected toward Protestant, White males (142). Today, modern-day college admissions use a majority of Hopkins's nine elements to select their classes. However, national attention regarding Asian American student enrollment in higher education did not arise until the 1980s.

Due to civil rights events in American history, colleges implemented affirmative action programs to increase the number of minority students. One view looks at affirmative action as a way to correct wrongs in the past, such as the discrimination against minority groups when Ivy League college admissions started in the 1920s. However, affirmative action for Asian Americans peaked in 1993 and its usage began a steady decline (Takagi 158). While more liberal elite colleges such as Stanford, Cal, and UCLA decreased the percentage of Asian American enrollment, Unz's data shows a striking 16% convergence of Asian American enrollment at the Ivy Leagues over the last two decades. Despite a 142% increase in Asian American undergraduate enrollment from 1989 to 2009 (CARE Report), it appears that Ivy League discrimination shifted from Jews to Asian Americans. Whether or not Ivy League schools are in fact discriminating against Asian Americans, it is important to examine the negative implications of this "cap on Asians" by looking at those that engage in the college application experience.

IV. Finding Reasons for Negative Implications

In America, a 2012 Lumina Foundation study reveals that 67% of Americans say, "...getting a good job is a very important reason for getting education beyond high school" (The Lumina Foundation). Economic success often motivates the pursuit of higher education. As a result, college applicants may endure various levels of stress and anxiety due to the uncertainty and difficulty in accessing college for future financial security (The Lumina Foundation). This influences subconscious or unusual behavior among individual applicants. Stress and anxiety take many forms, and it is vital to understand the origins of stress and anxiety. However, the college application experience of Asian Americans is unique in circumstance, as its historical and cultural factors play a significant role in the mag-

nitude and perception of stress and anxiety. The following reviews these negative implications ascending in the magnitude of stress followed by cultural explanation to distinguish the Asian American experience.

A. Practical Implications

High competition in college admissions may compel Asian American applicants to attempt alternative racial strategies to benefit their application. Many Asian American students now compete for the supposed “few spots for Asian Americans” at some of the countries most competitive colleges. Toward the lowest level of negative implications, one subtle way to leverage competition is to carefully select or decline to state a race or ethnicity (Ng). Students, parents, teachers, and counselor sometimes come into conflict about whether or not to mark an Asian race or ethnicity. In some institutions, a particular Asian race or ethnicity may be advantageous. For example, some race-conscious admissions systems like Stanford University take into special consideration certain minority groups for historical and political reasons, and within the Asian umbrella at Stanford, Southeast Asian Americans are advantaged (Sebro). In 2003, Southeast Asian American volunteer student organizations at Stanford University protested at the President’s office to increase and diversify the college enrollment of Asian Americans due to indicators of bias towards East and South Asian Americans (Ng). Southeast Asian Americans have historically been a minority group and as a result of protests, Southeast Asian Americans are now specially considered during the admissions process at Stanford (Ng). Educational patterns show that Southeast Asian Americans often have lower educational attainment and income, which can be explained by the unique histories and cultures of those countries, most notably the lack of emphasis on education (Ng). According to the former Asian American Liaison in the Undergraduate Admissions Office of Stanford University, Stanford tries to recruit “more highly qualified” Southeast Asian Americans (Sebro). While being Southeast Asian American may be advantageous, it may also impose a negative feeling of self-worth because of the disenfranchised label. However, Asians as a whole are generally disadvantaged in college admissions, placing more stress on all Asian American college applicants (Unz).

Although the following is not exclusive to Asian Americans,

these actions are applicable to Asian American college applicants. Pressures of getting into college can influence immoral actions to advance one’s status in the admissions review. Some students may take on a Social Darwinism approach, in which they only look out for themselves. In a “survival of the fittest mentality,” students may choose to not share with others information or opportunities that would benefit the application process. Some students may cross the moral integrity such as cheating on examinations and fabricating college applications (Winn). In rare cases, students may feel the need to sabotage other students to benefit their own status. In another case, fake Stanford student Azia Kim attended school at Stanford University for eight months before getting caught because she could not confess to her parents that she was rejected (Palo Alto Weekly Staff). Many of these actions are products of extreme pressures, affecting the mental well being of these Asian Americans. To an even further extent, some Asian American students will run away to avoid their families (Yoon), and some may even take their own life. While these implications may seem applicable to all college applicants, cultural differences distinguish the unique experiences for Asian Americans.

B. The Role of Filial Piety in Asian American Anxiety

Whether the level of anxiety is minimal or extreme, the anxiety itself often relates to cultural aspects of the Asian American community. Although various arguments can be made about origins of stress, filial piety is one of the most salient characteristics of Asian and Asian American culture that acts as a catalyst for the stress of the college application process and outcome. This section defines filial piety, or deep respect for one’s parents and ancestors (Mo & Shen), from two manifestations and shows how it contributes to stress and anxiety for Asian American college applicants in the modern-day context.

From the East Asian perspective, texts about filial piety, or devotion to the parents, can be traced back to Confucian origins between 200 B.C. and A.D. 350 (15) and illustrate the unconditional commitment for children to serve their parents. *The Classic of Filial Piety* and *The Twenty-Four Examples of Filial Piety* are two of the main Confucian texts. Targeted toward school children, these books tell stories of unbelievably valiant children prioritizing the well being of their parents before themselves. The story of “Kuo Ju” in particu-

lar dramatizes the filial love in the form of a child sacrifice, in which a poor man, Kuo Ju nearly buries alive his three-year-old son (17). By no longer needing to care for a child, Kuo Ju can save money to take care of his aging mother. This story also illustrates the didactic message of intergenerational transcendence of filial piety, prioritizing the eldest family member. Nevertheless, Kuo Ju prioritizes the care of his mother over himself and his son. Many Asian American elders live in the homes of their children until they die, and this expectation becomes a burden for many families that do not have the means to comfortably care for grandparents of three generations of a clan, negatively impacting the mental health of these families. Education in both Asia and the United States provides an opportunity for socioeconomic mobility. In China, student performance on the gaokao⁴ strongly influences future economic success (Zoninsein), as it is the main element examined in Asian college admissions. In the United States, patterns show that there is a positive relationship with high education and income (Bureau of Labor Statistics) however, scores on standardized tests are not the only elements considered when applying to American college. Success in education implies success in profession and wealth. Thus, entering college becomes difficult for Asian American college applicants in order to fulfill filial piety.

Although obtaining a college degree carries great credibility, it is important to emphasize the process in accessing higher education, as it is key to the college application experience. The “tiger mom” is one way to characterize patterns of strict parenting styles highly common in Asian American households to raise highly successful children. Tiger parenting, coined by author of *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* written by Amy Chua⁵ (Chua), is reflective of a helicopter and a Machiavellian style of parenting. This entails constant oversight of the children’s activities and fear and punishment as means for motivation and performance. According to Chua, it suggests that the conditions the Tiger method of parenting sets for children to follow is uniquely Asian in the conditions it sets children to

4. The gaokao is a college entrance exam, a type of standardized test, in which the admittance to certain tiers of higher education in China depends on the score of the individual. China still relies heavily on a meritocratic system that is biased toward the elite and metropolitan areas.

5. Dr. Amy Chua is a Professor of Law at Yale University. She has two daughters and is married to a Jewish husband.

follow. For example, Chua’s daughters were only allowed to play no other instruments besides piano or violin. Furthermore, her daughters were deprived of food until the music was perfected. Among other restrictions included attending sleepovers, having play dates, participating in school plays, and receiving a grade less than an “A” among many others (Chua). Because social mobility in Asia is mostly meritocratic, near perfect performance on tests is compulsory for Asian Americans. Sometimes, parents would force their son or daughter to retake the Chinese SAT II Subject test if they received a 790 out of 800 (Yoon). Furthermore, failure to meet these high expectations is unacceptable, often interpreted as shameful or dishonorable. One Korean American Stanford student, Hye-Jeong Yoon recalls a conversation with her grandfather on the phone. Her grandfather says, “You have reclaimed the honor of the Yoon name,” because Hye-Jeong is attending Stanford University, an elite college. Although Hye-Jeong has yet to graduate, her grandfather forecasts that she will find a good job and make good money, fulfilling filial piety and bringing honor to the family. Individuals who fail or do not meet expectations deal with aggressive or passive aggressive acts of guilt, which may have detrimental consequences like running away and committing suicide (Asian American Psychological Association Leadership Fellows Program). However, it is the uncertainty of repercussions of failing to meet expectations that empowers the tiger parenting. Thus, tiger parenting places high amount of stress on students because it is designed to craft nothing less than high success.

While Confucian children’s literature further emphasizes the importance of education, tiger parenting examines the process by which Asian American children access elite colleges. Both support the intersections of filial piety and are key components of how American society views Asian Americans as a model minority and treats Asian Americans in college access. The model minority is a collection of stereotypes that emphasize the extremely high expectations for Asian Americans to be highly successful (Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund). Sociologist Thomas Epenshade first use the phrase “model minority” to praise the Nikkei, second-generation Japanese Americans, for overcoming socioeconomic barriers in American society in the 1960s (Miller). Despite anti-Japanese attitudes after World War II, Japanese Americans persevered and rose

in education and the workplace. Decades later, the evolution of the model minority label became a monolithic view of Asian Americans that they are quiet and educated elites with high-paying professions (Miller). This homogenous view of Asian Americans compels college admissions to look beyond the meritocratic success of an Asian American college applicant (Sebro). This may explain the demographic shifts of diversifying the Asian population at college but not necessarily increasing the number of Asian American students. Unfortunately, this model minority homogeneity is a challenge for Asian Americans to distinguish themselves in other realms beyond academics, forcing college applicants to revolutionize or at least innovate new perspective of generations of Asian and Asian American culture and tradition. Although disparities amongst Asian Americans college students continues to persist (Pew), it is important to acknowledge the negative implications explain the circumstances from a cultural lens to alleviate the stressors during the college application experience.

Due to strong cultural values across various Asian American communities, assumptions made about Asian American may distort the ideals and actualities of Asian Americans college application experience. Research over the past couple decades have shown and have continued to show that college application experience of Asian Americans is worthy of investigation. While the current field of Asian Americans and Asian American Studies is under researched, the current literature suggests that Asian Americans tend to experience higher levels of mental health problems different from other cultural groups (Pew). While there is not much empirical evidence to support the negative implications due to cultural barriers like shame and dishonor that prevent information from being shared, anecdotal evidence is sufficient to suggest that a majority of Asian American college applicants have distinctly unique college application experience.

V. Conclusion

While the number of Asian American immigrants increases and the number Asian Americans entering higher education also increases (2010 US Census Briefs), the selection amongst qualified and diverse students at the nation's top tier colleges continues to intensify. Debate over these selection outcomes, especially for Asian

Americans, continues to gain national attention. However, the emergence of Asian Americans college students in educational discourse is subject to various interpretations.

Adopting an integrative perspective on the college application experience for Asian Americans and the outcomes of enrollment at selective universities involves a challenge to rethink the delivery of information for applicants and those advising these applicants, as it relates to the developmental needs of Asian Americans. This essay demonstrates the significance of increased competition for Asian American college access and recognizes the immediate need to ensure that families, educators, and policymakers are aware of these barriers for Asian Americans. Perhaps awareness and other forms of advocacy may ease the anxieties of Asian American college applicants and their advisers and impact the overall experience of the college application experience. Individuals should be cognizant of such high magnitudes of familial pressures, stereotypes, and institutional biases during the college application process, whether the individual is applying, advising the applicant, reviewing the application, or creating policies on how to review applicants. Continuing to fund research in the related fields and to execute awareness programs would hopefully take into consideration the complexity of the Asian American college application experience (CARE). As a result, the effectiveness of advocacy and awareness may be reflective of the extent to which the Asian American enrollment rates increase and diversity at elite colleges. In the end, healing and transformation for Asian Americans extends well beyond the college application process and research must continue to uphold the commitment to justice and equality. It is unfortunate that advocate for the Asian Americans in higher education must deal with the "chronic burden" of "demystifying myths" and "justifying research" due to the absence of knowledge (Chang, 96-100). This essay provides "a contribution toward mobilizing a collective voice" (104) to educate and inform society about the current issues, trends, and research facing Asian Americans in higher education.

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A CONFESSION OF NATIONALISTIC DISLOYALTY AS A PROFESSION OF ETHNIC IDENTITY: THE POETICS AND POLITICS OF DISSONANCE IN JULIE OTSUKA'S WHEN THE EMPEROR WAS DIVINE

Haerin Shin

Introduction: The How and Why in Voicing the Experience of Japanese Internment

In her novel, *When the Emperor was Divine* (2002), Julie Otsuka tells the tragic story of a Japanese immigrant family subjected to internment and its aftermath amidst the turmoil of World War II. A detached third-person narrator traces the traumatic loss of home and family from a calm, retrospective vantage point, lending tonal and thematic consistency to the narrative style in the course of taking in the agents, subjects and objects of the internment experience. However, as the story approaches its denouement, a passionate first person narrator suddenly intervenes and takes a stand on a purported charge of espionage. The new and unfamiliar voice is disorienting, vacillating between past and present tense while shaking with emotion. The venue of the confession is obscured by the multiplicity of the narrator's identity, in which racialized Asian-American bodies suddenly play into the trauma of Japanese-American internees as victimized innocents (142), the outpour of bitter invectives running parallel to a blatant admission of guilt (144). Such abrupt turnabouts, which may at first appear to undermine the aesthetic consistency and thematic focus of the preceding chapters, are in fact carefully calibrated tools that serve to re-center the reader's perspective, expanding a specific traumatic experience into a universal discourse and endowing the specter of painful past memories with sustainable life within the reader, who lives in the "here," and "now." Otsuka systematically tears down the racial prejudices foregrounded in her story by adopting a radically different narrative strategy in the last chapter, reconstituting the novel's artistic and social significance within the current historical context.

The Father: Obscurity of Personal, Ethnic and National Identity

In order to see how the last chapter achieves its pivotal position within the novel's structural and semantic makeup, it is first necessary to observe the elements that configure the nature and setting of the narrative in the preceding chapters. Taken together and viewed apart from the final chapter, the earlier body of the novel characterizes the work as typical internment literature, as the story spans over the period immediately before, during and after the Japanese-American internment in the U.S. during World War II (1941~1945). The spatial setting is limited to the family home in Berkeley, California (3); a train traveling through the desert to Utah; and Topaz (48), the location of the internment camp. Here, the objects of description are clear: the tale revolves around the Japanese-American internment as its central event, limiting its viewpoint to a given historical time and place. The nature of the characters is also distinctly definable, as their actions are mainly prompted by the fact that they are of Japanese descent. The matter of citizenship and national loyalties remains unclear; the mother, who recalls her childhood in Japan (94-95), is an Issei (first-generation Japanese immigrant) and therefore may retain legal as well as mental ties to Japan, whereas her young son and daughter—both of whom are implied to hold no linguistic or cultural background in things Japanese—most probably are Nisei (second-generation Japanese-American)s, likely to be either fully naturalized or American born. However, these subtle distinctions may be disregarded as tangential interests, for unlike the case of the father who was taken away (82) on specific charges of acting as enemy (Japan) agent, the source of the family members' sufferings is the internment experience of being alienated from their familiar surroundings including home and the father figure as its stronghold, rather than a conflict between dissonant national loyalties and identities. The narrative as the agent of their experiences unfolds in a past tense third person perspective, with scant interjections of the characters' emotions and thoughts, securing a sense of distance as an aloof reminiscence of what happened to "others" in the "past." In summary, the place and time settings as the object, characterization of players as the subject, and narrative style as the agent of the story are all clearly centered on Japanese Internment as the key motif, offering a subtly crafted voice that states a traumatic but historical and therefore once-

removed experience.

However, the reader is exposed to an abrupt inversion of such features in the last chapter, as the elements defined earlier including time, place, identity and even narrative tone undergo drastic change, moving from the realm of clarity into that of ambiguity. Titled "Confession" (140), which in itself implies a more personal and individualized development in its tone, the chapter brims over with an unnerving mixture of passion and ironic resignation. The voice splits into two, a mocking tone in italics interspersed among the lines adding a touch of irony to the factual statements; while the former dares the interrogators to "*Drop that bomb right here, right here where I'm standing*" (141), the latter calmly reminisces: "I went out into the yard and tossed up a few flares just to make sure he knew where to find you" (141). A hearty share of exclamation marks, which the earlier third-person narrative rarely ventures to use, appears six times in the last chapter alone. Identical phrasal structures are repeated for emphasis (e.g. "I sprinkled ... I sent ... I planted ... I set... I spied... " 140), and the sense of distance maintained throughout the preceding chapters is completely discarded with countless "I"s dotting every page.

In addition the torrential ravings of the narrator, the reader is at a loss as to how one may position this "I," subjectively and objectively. There is little hint as to who exactly this "I" refers to; who is preoccupied with addressing numerous criminal charges in terms of national security (140-141), as well as ethnic traits (142)? The opening lines of the chapter, in which the "I" recalls "wearing my bathrobe, my slippers, the night your men took me away" (140) and refers to having a "wife and children" (143), offers a possible identification of the "I" as a male figure, most likely the father of the protagonist family, for he is the only character we know from the earlier chapters to have undergone the experience of being spirited away in the above fashion. However, this seemingly logical possibility is subject to doubt once the "I" begins to elaborate on what he "is" (e.g. the "I" in "I am..." throughout page 142), claiming a variety of disparate occupations (grocer, waiter, and shoeshine boy) and nationalities. Racial epithets referring to Asian-Americans, such as "Nip," "Slit," "Slope," "Yellowbelly" and "Gook" hint at a pan-Asian-American identity encompassing the myriad of positions the

“I” assumes. The question, then, is whether “I” refers to racialized Asian-American bodies in general, which remains unanswered as the narrator sets off on rants of nearly self-destructive resignation (e.g. “So go ahead and lock me up. Take my children ... Freeze my assets ... Cancel my insurance” 143) without offering any further clarification.

Other players in the narrative include “you” and “then,” to whom “I” directs his “Confession.” Should “I” be the father from earlier in the narrative, “you” may be the prosecuting party, the U.S. government that had sent “them” (“your men”) to seize and interrogate “I” in a “small and bare” room (140). If “I” in a broader perspective is considered as an archetype of Asian-American ethnicity, the “tall, handsome, broad shouldered” “you” who belongs to “rotary clubs and the chamber of commerce” (143) may be the stereotyped version of the white majority that imposes discriminatory prejudices on Asian-Americans, who in turn are viewed as spies and criminals. Moreover, despite the introduction of ethnic and nationalistic discourses with all the talk on spies and “yellowbell[ies]” (142), the voice of “I” as a political body is constantly shifting, resulting in further ambiguity. “I” admits all charges, stating “I admit it,” “I spied” (140), even venturing so far as to “sign the dotted line” of the confession. Does this indicate that “I” as the father has indeed committed treason against the nation-state of the United States, his loyalty having lain on the side of Japan as his originating nation? The earlier chapters provide no clue as to how the father identifies himself amidst the violent rift between his country of residence and that of birth. The reader is given an account of his wife’s migration from Japan to America, but the same does not apply to the father, and therefore we as readers are forced to consider the possibility of his being a second or third-generation immigrant. If so, it is a stretch on the United States’ part to assume that he would risk a stable life in his current settings to benefit a distant ancestral home.

Should the father indeed be innocent, he stands for all the victims of the national paranoia to which David D. Lowman, former Special Assistant to the Director of the National Security Agency, testifies based on his hands-on experience as a government agent and a direct witness to the historical circumstances at the time of internment. Lowman unfolds the true reasons for President Roosevelt’s

authorization to evacuate all persons of Japanese ancestry in 1941; he explains how the U.S. Army Signal Intelligence Service found detailed espionage plans in the process of decoding Japan’s secret communications. Drawing on extensive archives, Lowman testifies to the possibility that countless innocent U.S. residents or citizens of Japanese descent were persecuted for being “aliens who led cultural or assistance organizations,” “slightly less suspicious aliens,” or “members of, or those who donated to, ethnic groups, Japanese language teachers and Buddhist clergy” (351). The father in Otsuka’s novel, who may inadvertently fall under one of Lowman’s categories, could be a representative case of those who suffered from false accusations of allying with enemy forces, charges that were levied on the most dubious grounds in the whirlwinds of war. He may have given in after days of torturous browbeating under constant, blinding lights in the interrogation room. He may have confessed crimes he had in fact never committed, because he was simply “tired, thirsty, scared” (140), wanted to get the questioning over and done with, to finally return home. (142)

Model Minority as an Oxymoron: Commendable but Ever Minor

The issue of the father’s national allegiance becomes further obscured as he begins to display ethnic characteristics that do not fit into the context of the war between Japan and the United States, importing the element of racial discrimination into the sphere of international politics. He asks to be “[in]form[ed] of [his] crime,” which his sardonic italicized alter ego sees as “*[being/ too short, too dark, too ugly, too proud]*.” The fact that such physical traits could be seen as grounds for incrimination alludes to the white majority’s disdain concealed under the pseudo-embracing anointment of Asian-Americans as the “model minority.” Chih-Chieh Chou, in his observation of the subtle but inexorable racialization engraved into the concept of “model minority,” asserts that the term is a reference to an “ethnic minority whose members are more likely to achieve higher success than other minority groups, especially in economic advantage, academic success, family stability, low crime involvement, etc” (Chow 219). Chow goes further on to analyze the socio-cultural rubrics that underlie this oxymoronic juxtaposition of two seemingly contradictory words, “model” as a positive acknowledgement of assimilation

and “minority” as the stigmatizing brand of cultural and physical differentiation. The former indicates that the given minority subjects have successfully attained their position as reputable civil servants by conforming to the responsibilities of a desirable member of the society by displaying academic, economic and therefore social excellence. Meanwhile, the latter betrays the insurmountable disadvantage they suffer due to elements they are “born into.”

Chow points out that cultural theorists such as “Samuel Huntington, for example, uses cultural differences in an absolute sense to exclude Asian Americans from the nation state of the US, unless they completely assimilate” (Chow 221); should this cultural difference implicate ethnic characteristics that incorporate not only abstract social conventions but also physical traits such as racial profiles, the complete assimilation Huntington had demanded would be a mere illusion, for the minority subjects in question will never be able to fully blend into the white majority. In Homi Bhabha’s terms, they will always be “almost the same” as the ideal white majority in that they demonstrate all the desirable qualities of successful model citizens, but are never able to completely assimilate—“not quite” (Bhabha 127) the same—due to their society’s view of their cultural and genetic inheritance as insurmountable differences.

Its entrance into the academic and social sphere can be considered fairly “recent,” as the exact point of origin for the term “model minority” only dates back to the year of 1966 when sociologist William Petersen coined the word in his New York Times article “Success Story: Japanese American Style” (1966) and subsequently called attention to its attributes. The general public began to recognize the concept through the outstanding performance of certain minorities with Asian origins in the following years. However, the racist and nationalistic sentiments embedded in the basic construct of the “model minority” idea can be traced further back in history. As the number of Asian immigrants marked an exponential growth at the dawn of the 20th century, fear of these “little yellow men” taking over the economy and appropriating its fruits that should be justly enjoyed by the founding fathers’ descendants (in other terms, the white majority) began to take on the form of a social paranoia.

In his article “Enjoy Your Nation as Yourself?” Slavoj Žižek encapsulates this phenomenon in the term “enjoyment,” which he

uses to explain the rise of nationalistic sentiments triggered by a perceived threat coming from culturally alien entities. Žižek asserts that upon encountering a substantial socio-economic fluctuation due to an influx of foreign elements such as language, culture or race, people suffer the fear of “others” taking over and depriving them of their daily bread and the sense of security in familiar, traditional surroundings. In short, initial settlers of a given nation develop a fear of being deprived of socio-economic “enjoyment” (Žižek 201), which in principle must be the sole property of those who firmly belong within a solid circle of historical and cultural continuity. The prospect of “little yellow men” invading their community and monopolizing the fruits of economic activities that should be harvested by the authentic subjects (the white majority) inevitably results in a grudge towards the undeserving intruders. With the outbreak of Pearl Harbor, the “alienness” found in the joint factors of both race and nationality acquires full force as a justifiable ground for reclaiming the lost “enjoyment” from the insolent Japanese-American minority, who dare infringe upon the White American territory. In this sense, “Confession” dictates the sorrows of those who are considered “model” for being respectable citizens with “assets, crops, house, insurance and business” (143), but are nonetheless categorized as “minority” for their ethnic origin and therefore inferior to the dominating majority, and their unalterable physical traits or cultural self-respect becomes detestable social incongruity during hostile times.

Then, one may safely say, the narrator as a racialized subject is calling attention to the haunting force of the long-withheld racial prejudice embedded within the United States’ domestic history as the undercurrent of a seemingly justifiable reaction to a threat on national sovereignty. In the article “A Dialogue on Racial Melancholia,” David L. Eng and Shinhee Han assert that “Discourses of American exceptionalism and democratic myths of liberty, individualism, and inclusion force a misremembering of these exclusions, an enforced psychic amnesia that can return only as a type of repetitive national haunting—a type of negative or absent presence.” (347) With nationalism at its height upon the outbreak of war, this negative or absent presence, the fear of those who do not fit into the mainstream American identity, leads to their systematic exclusion and persecution as the “other,” among whom immigrants with distinct physical features

become the main target. Han and Eng go on to maintain that the popular stereotype of “[model minority] functions as a national tool that erases and manages the history of these institutionalized exclusions” (347). In other words, the former term “model” and its positive connotation of “desirable citizens” based on economic and social success acts as a foil to disguise the underlying sense of exclusion implied in the latter term “minority,” which may shift its position and supersede the “model” aspect upon the advent of any threat on the white American “integrity.” In this light, we can see that the father’s true “crime” is not his nationality or allegiance but ethnic origin; not a failure of mental acculturation but (impossible) physical assimilation into white America. Thus, instead of a bitter outpouring of an individual Japanese-American who had been swept away by the ruthless tides of international politics, the father’s ironic protest becomes a collective outcry on behalf of all Asian-Americans, who are victimized by not only the international but also the domestic socio-historical context. Should the “I” of the father so expand its body to represent racialized Asian-American subjects in general, the enumeration and admittance of all criminal charges throughout the entire chapter become two-fold ironies, denouncing the absurdity of incriminating anyone on the sole basis of ethnic identity.

Narrative Ambiguity as a Subversive Strategy

The subjective and character-based aspects of the narrative are thus obscured in the final chapter, and the objective settings of time and place also lose their anchors. If “I” is the father, the setting could be the interrogation room where he is questioned before being taken to the internment camp, but such a reading is open to question as he describes the proceedings in the room in past tense, saying he has already “talked” (140) about the charges discussed in the chapter. As his monologue continues, the narrator shifts to the present tense for the culminating passage on Asian-American traits, leaving the “I” suspended in a temporal and spatial purgatory, his plea left unanswered. Does this narration take place at the internment camp where he is confined after the initial interrogation? Or, should the readers choose to view “I” as a synecdoche for the Asian-American identity? Are the settings merely an abstract social context within which racial discrimination stands problematic? Again, no clear proof is given.

At this point, both the tone and content of the book’s narrative have undergone complete mutations, the internment of the Japanese-Americans as the object, subject, agent and governing motif of the novel having been pushed aside to the peripheries. It has been noted that the causes underlying the internment no longer pertain to international conflict alone, but also branches out to the idea of Asian-American racialization in a wider socio-historical frame by the “I” who alludes to the lurking presence of racial discourse. However, from an aesthetic standpoint, the sudden emergence of cacophonous Asian-American voices in the final chapter of the novel seems rather abrupt, seeing that the preceding chapters offer scant grounds for such a generalized ethnic perception of the internment. Otsuka disrupts the aesthetic unity of her narrative, discarding the subtlety and ironic distance so strenuously maintained throughout the novel. If the confession indeed belongs to the father, why not give him a clearer voice earlier in the book? If the racial discourse is connected to the subject of internment, why is this not more firmly established within the concrete historical setting? What overall effect does Otsuka achieve with all the uncertainties?

Again, the dissonance found both in terms of the narrator/father’s national and ethnic positioning as observed above, in relation to the concept of “model minority,” is the key to answering this question. The clashing narrative voices and settings, in their ambiguity, become a strategy of protest against the black-and-white logic of ethnic and national identification, invoking the active involvement of the reader at a level far deeper than mere vicarious sympathy. Homi Bhabha asserts that “ambivalence” can serve as a subversive strategy that upturns the dominating discourse of the subjugating force; importing the term “mimicry” to specify the nature of “boundary breaching” in the colonized subject’s linguistic and behavioral assimilation with the colonizer, Bhabha argues that “the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference” (Bhabha 122). Should one venture to equate Bhabha’s “mimicry” to the concept of “ambivalence” on which he claims the construct of mimicry stands, the latter may substitute the former in the following passage “the authority of that mode of colonial discourse that I have called mimicry” (Bhabha 122), consequently

acting as a “representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal. Mimicry [hence, ambivalence] is, thus, the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline, which “appropriates” the Other as it visualizes power” (Bhabha 122). Applied in a slightly different—in that the given case of the father rests in the intricate rubric of international and domestic issues of racialization rather than an overt power imbalance between the colonizer and the colonized—yet essentially identical formula of subjection and counteraction, the ambivalence in the last chapter’s narration blurs the boundaries between fixed categories of perpetrator and victim, thereby undermining the dominating discourse of national allegiance and ethnicity as criteria for of one’s identity.

Trauma: Initiating the “I” into a Wider Historical Context

Another way to understand the contextual function of the last chapter is to set aside questions regarding the chapter’s independent meaning, and instead focus on its significance in its interrelation to the earlier chapters. If the reason why certain aspects of the narrative, such as the subject, object, and agent of internment in the former chapters are designed as they were, and what they do or do not achieve could be determined, the reader may then be in a better position to understand what bearing their deliberate disruption in the final chapter has on the aesthetic and thematic composition of the entire work.

The first and fundamental question the readers may face is why Otsuka chose to obscure the father’s position in addressing the issue of Japanese-American internment by mooring his voice in a neurotic outburst, instead of allowing him to present his case in a clear and logical fashion. In *Trauma and Recovery*, Judith Lewis Herman sheds light on this subject by observing female hysteria and war veterans, analyzing how the perpetrating majority tends to silence the traumas suffered by the victimized minority. Herman presents the histories and social reception of three types of trauma: female hysteria, war veterans’ Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and sexual and domestic violence women suffer. She notes how each of these types of trauma has the potential to undermine or incriminate the dominant patriarchal force that has repeatedly subverted the victims to “episodic amnesia” (7), as “secrecy and silence

are the perpetrator’s first line of defense.” (8) Herman asserts that to sustain the healing efforts of therapy and prevent the vicious cycle of resurgence and repression of painful but necessary discourses, a social climate ready to embrace the sufferers’ afflictions is crucial. Trauma originating from the superstructure must be addressed at the level of systematic remedy, instead of being individually diagnosed and confronted, since “without the context of a political movement, it has never been possible to advance the study of the psychological trauma” (32). In the case of the father, we must note that the paradoxical effect of self-silencing his ambiguous stance produces is in fact an accurate reflection of the “system” itself. Instead of serving as a potential venue for and channel of politicized discourse, the community he once belonged and eventually returned to was itself a traumatized subject, mentally reinforcing and further enacting the silencing mechanism the government had employed in the form of physical internment.

Enforced collective amnesia can indeed be witnessed throughout *When the Emperor was Divine*, as the family’s old friends who had shunned contact with the family as “enemies” greet the son and daughter with kind words upon their return to school (121); the vandalism committed upon the family goes unnoticed (123); and the father’s outburst of rage, strongly suggestive of PTSD, is eschewed even by his children and thus is reduced to a hollow echo (134). Moreover, as Judith Butler warns in *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, the experience of victimization blinds one to its retroactive re-lash at the purported and therefore possibly innocent group of perpetrators, creating a vicious circle. With the memory of Pearl Harbor still vivid in mind, and immersed in resentment towards the enemy faces because of whom their fathers and sons “never came home” (127) or “came home but [were no longer] the same man” (127), the neighbors of the protagonist family are by no means ready to open their ears to any appeal for sympathy. As Herman says, repressed wounds must be spoken about and their pain vented to an attentive and receptive audience in order to be healed, which is why trauma tend to resurface in history after a prolonged interval when social conditions are ripe for a more receptive atmosphere (32). Revisiting the experience of internment not only in light of the American government’s breach of civil rights but also the deep-set wounds

that dictated the lives of its own (American) subjects, therefore, is a form of therapy that permits space and time for a bilateral process of healing for both the system and its members.

Cathy Caruth provides another perspective in her article “Violence and Time: Traumatic Survivals,” seeing the undesired revisitations of traumatic experiences through recurrent nightmares as the mind’s effort to recover its integrity and peace by fully realizing the fact that it has indeed survived a near-fatal blow (25). Drawing on Sigmund Freud’s trauma theory, Caruth explains that the inexplicable resurgence of traumatic experiences in the form of nightmares springs from the discrepancy in time experienced by the mind and body. Noting that “not having truly known the threat of death in the past, the survivor is forced, continually, to confront it over and over again” (25), Caruth interprets the reliving of trauma as, not an additional aggravation of the wound, but the self’s struggle to overcome the traumatic experience by healing the rift between body and mind, creating a foundation from which literary narratives of trauma may draw their import. According to this view, interment literature may be understood as more than mere recollections of a sad history; by addressing the historical experience of interment, these narratives function as utterances that bridge the chasm between empirical immediacy and reflective realization of trauma.

However, it is still unclear as to why the protagonist family’s tale of hurt is told from a distant third person perspective adopted by the author and not in the first-person voice of the victims themselves. How can a traumatized subject be healed if the cure is practiced not by the subject who holds the specific memory, but by another whose physical and psychological distance may well serve to further alienate the victimized and thus risk rendering the subject into mere object? How can the narrative voice in *When the Emperor was Divine* be defined as a true agent of the protagonists, if it is remote in agency as well as in objective time and space? Again, Caruth offers a clue in her article “Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History,” asserting that “history, like the trauma, is never simply one’s own, that history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other’s traumas” (192). In Freud’s unconventional understanding of Moses within the context of Jewish history, Caruth sees a project for reshaping the points of arrival and departure in the framework of the

Jewish Diaspora and persecution. This process is anchored in the notion of history as the formation, processing mechanism and survival of collective trauma. Pointing out that “history, like the trauma, is never simply one’s own, that history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other’s traumas” (192), Caruth locates a reflexive interplay between trauma and history in Sigmund Freud’s *Moses and Monotheism*, reading it as a creative attempt at self-placing rather than objective reconstruction of facts or reification of an illusory state of wholesomeness.

With Caruth’s understanding of history as a collective fabrication—which Freud himself calls “historical truth” (201) in contrast to the belief in historical objectivity (“material truth”)—and the role of trauma in its process of formation, the monolithic formula of victim-persecutor in the case of Japanese Internment falls apart. Alongside the persecuted stands the accuser; the dynamics of injury is mutual, so that one person’s story of hurt becomes that of others, and the traumas of the persecuted as well as the persecutors become indistinguishably entangled within the historical context of interment. While a direct voice of a first person narrator may be more vivid, thereby invoking further sympathy, a distanced view allows the readers to pause before being fully absorbed by the protagonists’—in this case the interned family’s—feelings and perceive the tale as more of a historical account that incorporates multi-faceted dynamics rather than a personal ventilation. This kaleidoscopic viewpoint is critical, since interment, as the object of the narrative, must be treated as a collective experience and must therefore be perceived as a subjective, “historical truth” that reflects a desire to understand rather than prove.

The “Phantom Effect”: Incorporating the Fictional, Individual “I” into a Historical, Collective “We”

Speaking of “context,” it has now been identified why the given subject, object and agent of the interment motif have been elected to serve their roles in constructing the novel’s function as a testimony to historicized trauma, a distanced and therefore a more objective window to the socio-historical circumstances. I now inquire into their connection to the context in which the given novel as their carrier is physically placed, and why the form of fiction may fulfill

the purpose. We might argue that the effect of trauma narrative as therapy or configuration of the interplay among its historical subjects may be achieved by non-fictional memoirs or academic researches, their venue of realization not limited to the realm of fiction as a form of art. Then, it is only just to assume that there must be something unique to what fiction as art achieves, positioned in between the level of involvement or information each provided by direct recollections or (purportedly) objective recordings of history.

In *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*, a classic work of literary criticism that had marked the point of distinction between the differing roles of audience, art works and artist as crucial components of artistic creation, H. M. Abrams maintains that a work of art must dialogue with not only the textual or historical but also the present reality, or in other words acknowledge the present historical settings in and through which the audience as its key constituent (12) inhabit and view the world. Historical lessons may be told and the traumas of history addressed, but the reader living here and now, who may not identify with either the persecutor or the persecuted in the internment narrative, must be able to place the story within one's own historical and personal surroundings to derive meaning from it. Otherwise, the tale, however appealing, remains a mere specter on a distant silver screen.

In his article "Notes on the Phantom: A Complement to Freud's Metapsychology," Nicholas Abraham offers a possible explanation to this conundrum that has been ceaselessly haunting trauma literature. Abraham observes the case of a son who unconsciously internalizes the father's shameful personal history and fantasizes it as his own, the phenomenon of which he calls a haunting by a "phantom" (172). Whereas Sigmund Freud's concept of mourning and melancholia concerns an ode to or longing for the desirable aspects of the once-loved, now-lost object, the phantom returns to haunt the unconscious with the "burial of an unspeakable fact within the loved object" (172). "Maintain[ing] that the 'phantom effect' progressively fades during its transmission from one generation to the next" (176), finally to disappear, Abraham yet presents the possibility of exceptions, and concludes that phantoms that are brought out into the public sphere may live on, acquiring a trans-generational force. The concept of historically inherited/constructed trauma in Cathy

Caruth's "Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History" is reminiscent of Abraham's ideas.

Granted that certain readership standing beyond direct involvement with the internment experience may still fully internalize and sympathize with the traumatized voices of Japanese internees or the historical conditions that rendered them victims, "the 'phantom effect' progressively fades during its transmission from one generation to the next" (Abraham 172), finally to disappear. The wounds having been voiced and the need for healing thus addressed, with war time memories progressively becoming hazed over the passage of time, the story of Japanese internees may eventually disappear behind the curtains of history, unless it retains a trans-generational resonance that tears at the hearts and grasps the attention of new readers inhabiting changed times. This is the point where the importance of the last chapter is revealed, as it endows historical phantoms with flesh and blood, a pulsating vitality that undergirds the novel's artistic and socio-historical constitution.

The objective settings for the "Confession", as observed above, remain ungraspable with the "I", "them" and "you" shifting in meaning, and the "I" continuing his ethnic identification in present tense (142). This in turn means that the narration could be occurring "here" and "now" where the readers reside in, instead of certain points that fall into the temporal and spatial range covered by the previous chapters. Moreover, as the problem of Asian-American racialization raised by the narrator still lives on to the present-day society, there being "Florists, porters, waiters, Nips, Gooks and Slants" (142) suffering discriminative treatment at unseen corners, the narrator's voice obtains a sense of universality and urgency that successfully engages contemporary readers. In this way, the narrator's wounds are no longer subject to the fate of dissipating into the relentless tides of time as a distant historical phantom, but are given life as more readers may identify with the issue raised by the elusive "I".

As "I", "you" and "them" branch out from characters whose historical footings are expanded to encompass broader examples of a pan-Asian-American identity, the narrator and the imaginary audience the "I" is addressing shed their fetters of fictionalization and are opened up to personal identification for the readers. Readers

may see a mirror image of themselves in the narrator, whether he/she is Asian-American, a victim of any kind of discrimination, or even a member of the social majority that imposes or condones racial prejudice. Through its versatility, the narrative transcends itself, its story being transformed from a limited account of a specific historical event set in a certain time and place to a universal discourse on racialization and its subsequent victimization, as well as the societies that enforce, overlook or engineer such injustice.

The reader therefore becomes a crucial actor in constructing the work, and plays a vital role to play in the narrative's function of healing and bridging diverse historical players. This effect becomes sustainable over a longer term, as the trauma of the protagonist family can be felt by any reader who may identify him or herself with these issues in our present social setting. Thus, the trauma of internment constantly reproduces itself, demanding to be retold and touched upon again. As the reader joins force with the narrative voice, its remedies "turn inward, not to a healing of the 'self' but of the 'selves'" (Shiu 16). Through a studied ambiguity, the object, subject and agent of the narrative acquire wider applicability in the last chapter.

Closure: Revisiting and Reclaiming History as a Point of Departure

A near-fatal wound cannot be healed instantly and on the spot; it must be properly dressed and time allowed for the torn skin to close around mending organs. And even after full recovery, these wounds leave behind scars, records of their presence, which testify to one's struggle as a proof that life has emerged victorious over a deadly assault. The scar's function also reaches beyond personal benefit, since records that retell past traumas can serve as beacons and reference points that allows the source of pain and to be identified, remedied or avoided. This is how the phantom of another being's hurt is given substance and rendered truly ours.

The last chapter of *When the Emperor was Divine* is a scar in itself, inviting the readers to identify with the victim(s) through a strategy of obscuring and ambiguating, challenging them to deconstruct the specific and therefore limited subject, object and agent of the internment narrative. In this way, the unidentified "I"'s voice in

the last chapter bridges past and present, self and others, transforming a historical experience of wounds inflicted on a certain Japanese-American family of internees into our very own story.

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er-quality public services, and monopoly control of prices (IBON, 1997). One strategy the Philippine government has used to combat these issues is the Labor Export Policy (LEP)², which established the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA)³ to facilitate labor migration. In 2009, approximately one million Filipinos migrated out of the country, largely on an economic basis (Hong Kong Immigration Department, 2011). Studies indicate that 34-54% of the Philippine population is directly dependent on the remittances of overseas family members, comprising 10% of the GDP (Mission, 1998).

Hong Kong, one of the most economically important cities in Asia and the world, represents a major destination for these migrant workers. According to the Hong Kong Immigration Department, the population of foreign domestic helpers was 273,609 (approximately 48% from the Philippines) as of March 31, 2010. As many as 99% of the Hong Kong migrant workers from the Philippines are women. Here I integrate information from background research and interviews to highlight the issues encountered by this significant population of Filipina migrant domestic workers (MDWs) in Hong Kong. My research focuses on the conciliation process through which migrant workers pursue settlement of exorbitant fees charged by foreign and domestic recruiting agencies.

Overcharging and Illegal Collection

Amongst foreign domestic workers in Hong Kong, the problems of overcharging and illegal collection are rampant, as individuals pay recruitment fees up to HK\$21,000 in order to migrate for work. These issues are related to the illegal practices of recruitment agencies in both the Philippines and their principals in Hong Kong in forcing workers to pay high fees. Because of these practices, agencies continue to make enormous profits and increase in number, **despite the steep fees they themselves must pay to the government in**

2 The Philippine government established the Labor Export Policy, or LEP, in the 1970s to provide stable wages for the impoverished Filipino/a people and to service its foreign debt. It established the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration and targeted one million Filipino/a workers to be deployed annually.

3 The Philippine Overseas Employment Agency, or POEA, is a Philippine government agency whose stated objectives are the regulation of industry, the regulation of employment of Filipino workers, and the protection of Filipino workers abroad (Philippine Overseas Employment Agency).

order to operate the business (Mission, 2009).

The Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) Secretary Mariano Roque issued a memorandum effective in 2009 that banned the direct hiring of foreign domestic workers, in which employers and workers can enter into a contractual working relationship independent of an agency. This memorandum forces workers to pass through recruitment agencies, where they are illegally charged as much as PHP100,000 or more (Mission, 2009).

According to the Philippine Overseas Employment Agency (POEA) Guidelines for Household Service Workers (HSWs), effective December 16, workers should not be charged any placement fees. However, undermining this policy, agencies continue to charge blatantly excessive fees, yet do not refer to them as “placement fees.” Workers are charged insurance fees, an often unnecessary number of overpriced medical examinations, and “training fees” (also known as a “broker’s fee”) whose amounts are *arbitrarily set by the agency*. The activities undertaken during training vary by agency, but all of the workers I interviewed stated that they only reviewed basic and common sense skills like washing dishes and cleaning, instead of skills like operating a dishwasher or vacuum cleaner, with which they may not have been familiar. Some workers have even stated that, as “training,” they worked as maids (without payment) for some time in the home of their agency’s owner, or those of his/her relatives. With agencies sidestepping the no-placement fee policy, a survey conducted by the Mission for Migrant Workers (MFMW) in 2008 indicates that, of workers who passed through recruitment agencies (some before the effective date of the POEA Guidelines, and some after), 46% had to pay between PHP60,000 to P100,000. About 8% paid more than P100,000. Only 14% paid PHP25,000, the approximate legal amount of placement fee before the implementation of the POEA Guidelines (Mission, 2009).

Some workers are able to find some means to pay off their agency fees, in which case they usually borrow money from friends and/or family. The majority of migrant workers, though, who leave the Philippines in the first place to make more money than they can in their own country, do not have access to tens of thousands of pesos in order to complete the application process. Agencies force them to take out loans in their own names, usually with family members

and/or friends as co-signer(s), with loan companies in connivance with the agency. Once the migrant begins working in Hong Kong, she pays these loans either to a financial institution in Hong Kong, or has relatives in the Philippines pay to one there. Money is split between the recruitment agency and loan company. These complicated loan schemes are used by agencies to cover their tracks for the illegal placement fees they charge. All of the workers I interviewed were not given receipts for the fees they paid to the agency, including those who specifically asked for the receipts. With personal loans in workers' names and no documents proving that their loan payments go to the agency, agencies can deny that the worker is paying illegal placement fees, despite the obvious connections between the agencies in the Philippines and Hong Kong and the loan company. The fact that the Philippine agency can waive the worker's loan after conciliation (discussed in the next section) is one indication of such relations.

Hands-On Conciliation through the Philippine Consulate General

For Filipino/a migrant workers, one method offered by the Philippine Consulate General (PCG) of “finding justice” for these illegally high fees is hands-on conciliation. The hands-on conciliation method is the way in which workers make monetary claims against agencies via the consulate, whether or not they have balance remaining on their loans. In these conciliations, a consulate official mediates a meeting between a worker, often alone, and an agent from her recruitment agency. The PCG has boasted that, through conciliation, it has been able to facilitate the return of millions of Hong Kong Dollars to victims of illegal collection. While the PCG has boasted of the method’s quick process of “delivering justice” by reimbursing workers for some of what they have paid to the agencies, the NGO Mission for Migrant Workers (MFMW) expresses concern about the validity of the process.

The Mission asserts that the handling of the hands-on conciliation reinforces the current system of illegal fee-paying, diminishes the culpability of erring recruitment agencies, and places workers at a disadvantage during the negotiating process. The Mission argues that the conciliation pacifies victims of illegal recruitment fees with the illusion that they are being given reparations for the fees, when

in reality the workers often get less than half of what they are owed – fees from which the Philippine government should have protected them in the first place. The Philippine government does not protect workers pre-departure, and once workers are in Hong Kong, beltless their systematic struggle with recruitment agencies by tagging such cases simply as a labor issue. This “quick fix” scheme, which evades any question of prosecution, dissuades workers from filing cases with the Philippine government, which could win them a larger portion of what they are owed and has the potential to punish erring recruitment agencies.

The system under which the conciliation operates places workers at a disadvantage. Should a worker choose to settle, she must sign a document waiving any right to pursue further claims from the agency, on the same document, the settlement amount is referred to as “financial assistance” from the agency. In this way, the settlement is considered final and recruitment agencies can avoid any further litigation and continue their illegal practices with other workers. On the other hand, if workers want to find work again in Hong Kong, they must pay (illegally high) recruitment fees to other agencies, virtually all of which charge similar fees. In upholding the legitimacy and effectiveness of the conciliation process, the Philippine Consulate covers the illegality of agencies’ actions, perhaps suggesting connivance between agencies and the Philippine government.

This Study

This research evaluates the hands-on conciliation of the Philippine Consulate General in Hong Kong. By looking through case files and other data on victims of illegal fees, interviewing case officers of the Mission and its clients, interviewing the Philippine Overseas Labor Office (PLOO) of the PCG, sitting in on a conciliation, and conducting supporting interviews (with employers, a lawyer, and an academic), I examine the effectiveness of the hands-on conciliation process and suggest how it can be improved to offer greater protection from illegal collection to Filipino/a foreign domestic workers in Hong Kong. This study will focus on Filipina migrant domestic workers who applied to an agency in the Philippines with a counterpart in Hong Kong (as opposed to workers who had already been working in Hong Kong and found new employers by applying

directly to Hong Kong agencies).

Methodology

This study includes both qualitative data in the form of interviews and observation, and quantitative data derived from the MFMW's case files. I interviewed:

- Five case managers and community organizers from MFMW for a fuller picture of the conditions of migrant workers in Hong Kong; the Philippines Consulate, and the practices of the latter;
- seven workers for anecdotal evidence;
- two employers;
- two professors working at universities in Hong Kong (one of which was also an employer);
- a Hong Kong lawyer currently handling a case regarding workers made to take out loans by their recruitment agency;
- and two officials from the Philippines Consulate General, one with some purview over the hands-on conciliation.

All of the above interviews were recorded on tape for later review. Through one of the consulate officials I interviewed, I was allowed to sit in on an actual conciliation and take notes.

I also conducted informal interviews talking with workers congregated on the streets of Hong Kong on Sunday (the rest day for most HK domestic workers).

Lastly, I went through MFMW's database and case files, both for the quantitative portion of my research and also for extra notes on the modes of operation of the PCG and the agency officials during conciliation.

I conducted this field research in Hong Kong from mid-July to the end of August 2011.

How Conciliation Works

When a worker's contract is terminated or pre-terminated (under a one-month notice), or in rare cases has been allowed by her employer to pursue conciliation with an agency, the worker must first file a complaint with the Philippine Overseas Labor Office of the Philippines Consulate General in Hong Kong. The consulate staff will then set an appointment for the worker, first calling her agency as to what day and time it can send a representative to the concili-

ation.⁴

On the day of the conciliation, the worker will go to the consulate and meet with the conciliator and an agent or representative from the Hong Kong counterpart agency who will call an agency official from the worker's Philippine agency. The worker and agent/representative sit side by side in front of the conciliator, with the conciliator's desk in between. The entire conciliation takes place verbally, usually involving a discussion of the worker's circumstances and her pleas for a larger settlement, in opposition to the agency representative's negotiation for a smaller one. Workers, caseworkers, and even an official from the PCG have all likened the conciliation process to haggling at a market.

Conciliations can range from a very short time (10-20 minutes) to hours. Regardless, by the end of the conciliation, the worker chooses either to settle there or be endorsed to the Philippine Overseas Employment Agency (POEA) in the Philippines to pursue a greater settlement there. Depending on the worker's place of stay in the Philippines, she will file a case with the nearest POEA office, where she will face another series of (3) conciliations. If her case is still not settled by the end of these conciliations, she will then be endorsed to the National Labor Relations Council (NLRC), where a court hearing will take place and the agency's license can be suspended if found to be charging illegal placement fees.

Quantitative Data

The purpose of the quantitative data is to answer the following questions:

- How many workers chose to settle at the conciliation? How many chose instead to file in the Philippines? How do these two numbers compare?
- For those who did settle, how much of their claims did they actually receive? How do these numbers compare?

In order to isolate the data to be used to answer these questions, I reviewed the electronic and paper copies of the Mission's case files. Since the Mission did not have follow-up information for

⁴ Sometimes the worker's agency insists that she settle at the agency rather than attempt a conciliation, but this is usually a trap that leaves the worker at gravest disadvantage. Both migrant worker-serving organizations like the Mission and the agency official whom I interviewed discourage workers from doing this.

every client (due to several reasons, e.g. the worker could not be contacted in the short time between the conciliation and her flight home), I went through the electronic spreadsheet to identify records indicating 1) that the worker chose to be endorsed to the POEA, or 2) the worker's final amount settled at the conciliation. I then found these workers' case files in the Mission's paper records to confirm the accuracy of the numbers on the electronic spreadsheet and to get more detailed information about their cases.

The Mission has workers include fees for POEA processing, Philippine Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) membership, and PhilHealth health insurance in the calculation of their placement fee, to be written on the client intake form. When amounts were indicated in Hong Kong Dollars (HKD), I converted the HKD amount to Philippine Pesos (PHP) by multiplying the HKD amount by 5.9.

The limitations of these methods should be addressed:

- The sample of clients' case files with complete follow-up data was relatively small (27).
 - Since there is no record of the agency's final offer at the conciliation before the worker chose to be endorsed to the Philippines, the effect of this amount on the worker's decision whether or not to settle, cannot be determined.
 - Mission's case files did not indicate how much the worker had already paid to the agency before the conciliation and the remaining balance on her loan. We do not know, for example, if she is just getting the rest of their loan waived, or if she is being reimbursed for illegal fees she had already paid. Such data is highly variable, depending on the circumstances of the worker.
 - For the "placement fee" amount as indicated on the workers' case files, it cannot be confirmed whether or not interest on the workers' loan (if the worker paid via a loan) was included in the calculation.
- The quantitative research I conducted produced the following results:
- For all of the 27 workers included in the sample, the average amount paid was PHP 91,840.41.
 - Of 27 workers, 4 chose to be endorsed by the PCG in HK to the POEA. This shows that around 15% of workers who attend conciliation at the consulate choose endorsement over settlement.

- For the 23 workers that chose to settle after the conciliation, the average amount paid in placement fees was PHP 92506.74, and the average amount settled from conciliation was PHP 41991.04. The latter is 45.39% of the former, meaning that workers who choose to settle at the consulate settle for less than 50% of the total amount they paid to agency.
- For the 4 workers who chose to be endorsed by the PCG in HK to the POEA, the average amount paid in placement fees was PHP 88,009.

According to these results, workers receive as settlement a relatively small percentage (45.39%) of the amount that they paid to the agencies in order to work as domestic workers in Hong Kong. It should also be noted that the workers reflected in this data are clients of Mission, who, prior to the conciliation, are briefed as to the running of the facilitation, what they can say to help their case, and how to defend against common tactics by agency officials/representatives to lower the settlement amount. It is likely that other workers who participate in conciliation without being prepared beforehand in such a manner receive even less from the settlement.

Despite this, few workers (15%) choose to pursue their cases further in the Philippines, where they can potentially receive greater amounts and have the licenses of erring recruitment agencies suspended. The low number of the workers who continue the fight for justice in the Philippines can partly be explained by the agency's tactics in convincing workers to settle for whatever they can during conciliation, and the facilitation of the conciliation by the Philippine Consulate.

Evaluation of Conciliation

As aforementioned, the PCG in Hong Kong claims to be proud of the conciliation as a quick and fair means to win justice for migrant workers. However, my research has shown that there exist fundamental problems with the facilitation of the conciliation that leave workers at a disadvantage when facing the agency. This section will explore the positive and negative aspects of the conciliation from the perspective of a worker who has been charged high illegal placement fees.

Benefits

- If the worker makes herself aware of agency tactics and how she can respond to them, and remains determined to fight for justice and her money despite the high-pressure circumstances of a conciliation, she can at times obtain a considerable portion of the money she is owed. For example, one case worker recalls a worker who was able to win PHP67,400 out of her PHP78,633 claim. This, however, also depends on how much the agency is willing to negotiate with the worker. Although a few outstanding cases where a worker received almost all of her claim come to mind for each caseworker, such cases are obviously not common.
- For workers who are determined to find another employer in Hong Kong, the conciliation provides the quickest way to settle their cases and move on to other employers. This, however, comes at some expense, since the worker is virtually guaranteed to lose money and would inevitably be contributing to the perpetuation of this rotten system, as they re-apply to work as a domestic worker with the same or another agency and must once again pay an enormous placement fee.

Points for Improvement

- *A worker's complaint is only entertained when her contract is terminated or pre-terminated.* The consulate official stated that this is a security measure, for the worker, if her employer is not supportive of her participation in the conciliation, may risk the termination of her contract. That is, if the agency is close to the employer, who does not support the worker, it can encourage the employer to terminate the worker's contract and hire a new worker through the agency. On the other hand, the consulate states that the worker can participate in conciliation even if she is employed, but she must approach her employer about the issue and make sure that he/she is supportive. However, one worker in this position whom I interviewed has faced some difficulty in entering the conciliation process, explaining that the consulate is requiring her to solicit a letter from her employer of his/her approval. In sum, usually only workers whose contracts are pre-terminated or already terminated can participate in conciliation; the process is rather difficult and bureaucratic otherwise.

- *The consulate schedules the conciliation very close to the worker's departure date, in some cases even on the day of her departure.* The consulate official stated that this was because the workers come in too late (as in only a couple days before she is scheduled to leave for the Philippines), but one case worker said that the consulate maintains this practice even when the worker comes in well ahead of time (as in one or two weeks). If the worker is set to leave in two days, one day, or even on the day of her conciliation date, this places her in a precarious and insecure position during the negotiation process. She will not have the chance to ask for another conciliation date if the negotiations are against her favor or wishes, and she will have much less time to thoroughly contemplate her decision and understand its consequences, with tens of thousands of pesos at stake. I surmise that this practice, while decidedly disadvantageous to the worker, is beneficial to the consulate; by setting a conciliation date near the worker's date of departure, it can prevent further conciliation meetings with the same worker and more quickly clear its own schedule.

- *The consulate does not allow workers' friends and caseworkers from sitting in the conciliation to provide moral support and/or counsel to the worker.* The consulate reasons that it maintains this policy because the conciliation is solely between the worker and the agency, and that other people cannot speak to the circumstances of the case. However, by the nature of casework, a caseworker becomes very familiar with the worker and her case. Because a caseworker is likely more familiar with the rights guaranteed to a migrant domestic worker in Hong Kong, he/she can provide sound counsel to the worker and help her defend herself against agency tactics. In fact, each of the caseworkers I interviewed who, before this policy was implemented, had the chance to join a worker during her conciliation, believed that he/she was able to help workers increase the amount they received from their agencies, or help them make the decision to continue the fight for justice in the Philippines if unsatisfied with the settlement amount in Hong Kong. For example, one caseworker said that when the conciliator discouraged the worker from filing in the Philippines, the caseworker silenced the conciliator and the

agent by reminding them that, should the worker pursue the case in the Philippines, it could potentially lead to the suspension of the agency's license. Such assertions remind all parties involved that the worker also has power during the negotiations and does not just have to take whatever she can get from the agency. This helps create the ideal situation in which the conciliation is a negotiation between two equal parties. Although the worker cannot have another person in the room, the consulate allows agencies to send agency representatives in the place of agency officials who deal with workers. If the PCG is maintaining this policy on the basis that the conciliation should be between only the worker and the agency, why does the PCG not require the agent who processed the worker to attend in person, like the worker?

- *The agency is in a position of power during the conciliation because of its money and its officials' /representatives' familiarity with the process.* Because the agency has the money, it in a better position to negotiate the amount it gives to the worker. Furthermore, since agencies are used to attending these conciliations, the officials and representatives who often participate in conciliation do not have any uncertainties about the process, can anticipate what the conciliator and the worker might say, and can over time develop strategies to minimize the agency's payment to the worker.
- *The consulate may proceed through the conciliation too quickly, such that the worker may not fully understand everything to which she is agreeing.* Upon signing the settlement agreement at the end of the conciliation, the worker waives any right to pursue the agency further. One worker states that, although the conciliator may have explained this to her, the conciliation proceeded so quickly that she was not able to take in all the information. From what I have observed from the waiting area for the conciliation room, many workers become very emotional, even crying, during the conciliation due to their lack of power to win a just settlement; in such a case, it is understandable that the worker (not as familiar with the protocol as the conciliator or the agent) does not register every piece of information given to her by the consulate official, especially if it is facilitated very quickly. Again, perhaps the consulate officials continue this practice in the spirit

of wanting to clear their schedules, despite the disadvantages to the worker.

- *The conciliator allows the agent/agency representative to mislead the worker during the conciliation.* In reference to the agency tactics earlier explained, the conciliator does not correct the agent or representative when he/she gives the worker false information, if not encouraging the worker him/herself to listen to the agent/representative. For example, one caseworker explained that in one case, when the agency told the worker that it could not refund her for past payments because she has already worked so long, the conciliator said something like, "Yes, come on. Don't ask for too much, you've already had the chance to earn that money by working." This does not account for the fact that the worker should not have been made to pay such illegal fees in the first place, and that she is entitled to this money whether or not she has already earned it back through her labor. Such actions on the part of the conciliator help perpetuate the agencies' systemic exploitation of Filipina migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong.
- *The consulate allows (or, according to one case worker, sometimes even advises) the worker to go to the agency to settle her claim.* As aforementioned, if the worker goes to the agency to "negotiate" her settlement rather than participating in conciliation, this would place her in an even more unstable position to assert her rights. At the agency, she might be forced to sign documents stating that she has received all of her money even though she has not in reality, or that she will no longer pursue the agency, etc. Although the consulate official I interviewed stated that she strongly insists that workers participate in the conciliation rather than going to the agency in person, both caseworkers and domestic workers have attested that the neglect occurs nonetheless. One worker, for example, spoke with her agent on the phone while at the consulate. When the agent said that they should talk further at the agency, the consulate staff agreed. No matter the circumstances, this obviously goes against the consulate interviewee's (stated) strong position that all discussion between the agency and the worker about her case should be conducted at the consulate.

- *The conciliator discourages workers from filing cases in the Philippines.* In the case of almost every domestic worker I interviewed, the conciliator encouraged the worker to take whatever she can get from the agency at the conciliation. If she tries to file in the Philippines, the domestic worker said, the process would take too long, it would cost a lot of money to pay for her travel to and from the POEA, she might not be able to find a job when she goes back home to the Philippines, etc. Indeed, these statements are in many cases true, but conciliators also ignore the worker's opportunity to potentially receive a higher, more just settlement in the Philippines and/or to take judicial action to suspend the agency's license. To discourage the worker, conciliators also say that the worker cannot continue the case in the Philippines if she is not there in person, which would effectively prevent her from supporting her family by working abroad. This statement is untrue. Domestic workers with a claim against an agency can file for a special power of attorney for someone else to represent them in their case, preferably a relative, but possibly also a representative from a community organization like Gabriela Philippines or Migrant Philippines. Why does the consulate uphold this practice even when it may be in opposition to the worker's fight for justice? One reason is made clear by the consulate official's explanation that the conciliation in Hong Kong is the first step in a worker's fight for her claim, a way for the Philippine government to "de-clog" its system. That is, the more workers the Philippine Consulate can encourage to settle in Hong Kong, the fewer they will have to entertain at the POEA and NLR. And the more quickly the consulate can process workers in Hong Kong, the more it can "de-clog" its own schedule. This is decidedly not pro-worker.
- *During the conciliation, workers felt that the conciliator was on the side of the agency.* The conciliator, for example, might say that the worker is simply asking for too much—"Oh, come on, don't you think that's a bit much?" he/she would say in a tone friendly and appealing, if not condescending. In a similar vein, the conciliator from the consulate might coax the worker into just accepting the agency's offer so that she can move on with her life. In one instance that made the worker feel that there

- was a certain closeness between the agency and the conciliator, the conciliator, as per the request of the Philippine employment agent on the phone, kicked out of the conciliation room an agency representative that surprisingly was strongly pleading with the worker not to accept such a low settlement and demand a higher one. After the agent on the phone and the worker had reached a settlement, the conciliator took the phone and said to the agent, "See, didn't I tell you everything would be OK?" Another example is the postponement of a conciliation meeting when the agent or agent representative does not show up, with apparently no penalty; on the other hand, one worker I interviewed who was late to her meeting was scolded by the conciliator. I do not mean to say that the conciliator should have pardoned the worker for being late, but if such is his/her treatment of the worker, why does he/she not scold the agent or agent/agent representative (who in some cases does not show up at all, forcing the consulate to reschedule the conciliation) in the same way? The consulate official I interviewed said that the conciliator is simply moderating a negotiation between two equal parties. But is the worker truly treated as if she is on equal footing with the agency? When I asked the caseworkers why they think consulate does this, they suggested that the consulate and the agency may be working together, that they both have an interest in the current system of migrants' cycles of debt. Because agencies pay a very large chunk of money to the government to receive agency licenses, the government can profit from the sustained growth of the industry and the establishment of new agencies. Furthermore, agencies, which connect Filipino/a workers to employment abroad, play an integral role in the government's continuation of the Labor Export Program (LEP), on which the Philippine economy has become dependent for remittances. Perhaps for these reasons, agencies are protected from greater government regulation.
- *The settlement agreement, also known as the Affidavit of Desistance, Waiver and Release and Quit Claim, takes blame away from the agency and fully protects it from further action by the worker for her claims.* As if rubbing salt on the wound, one point of the settlement agreement (as of March 2011) which

the worker signs after the conciliation (if she chooses to settle) states: That after carefully evaluating the facts and the circumstances surrounding the filing of complaint/case, I have come to realize that filing thereof was a result of plain and simple misunderstanding and misapprehension of facts between me and [agency] or its officers, directors.” Previous versions of the settlement agreement refer to the settlement amount as “financial assistance” from the agency. Such statements belittle the worker, while taking blame away from the agency, in the latter case even creating an image of it as helping the worker. These words may serve another indication of the consulate’s stance between the agency and the worker, and which party it favors.

Conclusion

Naturally, this is not an exhaustive explanation of all of the different tactics adopted by agencies during the conciliation, or all of the good and bad points of the process. Depending on the case, depending on the day, despite general patterns, all parties involved ultimately improvise during the hands-on conciliation and may veer from the patterns aforementioned. Regardless, the consulate, pro-migrant organizations, society at large, and especially workers themselves all have a role in asserting the rights and welfare of migrant workers in light of (or in spite of) the concrete conditions they face, and the current state of the hands-on conciliation as the consulate’s sole method for entertaining workers’ monetary claims.

The current conditions of Filipino/a migrant workers not only in Hong Kong, but also in other parts of the world, are incontrovertibly tied to the Philippines’ lack of national industry (and therefore jobs) and emphasis on the export of human labor. The consulate official I interviewed stated that one of the purposes of the hands-on conciliation is to “de-clog” the system of workers making claims against agencies and corporation. But this system can never truly be “de-clogged” if the Philippine government continues its current policies of debt servicing, dependence on foreign economies, and labor export. Thus, Filipino/a workers both in and out of the Philippines should fight for fundamental change in their country, one that places the interests of workers above corporations and foreign economies, and fosters consulates that are truly “for the Filipino/as abroad.”

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EXPOSING AGENT ORANGE: TRACKING PHOTOGRAPHIC LINEAGES TO REENGAGE VIEWERS WITH THE ONGOING ENVIRONMENTAL AND HUMANITARIAN CONCERN

Natalia Duong

“How do we cope with our exposures to Agent Orange?”

—Susan Schweik

At a recent conference on Agent Orange and Addressing the Legacy of War in Vietnam on October 29, 2011, English professor and Associate Dean of Arts and Humanities at UC Berkeley Susan Schweik posed the question, “What else can we do about Agent Orange?” In her speech, Schweik delineates three different types of exposures that surround the history of the herbicide Agent Orange in Vietnam and in the United States. She speaks of the exposure to the actual chemical, Agent Orange, and the dioxin therein, the exposure of bodies affected by Agent Orange to the public eye, and lastly, the general public’s exposure to the story of Agent Orange. In this paper, I extrapolate on this notion of “exposure” to consider the role of trauma photography in relation to bodies affected by Agent Orange. While photographs of people affected by Agent Orange originally aided in exposing the public to the ongoing environmental and humanitarian concern, some photographs of people affected by Agent Orange fix bodies perpetually in a moment of exposure to dioxin, thereby denying knowledge of the chemical’s progressive effects and a present health condition, thus foreclosing future potential for remediation. Alternatively, photographs that trace a lineage of exposure through generations require longer processing and thus engage the viewer not only in personal histories but also the immediate humanitarian concern in the present.

The Vietnam War, referred to as the American War by the Vietnamese, was the first war to have a simultaneous visual presence in American homes. The war was broadcast as a “television war,” overtaking the evening news and showing America’s boys complet-

ing their duties. However, as the war began to turn, images began to reflect the failures of America’s efforts. Though images of American deaths were rarely shown, photographs of Vietnamese people as victims became iconic of the war. One such photo, often referred to as “Napalm Girl,” (*Figure 1*) captured by photojournalist Nick Ut, exposed the horror of war to the public eye, in particular the destruction caused by napalm. This photo continues to share this narrative though it has been 40 years since it was taken. However, it would be decades before photography would capture the destructive potential of Agent Orange, as its most extreme effects would not appear until second and third generation descendants of those exposed were born. Vietnamese and American soldiers and civilians alike are still haunted by the recurring trace of war as transmitted by Agent Orange.

Initial Exposure: The Spraying of Agent Orange

Agent Orange is an herbicide that was sprayed by American soldiers, primarily in South Vietnam, from 1961 to 1971. It is estimated that approximately 12 million gallons of Agent Orange were sprayed at over fifty times the suggested concentration for defoliation over five million acres of forests and crops in Vietnam¹. The Aspen Institute now estimates that 4.5 million Vietnamese people and hundreds of thousands of American veterans were exposed. However, because the chemical is not water-soluble and continues to exist in the environment in Vietnam, dioxin has made its way into the food chain thereby continuing to affect populations in the present. In the past few years, clearer links have been drawn between exposure to Agent Orange and consequent health effects in persons exposed to the chemical, as well as second and third generation descendants of those exposed. A study by Michael K. Skinner et al. (2012) found that dioxin (TCDD), the main contaminant present in herbicides such as Agent Orange, promotes epigenetic transgenerational inheritance of diseases in unexposed progeny of females exposed during gestation². This essentially implies that females exposed to Agent Orange

1 “History of Agent Orange and Dioxin in Vietnam,” *The Aspen Institute*, accessed April 11, 2013, <http://www.aspeninstitute.org/policy-work/agent-orange/history>.

2 Michael K. Skinner, Mohan Mannikkam, Rebecca Tracey, and Carlos Guerrero-Bosagna, “Dioxin (TCDD) Induces Epigenetic Transgenerational Inheritance of Adult Onset Disease and Sperm Epimutations,” *PLoS ONE* 7, no. 9 (2012): e46249, <http://skinner.wsu.edu/toxnews/Dioxin%20PlusOne%20Skinner%202012.pdf> (ac-

during their pregnancy will epigenetically transmit related diseases to their offspring. The same study found similar effects in second and third generation descendants as well. Thus, while this particular field is still nascent, studies suggest that Agent Orange is, in fact, genetically transmitted through the mediated expression of DNA. Furthermore, though the health effects of Agent Orange range from physical disabilities to various cancers, the majority of the associated diseases are represented phenotypically—in other words, the effects are visible. Thus photography, as a primarily visual medium, becomes an important tool in representing the transgenerational transmission of Agent Orange as a residue of war.

As trauma has been considered the “past made present,” the reproduction of photographs as well as the development of these photographs over time, repeat the continuing effects of the herbicide today. Sigmund Freud in *Remembering, Repeating, Working Through*, has considered an individual’s repetition of past trauma in the present from a psychosomatic perspective. Freud writes, “As long as the patient is in the treatment he cannot escape from this compulsion to repeat; and in the end we understand that this is his way of remembering.”³³ In other words, Freud considers the process of repetition to be the patient’s manner of coping with past trauma in the present. Thus, the repeat becomes a form of understanding the aporia of trauma. Alternately, Eva Hoffman in *After Such Knowledge* edge considers the transgenerational transmission of trauma between individuals as a culturally embodied experience. Hoffman explains the generational effects experienced by Holocaust survivors and their descendants who can either be a source of potential renewal or an icon fixed at the moment of trauma. She writes, “The second generation after every calamity is the hinge generation, in which the meanings of awful events can remain arrested and fixed at the point of trauma; or in which they can be transformed into new sets of relations with the world, and new understanding.”³⁴ Thus, Hoffman describes the potential for the “hinge” generation to reinterpret past traumas through a contemporary perspective once the trauma

ceased (December 4, 2012).

3 Sigmund Freud, “Remembering, Repeating, Working Through” in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1990), 150.

4 Eva Hoffman, *After such knowledge: memory, history, and the legacy of the Holocaust*, (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 103.

has ended. Future generations can therefore escape the repetition of trauma. However, those affected by Agent Orange complicate this potential because they continue to *physically* and *literally* exhibit the embodied proliferation of war in the present. Healing through “new relations and understandings” is harder to accomplish when physical disabilities due to herbicide exposure continue to reappear. As such, photography performs the compulsion repetition that fixes the subject in a moment of victimhood rather than arousing the potential for renewal that Hoffman describes.

Exposure as Shock

Early photographs of bodies affected by Agent Orange fixed the referents at the point of trauma. Schweik summarizes, “Vietnamese people with disabilities became the emblems of ecocide.”³⁵ Once the health effects of Agent Orange were exposed to the public, Vietnamese people with disabilities lost their individual subjectivities in exchange for a collective identity as victims of chemical warfare. Ulrich Baer, in *Spectral Evidence*, analyzes a similar occurrence in the photographs that Jean-Martin Charcot took of women thought to be suffering from hysteria. Baer notes that Charcot took the pictures as a way of analyzing the ailment, however, the women were captured by the flash at the height of the illness and therefore forever exposed as icons of the condition. Baer writes about how photography as a medium “freeze-frames and retains the body in an isolated position that can be viewed and theorized about outside of a temporal continuum.”³⁶ However, while this flash capture of catalepsy mirrored the effects of hysteria, and therefore illuminated the condition, the atemporal depiction of bodies affected by Agent Orange obscures the transmission of health effects through time. The photographs of those affected by Agent Orange arrest the symptom at its height, remove the bodies from the to the past, and consequently ignore the present condition through a continual temporal distancing from the now. The momentary exposure of bodies through photography masks the most detrimental effect of the herbicide: that it is transgenerational.

5 Susan Schweik, “What else can we do about Agent Orange?” Agent Orange and Addressing the Legacy of War in Vietnam, Ford Foundation, Rotary Club International and Active Voice, University of California Berkeley, October 29, 2011.

6 Ulrich Baer, *Spectral evidence: the photography of trauma*, Paperback ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2005), 39.

ally inherited.

Moreover, the initial photographs taken of bodies affected by Agent Orange removed all subjectivity of the referents represented within the photos. They portrayed the most extreme cases of physical disability that seemed to occupy a realm of fantasy as opposed to reality. There were twin headed stillborn babies in formaldehyde filled jars, babies born with extreme skull contortions and missing whole limbs. The bodies were excessive in some parts and seemingly lacking in others. This first set of photographs exposed the effects of the herbicide through shock.⁷ As a result, viewers often turned away from the photograph within seconds of experiencing its primary shock as affective response. Judith Butler, in *Frames of War*, addresses how photographs transmit affect:

For photographs to communicate effectively in this way, they must have a transitive function: they must act upon viewers in ways that have a direct bearing on the kinds of judgments those viewers will formulate about the world. Sontag concedes that photographs are transitive. They do not merely portray or represent—they they relay affect. In fact, in times of war, this transitive affectivity of the photograph may overwhelm and numb its viewers.⁸

Butler contends that photographs can shift individual's perspective of war through the transmission of affect. However, this “numbing” affect can also inhibit political or social action when the photographs overwhelm the viewer. Thus, photographs that shock viewers allow them to retreat from the photograph, rather than engage with the larger political or social concern.

The shocking nature of the photographs rendered the bodies immediately abject—as they represented neither subject nor object; the photographs denied the I/eye.⁹ Consequently, viewers carried

⁷ I have explicitly chosen not to reproduce these “shock” photos in this paper as I do not support the adverse affect that they induce. However, many can still be found by searching for “Agent Orange” in a Google image search.

⁸ Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2009), 68.

⁹ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of horror: an essay on abjection*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

this adverse affect onto their readings of the larger issue of Agent Orange and dioxin in the environment. Thus, the American public could turn away from the environmental and humanitarian concern just as they did from this first set of expository photographs. The lack of visible subjectivity in the photographs forgives the lack of humanitarian response. The numbing affect produced by the photograph paralyzes its viewer while evading the current severity of this issue in the present. As the bodies portrayed were considered abject, the images of people affected were cast aside just as those affected by Agent Orange were cloistered in centers for people with disabilities outside of the public's eye. Moreover, because people with disabilities in Vietnam are considered to be suffering karmic punishment for the deeds of their ancestors, they are often ignored and considered a burden to the development of society.¹⁰ Thus, the abject nature of the photographs produced an affective response that licensed the continual “pushing away” of bodies affected by Agent Orange. The photographs require only a distal engagement with the subjects portrayed and therefore remain a flat protective skin behind which the memory of war can remain repressed.

Circulation: The Spread of Agent Orange

However, like the transgenerational health effects of Agent Orange, the images of affected bodies kept returning. The process of creating a photograph ensures its reproduction: the photograph is inherently repeatable, lending itself to the widespread circulation of its multiples. Thus, the spread of images mirrored the ongoing spread of Agent Orange in the environment. Butler makes a similar claim about photographs taken of torture victims at Guantanamo Bay. She writes, “The indefinite circulability of the image allows the event to continue to happen and, indeed, thanks to these images, the event has not stopped happening.”¹¹ In other words, the spread of images mirrors the spread of dioxin, propagating the traumatic event into the present. However, the isolation of the shocking images from a lineage of photographs implied that the developing severity of the condition was not reflected in consequent developments of the photograph. Therefore, while the photographs were circulated, and its

¹⁰ Irmo Marini, Noeren M. Glover-Graf, and Michael Millington, *Psychosocial Aspects of Disability*, (New York: Springer Publishing Company, 2012), 76.

¹¹ Butler, *Frames of War*, 86.

exposures multiplied, the image circulated captured bodies affected in a moment of exposure to the chemical without referencing its progressive nature. The bodies were viewed as things of the past rather than people of the present. The photographs' repeats did not reveal the worsening nature of the health concern.

This circulation of images that freezes the victim at the height of trauma is exacerbated in the contemporary moment where digital photographs are instantly captured and shared at greater speeds than ever before. Search engines scour the Internet, retrieve images from websites, and present the amalgamation of images without context. A Google image search of "Agent Orange" reveals a host of decontextualized photographs—often of the shocking nature—that overwhelm the viewer. There are only masses of bodies without names or (hi)stories. The overwhelming collection of abject images also allows them to be pushed away from view. Thus, the instantaneous relation to photographs engendered by Internet search engines denies a sustained response to the condition portrayed. Bodies are circulated as petrified in disease without any index of the progressive nature of the disease or the potential to protect future bodies from exposure to the chemical.

Furthermore, the repeatability of photographs ensured that the photograph outlived those who were represented within the photograph. Just as photographs capture a moment that has occurred in the past, and represent it in the now, the photograph also reveals the immanence of death for all lives represented within it. Butler explains:

If we are not haunted, there is no loss, there has been no life that was lost. But if we are shaken or 'haunted' by a photograph, it is because the photograph acts on us in part through outliving the life it documents; it establishes in advance the time in which that loss will be acknowledged as a loss. So the photograph is linked through its 'tense' to the grievability of a life, anticipating and performing that grievability.¹²

Thus, Butler articulates the melancholic nature of photographs to perform the loss of its referent. The photographs of those affected by Agent Orange, particularly the iconic pictures of mothers and their affected children, enact a greater tragedy as the mothers will often outlive their children who are affected, and the photograph will outlive both referents. Many of these photographs reenact a Pieta posturing, like the Western art historical trope of Madonna and Jesus, alluding to the imminent demise of the child. For example, a photograph taken by Nick Ut elicits this feeling of helplessness as Pham Thi Thuy holds her grandson Dinh Dai Son as he lays inactive in her arms (*Figure 2*). This photograph is haunted by the pending death of the child even though the child portrayed is still alive. The photograph fixes the outcome: the child's death is presented as unavoidable. This type of photograph continues to deny an active response from its viewer, as it portrays the certain death of the child, removing his subjectivity and agency to control his own future. The photograph also forgives the viewer for her lack of engagement as it recalls a larger historical precedent that seems insurmountable. Thus, the form of the photograph inherently contains a drive towards death through the document's ability to outlive the life it portrays.

Photographs that fix the outcome of its referents allow viewers to further disengage from the environmental and humanitarian concern. While some frames highlight the humanity of the subjects photographed, photographs that produce an aversive response, or that remind viewers of the imminence of their death, allow the viewer to disengage from the photograph and the concern being represented. Butler refers to this frame as "foreclosing responsiveness":

There are ways of framing that will bring the human into view in its frailty and precariousness, that will allow us to stand for the value and dignity of human life, to react with outrage when lives are degraded or eviscerated without regard for their value as lives. And then there are frames that foreclose responsiveness, where this activity of foreclosure is effectively and repeatedly performed by the frame itself—its own negative action, as it were, toward what will not

¹² Butler, *Frames of War*, 98.

be explicitly represented.”¹³

Thus, through its repeatability and reproducibility, the photograph immunizes its original shock effect rendering the environmental and human effects of Agent Orange banal. Because the subjects within the photos are not regarded as subjects, the frame of the photograph does not implicate the viewer in relation to those portrayed, rather the viewer remains outside. The photograph forecloses response by repeating a determined outcome. Schweik reiterates, “The poster child is both obsessed-about and utterly ignorable.”¹⁴

Developing the Photograph: Constructing photographic lineages

If photographs inherently arrest the symptoms at its height, and repeat this moment of exposure in the present, what types of photographs do not foreclose a response, but rather actively engage the viewer with the photograph? Photographs capture a momentary situation, thus singular photographs do not necessarily relay a causal effect. They may transmit affect, but how could they reveal the transmission of trauma *through* time? There are not clear before and after pictures of the bodies affected by Agent Orange like there are of the landscape as the transmission of effects is intergenerational and individuals do not reflect the cumulative deterioration in a single body (*Figure 3*). Photographs of bodies do not exhibit causal relation as easily, even when they are individually marked. Consequently, the trace of transmission must be mapped between multiple representations: across generations, borders, and mediums. As such, recent photojournalistic tributes to Agent Orange have begun to restore subjectivity to the bodies portrayed while tracing the genetic transmission of the herbicide through a lineage of photographs.

Though Ulrich Baer desires to read photographs through a Democritean lens, where time is considered as isolated flashes and bursts, in the case of photography of bodies affected by Agent Orange, this perspective obfuscates the cumulative nature of the herbicide’s effects. To read an image of a body affected by Agent Orange void of its temporal context misses the point that these bodies are still, in the present, being affected by this chemical. Thus, what would it be to consider a Heraclitean “river” of photographs that, like

Eadweard Muybridge’s action photos, represent the effects of this herbicide as causally linked over time?

Diana Taylor traces the performative lineage of political action through photography’s doubles in Julio Pantoja’s photographs of the Argentinian H.I.J.O.S., the children of the disappeared. Taylor suggests that the children of the disappeared hold the photographs of their parents to insist on their presence within the political discourse, despite their physical disappearance. In one photograph, *Los Hijos, Tucumán veinte años después*, the daughter of a disappeared man holds a portrait of her father in front of her face, partially obscuring herself in exchange for foregrounding her disappeared father’s portrait (*Figure 4*). Taylor writes, “These portraits illuminate the political hauntology I sensed at the *escrache*... The faces in both sets of photographs (Pantoja’s and the ones the children are holding) demand a double-take... The portraits, however, indicate that the children, both genetically and visibly, resist the tugs of surrogation.”¹⁵ Thus, Taylor articulates how the photographs engage the viewer by visually marking the generations affected by Argentina’s Dirty War. Through the doubling of the frame, the photograph presences both the daughter of the disappeared man and the man himself. Moreover, the double frame links the two bodies without collapsing their separate identities. The photograph indexes the social and political genealogy that extends outside of the captured frame.

A similar photograph, captured by Lisa DeJong, cites this photographic lineage by featuring Heather Bowser holding a photograph of her father who was an American soldier assigned to spray Agent Orange over Vietnam during the war (*Figure 5*). Bowser holds the black and white photograph in her hand that is missing several fingers. Her birth defects have now been linked to her father’s exposure to the chemical. While her father, the referent of the internal photograph is portrayed as whole even though he is not present, Bowser is only partially visible in the photograph. The black background of the photograph denies a temporal or spatial localization, rather the abyss extends infinitely. The frame performs this endless extension of the condition into the unforeseeable future. Where is the solution? The color of Bowser’s flesh stands in stark contrast to the

¹³ Butler, *Frames of War*, 77.

¹⁴ Schweik, Lecture.

¹⁵ Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural*

Memory in the Americas, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 183.

black and white photograph and the black background; the color of her hand asserts her presence in the “now.” Bowser’s hand draws the viewer into the photograph. One imagines that if Bowser’s missing fingers were present they would be pointing towards the viewer, implicating her in the frame. The presence of Bowser’s hand holding the photograph, in its partiality, indexes the continued lack of aid and support. This photograph, like Pantoja’s, engages the viewer to question what, or who, are missing.

However, unlike the *escrachas* performed in Argentina with the aim of politically exposing the perpetrators of their disappearing crimes, there is not a clear perpetrator to blame for the effects of Agent Orange. While the American government ordered the dispersal of the herbicide, the American soldiers who sprayed the chemical are now also suffering the effects of being exposed. Lawsuits have been filed against Dow Chemical and Monsanto, two companies responsible for the manufacturing of Agent Orange, and a remediation plant has recently been constructed in Danang, Vietnam, near one of the areas most affected by the herbicide. Yet, the chemical remains in the groundwater and the bloodlines of communities. The continued exposure of people to Agent Orange today is an environmental and humanitarian concern that can be addressed. Therefore, a photographic lineage that traces the transgenerational effects of the herbicide can reengage viewers with the fact that the herbicide continues to exist in the environment in Vietnam, and that new bodies continue to be exposed. What could a third, fourth, or fifth generation multiplying of the frame perform? Would the bodies continue to disappear or reappear as time progressed?

Future Exposures: Regaining Subjectivity

While some photographs capture bodies affected by Agent Orange, fixing them as victims, other collections of photographs expose the transitive effects of the herbicide. Still, what types of representations could be exposed to the public that would point towards a curative future? Baer argues that photographs possess an ontological futurity that allows for the potential of redemption, “[Photographs] open up a future that is not known and, because it is unknown, might yet be changed.”¹⁶ Indeed, contemporary tools of photography,

including digital manipulation, have opened up doors for images of the past to be altered. This alteration of the image, and potentially the future of exposures of Agent Orange in the environment and on bodies, first requires an in-depth engagement with the photographs of the past and the people depicted within them. The viewer must be implicated in the frame and the frame must point towards a future outside of itself.

However, I would also propose an engagement with bodies affected by Agent Orange in live performance as the physical presence of people affected reestablishes their subjectivity. Bodies seen as people, with names, identities, and active lives that include living with the effects and affects of the herbicide in the present can expose audiences to a different understanding of the proliferated effects of the herbicide in the present. How would a somatic relational engagement, beyond the flat protective surface of a photograph, require an observer to experience an empathetic affective response as opposed to one of shock and aversion? Perhaps then, the problem that is seen as fixed in a past moment can be viewed as fixable in the future.

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AN EVALUATION OF RACE CONCORDANT DOCTOR-PATIENT RELATIONSHIP AS A METHOD OF ELIMINATING CULTURAL BARRIERS IN THE VIETNAMESE AMERICAN PATIENT POPULATION

Phuong Ivy Le

As the medical field diversifies with more professionals of different racial and ethnic backgrounds, patients now have more choices when choosing healthcare providers. When available, patients tend to select physicians of their same race (LaVeist and Jeter 2002). In fact, when patients have the opportunity to select a health care professional, they are more likely to choose people of their own racial or ethnic background and are generally more satisfied with the care they receive (American Association of Medical Colleges).

Behind this preference lies the presumption that a race-concordant doctor, that is, a doctor with similar racial background, would understand the patient's needs and concerns more accurately since there are no language or cultural barriers. One may speculate the same trend in the Asian American population, or more specifically, the Vietnamese American population (Gordon et al.). This paper seeks to access the factors contributing to a patient's positive experience of a race-concordant relationship with his or her physician in the older Vietnamese population. While language barrier may appear to be the greatest determinant, other cultural factors, such as differences in social values and beliefs, were shown to also play a substantial role in the quality of an older Vietnamese patient's visit to a race-concordant doctor visit.

The Importance of the Patient-Doctor Relationship in the Healing Process:

Patient-physician relationships have been shown to constitute an important factor in encouraging people to take a more active role in their health care (DeBenedette 2011). With the increase in the patient-doctor race discordant visits, or relationships involving patients and doctors of different races, more investigations are be-

ing carried out to study the effect of such a relationship. In general, patients of minority backgrounds are less likely than whites to rate relationships with their physicians positive, as characterized by effective communication, partnership, and trust (Doescher et al. 2012). These patients, however, reported better relationships when seeing physicians of their own race or ethnicity. For example, African-American patients who visit physicians of the same race rate their medical visits as more satisfying and participatory than do those who see physicians of other races (Cooper et al. 2003).

In more recent studies, even though race-concordant visits appeared to be longer and characterized by more patient positive effect, no conclusion was reached regarding the association between higher patient ratings of care in race concordant visits and patient-centered communication (Cooper et al. 2003). Such findings suggest that a Vietnamese patient seen by a Vietnamese doctor does not necessarily receive higher quality of care. Besides the fact that the physician is race-concordant with the patient, other factors, such as differences in patient and physician attitudes, may mediate the relationship as well.

The Vietnamese Patient Population:

In order to understand the Vietnamese American population, their immigration profile needs to be examined. Vietnamese Americans are one of the fastest-growing minority groups in the United States, with a projected population of 3.9 million by 2030 (Ong 1994, Bouvier 1985). The Vietnamese population immigrated to America in three major waves (Pham). The first wave occurred when military officers and their families came at the end of the Vietnam War in 1975. Vietnam was soon seized by the Communist government, initiating the second wave of immigrants. To escape the Communist oppression, many Vietnamese traveled by boat to arrive in America in the early 1980's; hence the term "boat people." This second wave of immigrants also includes prisoners released from the Communist "re-education" camps in the 1990's. Finally, the third wave refers to the recent and on-going population of Vietnamese immigrants coming to America under family sponsorships. These major immigrating waves, according to Jenny Dang, explain the high concentration of elders within the Vietnamese population in America,

as this older generation is also experiencing an extended life longevity (2012).

As explained, the Vietnamese population is subdivided mainly by generations. Every Vietnamese patient, therefore, significantly differs from others in terms of their experience in America and the level of their cultural assimilation. When the 2003 California Health Interview Survey was conducted on the older Vietnamese population in America, ninety nine percent of the Vietnamese respondents were born outside of the United States, seventy four percent had lived in the United States for at least 10 years, and eighty percent reported having limited English speaking proficiency (Sorkin 2008). Such high percentages implies that even though the older population may have resided in America for a long period of time, they are not very assimilated to the American culture, but rather still retain many of their traditional beliefs. Cultural assimilation is defined precisely as the degree in which immigrants adopt the language, customs, and other cultural patterns on host country (Min and Kim 1999).

Generally, Vietnamese people tend to be excessively polite and delicate. Frank honesty and the act of speaking up are therefore often considered disrespectful and inappropriate (Gordon et al.). This tendency to keep their feelings to themselves may hinder an effective doctor-patient relationship, as a Vietnamese patient may refrain from an honest discussion with the doctor regarding their illness. Furthermore, Vietnamese culture values collectivism over individualism (Pham). Individuals within a community, therefore, often are extremely considerate about their own actions to ensure that they are not imposing a burden to the collective group. This is then the reason why, according to Pham, news of a serious illness is often kept a secret among family members. It also further discourages an elder patient who is not fluent in English to seek family members for help translating or navigating the American healthcare system (Pham).

Though well informed of Western medicine, the older Vietnamese population generally still prefers to adhere to their traditional health model instead. For instance, while life-saving antibiotics and some disease causations, namely the germ theory, are popular within the realm of healthcare, Vietnamese are still foreign to the idea of preventative, long term treatment (Gordon et al.). The reason for this is because Vietnamese seeking medical care often aim to relieve

symptoms since many believe medicine should be able to cure an illness right away. Patients, therefore, are likely to either discontinue medicines after symptoms diminish, or seek other alternatives if symptoms seem to persist. Worse yet, Vietnamese patients may even assume an absence of illness if there are no observable symptoms. Physicians when giving care to the Vietnamese population must consider these general cultural traditions.

Vietnamese Healthcare Professionals – The Younger Generation:

With such a contrast between Western medicine and the traditional Vietnamese health model, the most effective solution sought to eliminate the cultural barrier in healthcare for the Vietnamese population has been to increase the number of Vietnamese doctors (Dang 2011). In fact, the high demand of a doctor race-concordant relationship in Vietnamese patients has partly driven the increase in the number of Vietnamese physicians (Dang 2011). This sharp increase is particularly evident in the number of Asian American medical school applicants growing from 986 in 1974 to 7,622 in 1999, with Vietnamese being one of the major categories (American Association of Medical Colleges 2012). More specifically, there are currently more than 4,000 Vietnamese American physicians practicing in the country (Vietnamese American Medical Association 2012). The increase in the number of practicing Vietnamese doctors naturally enables more race-concordant visits of the Vietnamese patient population, and hence is often perceived as progress toward closing the cultural barrier between a patient and a doctor (Cooper et al.). Such effort, however, will only be effective under the assumption that a Vietnamese doctor shares similar cultural beliefs as their Vietnamese patients. In reality, this is often not true, and the key in accessing the validity in such an assumption lies in the distinction of two different terms - race and ethnicity.

The term Vietnamese American carries both racial and ethnic implications, and the main distinguishing characteristic of the younger Vietnamese Americans to the elder generation is often the basis of the younger generation's ethnicity (Min and Kim 1999). Even though ethnicity is often used interchangeably with race, the two are entirely different, yet closely related concepts. Race is somewhat biological, differentiating people according to their appearance and geographical

origin (Ford and Harawa 2010). Ethnicity, on the other hand, "encompasses the aspects of social life and personal identity that people within some collective group chooses to share (Ford and Harawa 2010). Doctor Lisa Lowe, a professor of Comparative Literature at the University of California, San Diego, in fact emphasizes the need to recognize the heterogeneity within the Asian American community (2004). Asian American, or any single racial label, constitutes "a social and political construct, which only serves as one modifier for the many individuals classified" under the label (Lott 1997). Operating on similar reasoning, one can conclude that although Vietnamese American as a racial label, like other racial categories, may provoke certain cultural presumptions, the term does not serve to specify an individual background or beliefs. There is no single definition to be "Vietnamese," and there certainly is no single experience entirely shared by all Vietnamese Americans. (Lee and Zhou 2004, and Lowe 2004).

Not having participated in the earlier immigrating waves with the older generation, the younger Vietnamese generation, one that constitutes the majority of current Vietnamese practitioners, will not share the same sense of ethnicity as the older generation. In fact, Asian American youth, which includes Vietnamese Americans, have been shown to base their personal identity not from their racial identity as being Asian, but rather, on a social identity formed in relation to the process of adjusting to the American society where they are trained as medical professionals (Lee and Zhou 1999). Social identity entails "an awareness of one's membership in a social group that has a common culture," but that culture is not determined by an individual's race (Ahearn et al. 2002). Therefore, individuals from the same racial backgrounds in America, such as Vietnamese American, may form a social identity on the basis of other social identifying factors. In the case of Vietnamese American medical school students, this social factor lies heavily in the environment in which they receive training.

The Effect of Medical School Training on Vietnamese Americans

Sense of Identity:

Medical schools seek driven leaders who can show compassion to others (American Association of Medical Colleges 2012).

Such traits obviously contrast with the values in which a Vietnamese American was raised, such as being a reserved individual. In fact, Medical Professor Soslan notes that the respect foreign-born Korean or Vietnamese students in medical schools have toward their faculties are “beyond reality” (cited in Le 2001). Professor Soslan further observes that the faculty’s casualness with the medical students “was unacceptable to them because they thought it was an effrontery to showing respect.” This observation suggests that while many Asian Americans still uphold their traditional values, those values may in turn hinder their subsequent advancement in the medical field (Le 2001). Professor Soslan did in fact confirm this notion in his speech at an Asian Pacific American Medical Student Association conference, discussing how behaviors pertaining to traditional Asian values and culture -- to respect elders, to talk only when spoken to, to be passive, and not question authority -- “may be perceived as uncaring or uninterested in health care.” Because of such traits, they sometimes are even labeled as followers, not leaders, despite other skills they may possess (Le 2001). Given the specific expectations demanded by the medical field, it is then fair to declare that medical students of a Vietnamese background must somewhat consolidate their traditional values at home with those taught at the university.

A study done with Vietnamese immigrants aged 50-70 years old identified three categories of themes concerning the patients’ experiences with cancer in a health care setting (Nguyen and Holmes 2007). The three themes include: attitudes about addressing screening with providers, problems communicating with physicians about cancer, and language/translation difficulties. The results yield substantial overlap between patients who mentioned each theme category, along with the 40 percent who mentioned all three. In addition to suggesting that the older Vietnamese generation, though having lived in America for a considerable amount of time, still have yet to assimilate to the American ways of life, the result also shows that the language barrier is only a part of the story. While the last category seems mostly racial, as it can be solved by having a Vietnamese-fluent doctor, the first two seem more cultural, characterized by different attitudes and personal beliefs of both the patient and the doctor. As shown earlier, having a Vietnamese doctor does not guarantee that the cultural barrier will diminish, since while the doctor and

the patient maybe Vietnamese, their cultural identity, or ethnicity, is likely to differ.

Conclusion:

Though having resided in America for a long period of time, the majority of the Vietnamese older population still closely adheres to their traditional healthcare model, one that contrasts with the modern Western medicine. This cultural barrier must be minimized to ensure an effective quality of care for medical seeking patients in America. Efforts are being made to accomplish this goal, but mainly in the form of increasing the pool of Vietnamese doctors. After an analysis of the generational differences in the older Vietnamese patients and the younger practicing doctors, it is evident that even when language barriers are removed, as when Vietnamese patients are seen by Vietnamese doctors who are fluent in the native language, there still exists a great amount of cultural barriers between the two. These findings imply that to enhance the quality of health care for the Vietnamese populations, improving cultural competence among physicians may prove to be more effective than simply seeking a race-concordant patient-doctor relationship.

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"Da Pidgin Guerrilla" **Lee A. Tonouchi** stay da writer of da book of Pidgin short stories *Da Word*, author of da Pidgin essay collection *Living Pidgin*, compiler of *Da Kine Dictionary*, and editor of *Buss Laugh: Stand Up Poetry from Hawai'i*. His latest book *Significant Moments in da Life of Oriental Faddah and Son: One Hawai'i Okinawan Journal* won one Association for Asian American Studies

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Njsaubnusi Cassandra Vue is a sporadic writer who mostly enjoys crafting creative short stories and poems. She is inspired by her experiences as a Hmong American female because she wishes to explore and understand the intersection of culture on a variety of levels. She hopes to maintain her passion for writing throughout the rest of her life.

