

VOLUME VIII

SPRING 2019



STANFORD JOURNAL OF  
ASIAN AMERICAN  
STUDIES



Stanford  
Journal of Asian  
American Studies

2019

**Cover Art by Yeji Jung**  
**Design by Huanvy Phan**

**Wax & Wane, 16” x 20”, 4-color woodblock print on hanji, 2017**

This print is based on lunar calendars and draws heavily on my Korean heritage, quoting imagery from Chuseok, the fall harvest moon festival, and bringing in the materiality of hanji, traditional Korean paper made from mulberry trees. Through the research process for this print, I reaffirmed my right as a diasporic Korean to (re)claim my culture, even if doing so involves looking up histories I have not had access to. For example, the central half-moon is based on a Korean story that the half moon is luckier than the full moon, since it has room to grow whereas the latter can only shrink. The print's golden rice harvest, ripe fruit and plump songpyeon (rice cakes) tell of abundance and celebration. However, the yellowed, fallen ginkgo leaves and the rest of the lunar cycle allow space for the fact that we are not always full, and waning is a natural and necessary phase of the cycles of our lives and the seasons of our souls. (Yeji Jung)

**Acknowledgement**

The Stanford Journal of Asian American Studies would like to thank Adrian and Monica Arima, whose generous gift to Asian American Studies at Stanford made the publication of this volume possible.

# Stanford Journal of Asian American Studies 2019

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# A LETTER FROM THE SJAAS EDITORIAL TEAM

Dear Community,

Since 2008, the Stanford Journal of Asian American Studies has sought to destabilize and diversify familiar notions of “academic” work and an “academic” journal. Because the institution of academia was created by and for white men, there still exist today many gatekeeping mechanisms which ignore and attempt to delegitimize people of color, their bodies, and their histories. Since its inception, this journal has sought to combat this exclusion by figuring Asian American Studies as a legitimate, diverse, and people-oriented subject. Because of this mission, SJAAS has not limited its submissions to academic papers, but rather has accepted visual art, poetry, fiction, and creative non-fiction alongside more traditional research.

This particular journal began in Stanford’s 2016-2017 school year with a team of passionate Asian American students who collected and edited submissions from the community, but who were ultimately unable to complete the publication. As many of these students graduated, the submissions and the journal were left to collect dust. This year, however, two of the original editors decided to take up the task of completing the publication process for the 2016-2017 journal. As many of the editors were not even at Stanford when this project was started, this journal represents a multi-generational desire for an Asian American intervention in academia.

Ranging from an essay about the Japanese art of haiku to poems about migration, calligraphy, and anxiety, this issue of the SJAAS continues to delve deeply and personally into topics which expand and explode traditional notions of what it means to be “academic” and Asian American. It has been three years in the making, and we are so grateful to all the people who have helped to make it happen -- our contributors, the editing team who began this project in 2016, and all of the 2019 team whose hard work you will find on every page. We hope you enjoy!

In movement,

Stanford Journal of Asian American Studies

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ACADEMIC  
ESSAY

# YANSHUO ZHANG

## Between Representation and Repression: The Photography of San Francisco's Old Chinatown and the Visual Politics of Representing the Racial "Other"

### *Sketching Chinatown and Its History*

In the final decades of the 1800s, American photographers converged on San Francisco's Chinatown. Allured by this last bastion of the "Orient" in the City by the Bay, they roamed through streets into homes and shops, lugging along heavy equipment and even heavier views about the people whom they would photograph. Chinatown, the Old Chinatown<sup>1</sup> not yet razed by the catastrophic earthquake of 1906, sat the crossroads of Western fantasies about the Chinese in America and half-baked theories about race. Photography brought the knotty interplay between them into sharp focus.

In the context of transnational cultural and economic exchange, San Francisco, a growing metropolis on the West Coast, became home to the first wave of Chinese immigrants who landed in the U.S. in the mid-nineteenth-century. At first, Chinese immigrants clustered in the Sierra Nevada Mountains for gold mining, and the port city only served as a "transition point" for them. Later, however, driven by the racial hatred and massive social and legal discriminations against them, Chinese immigrants—mainly laborers who came to the U.S. without bringing their wives or being married—made a home in the "Old Golden Mountain" (Chinese nickname for San Francisco), a city that saw the first "Chinatown" in America taking shape as early as the 1860s.<sup>2</sup>

San Francisco's Chinatown, encompassing the streets of Broadway, California and Kearny, became home to the first Chinese immigrants who arrived in California mainly from China's coastal province Guangdong (Canton). Those immigrants bound together culturally, economically, and socially in this racialized ghetto.<sup>3</sup> Intrigued by this culturally distinct community and its curious social norms, many Californian elites, including the photographers who would later document Chinatown with their camera lens, understood Chinatown to be a "colony:" "an imaginary space of social and cultural relations between the colonizing and colonized people of the empire [of America]."<sup>4</sup>

In the nineteenth-century, an era of Western colonial expansion, artistic representations and visual techniques usually served the imperial goals of Western powers to order the world and represent—eventually control—the subjects of their colonial rule. Edward Said concluded that "The Western artistic and scholarly portrayal of the non-West... is not merely an ideological distortion to the emergent global political order, but a densely imbricated arrangement of

imagery and expertise that organizes and produces political reality.”<sup>5</sup> Indeed, artistic imaginary oftentimes not simply reflects the world, but participates in the making of the world and shaping human consciousness about the world, especially when Western colonial power and technological advancement dictated the representations of the racial and cultural “others.”

In this article, I will probe how Chinatown and Chinese immigrants in the U.S. were represented by the artistic gazes of nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century American photography and mass media. Simultaneously fantasied as an exotic and mysterious people and condemned for inspiring moral corruptions, the Chinese occupied a special place in America’s national and racial imagination, embodying the nation’s anxiety of coming to terms with a culturally distinctive racial minority.

Hailing from a country with cultural customs and beliefs distinct from Western ones, the Chinese invited both hatred and fascination for the Euro-centric American mainstream society. Starting in the mid-1800s, the Chinese began to land on the West Coast, particularly the state of California, to become manual laborers, small shop owners, and transcontinental railroad workers. But they also engaged in illegal and “corrupted” activities—opium smoking, prostitution, and slave-girl trading—which made them the target of the nation’s rampant racial bias. Many argued that the Chinese, being the former subjects of a moribund empire, exhibited inferior cultural traits incompatible with the democratic, progressive spirit of America.<sup>6</sup> To make matters worse, the large number of Chinese and other Asian coolies—indented servants who worked on plantations—triggered another wave of debate about slavery when the emancipation of black slaves was still fresh in America’s memory.

The “guilt” of the Chinese, according to public media, includes their disdain for American law and general social orders, as well as their ignorance of the meaning of democracy. As a result, most Chinese immigrants were denied the right to obtain American citizenship and male laborers were barred from entering the country according to the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act.

In much of the political and journalistic literature of nineteenth-century America, the Chinese were depicted as “a peculiar and separate people” who would not “amalgamate with persons of European descent.”<sup>7</sup> Public discourse regarded the Chinese as a peculiarly mysterious and dangerous racial other. Moreover, many feared that “the mighty tide of ignorance and pollution that Asia was pouring with accumulating force and volume into the bosom of our country” would tear apart the national identity of the U.S.<sup>8</sup> These public discourses, which portrayed the Chinese as a morally demonic and culturally backward mob, came to dominate the minds of the most educated white elites. News media became a major vehicle through which Euro-centric social elites debated about and visually represented the “vices” and “virtues” of Chinese immigrants.

## *Representing the Chinese in News Media*

The Chinese started to enter into mainstream American artistic imagination in the forms of newspaper and magazine illustrations. In an August 1891 issue of America's first illustrated newspaper, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, we can see the cover of the newspaper being a wood engraving reproduction of a picture attributed to Miss G.A. Davis.

This wood engraving is titled "A Street in Chinatown, San Francisco" (Figure 1). This picture is highly suggestive of the historical relationship between the Chinese and white Americans in the United States. In the picture, two well-dressed upper-class Euro-American women pass by Chinatown and occupy the center of the scene. They are followed by a white American man and surrounded by Chinese peddlers and passers-by, who cast curious looks at the two ladies. To their left side is a Chinese father with his daughter, a four- or five-year-old Chinese girl. The little Chinese girl quietly lowers her head and stands submissively in front of the two Euro-American ladies, enduring the piercing gaze of the two ladies. While the two white women scrutinize the Chinese girl, the girl cannot return the gaze. Meanwhile, the father stands somewhat nervously aside. The little girl being looked at represents the Chinese immigrants whose existence in America in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was being constantly inspected and judged by white Americans. The gaze of the two Euro-American ladies is inquisitive and patronizing, as if they were examining an object on display or looking at their inferiors.

Another wood engraving titled "Scene in a Chinese Opium Palace, San Francisco" was produced by Paul Frenzeny and published in *Harper's Weekly* in 1873 (Figure 2). *Harper's Weekly: Journal of Civilization*, as a political journal, routinely featured pictures of the Chinese and Chinatown in the late 1800s. This wood engraving picture exhibits some of the same objectifying, scrutinizing tendency toward the Chinese that we see in "A Street in Chinatown." In this picture, two Chinese men languish in an ornately decorated opium den; a servant is offering tea to them, and another Chinese man—possibly the owner of the den—looks into the opium addicts through the hollowed wooden window.

What would be the purpose of *Harper's Weekly*, whose readers were mainly educated American elites, to publish a picture like this? There are two plausible reasons. First, the magazine intended to expose the moral decay of opium smoking as a malaise imported by the Chinese; second, the magazine probably wished to satisfy many Euro-Americans' fascination with the Chinatown as the dwelling of a relentlessly foreign group of people—after all, it is "they," not "we," who were the opium smokers. Newspapers and magazines like *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* and *Harper's Weekly* helped popularize the images of the Chinese in nineteenth century U.S. The Chinese were portrayed as a



Figure 1: A Street in Chinatown, San Francisco, From a Picture by Miss G.A. Davis, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 1891  
Courtesy of the Department of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries

morally suspicious people who posed not only peculiar dangers, but also strange lures to America. To many Euro-Americans, this group of people would be ineligible to become Americans because of their entrenched cultural difference and corruptive practices, such as the opium addiction and ornate opium den depicted in this image (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Scene in a Chinese Opium Palace, San Francisco.

Drawn by Paul Frezeny in *Harper's Weekly* 1880.

Courtesy of the Department of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries

### ***Arnold Genthe: Distilling the Human Faces of the Chinese***

If news illustrations represented some of the collective imaginaries of American intellectuals about the Chinese, photography embodied the debates about race in a distinctively personal way. California—one of America's newest frontiers in the nineteenth century—became a favorite subject for American photographers and pioneers eager to explore the natural wonders and cultural diversity of a rich land.

Among the numerous American and European photographers who set out to capture Chinatown, Arnold Genthe (1869-1942) preserved the images of the Old Chinatown before the 1906 San Francisco earthquake that destroyed much of its historical look and old traditions. Genthe's photography simultaneously gave human faces to the otherwise dehumanized Chinese immigrants *and* crystalized timeless images of the Chinese.

Genthe, a German-born photographer who immigrated to the U.S. at the age of twenty-six in 1895, was a lifetime lover of "oriental art and European painting" before he eventually taught himself photography and gained fame as a photographer in San Francisco.<sup>9</sup> In 1908, Arnold Genthe published *Old Chinatown: A Book of Pictures* with accompanying short essays penned by his journalist friend Will Irwin (1873-1948). This book is packed with both Genthe's photographic masterpieces and Irwin's poignant cultural essays that betray white American elites' deep ambivalence toward a racial other, despite the two authors'

sympathetic portrayals of Chinese immigrants and their social customs.

As an artist, Genthe advocated for spontaneity and authenticity in his photographic practice.<sup>10</sup> Distaining the pretense of the popular studio portrait format in which bourgeois Chinese were instructed to perform a perfect pose in front of their white photographers, Genthe roamed the streets of Chinatown, hiding his camera from sight, and only opened his lens when his Chinese subjects appeared most natural.<sup>11</sup> At a time when severe racial debates stirred the nation and burning biases against the Chinese became the norm, Genthe and Irwin's sympathetic and nostalgic look at San Francisco's Old Chinatown helped restore the humanity of an alienated group in America, even though their representations were not without their own problems.

Genthe wanted to represent the Chinese in a humanized light—he criticized the objectifying tendency of many Chinatown photographers of his time and combatted the mystifying effect of studio portraits favored by bourgeois and aristocratic Chinese. Among Genthe's contemporaries, Carleton Watkins (1829-1916) was known for his scientific survey photography of California's magnificent landscape and his equally "scientific" documentation of the architectural features and decorative façade of San Francisco's Chinatown. (Figures 3 and 4) Similarly, Isaiah West Taber (1830-1912), another great Chinatown photographer in nineteenth-century California, maintained a careful distance between his camera eye and his Chinese subjects, tending instead to the ethnographic details and visual exotics of San Francisco's Chinatown, such as the depiction of a well-decorated Chinese apothecary (Figure 5). Both Watkins and Taber seemed to maintain a calculated distance from their Chinese subjects in



Figure 3 (above): Carleton Watkins, Chinese Restaurant, Jackson Street, San Francisco. n.d. Courtesy of Bill Lee and [www.carletonwatkins.org](http://www.carletonwatkins.org)



Figure 4: Carleton Watkins, Interior Chinese Restaurant, n.d. Courtesy of the Society of California Pioneers and [www.carletonwatkins.org](http://www.carletonwatkins.org)



Figure 5: Isaiah West Taber: Picturesque San Francisco—Scene in Chinatown, A Chinese Apothecary, 1897. Courtesy of the Department of Special Collections Stanford University Libraries

their photography, as their photographic depictions of Chinatown emphasized the physical, architectural, and even cultural exoticism of this peculiar “colony” at the cost of minimizing the actual people in Chinatown. These images contributed to turning Chinatown into an exotic quarter and a tourist’s favorite—visitors had a “seemingly insatiable curiosity about the place and its people,” eagerly buying Chinatown photographs as souvenirs.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, the Chinese and their nuanced emotional states failed to be the main subjects of these photographic practices.

It was precisely the artistically and emotionally nuanced details of the Chinese immigrants and their daily lives that became the core of Arnold Genthe’s photographic enterprise. Departing from the monumentalizing, objectifying approaches taken by his contemporaries or predecessors, Genthe made the Chinese themselves the center of his artistic practice. Genthe’s camera captured the humanness of San Francisco’s Chinese immigrants. He was bold in using close-ups and other photographic techniques to reduce the distance between his camera eye and the Chinese, creating a sense of presence and intimacy. In so doing, Genthe broke the visual and cultural spell of San Francisco’s Old Chinatown, which was either criticized as a peculiar racial ghetto in mainstream media or consumed as merely an aesthetic topography in Watkins’ and Taber’s photography.

Genthe was interested in Chinatown as a place of life: he tirelessly observed the daily labor, leisurely activities and festive events of Chinatown residents, projecting spontaneous photographic gazes when his subjects were absorbed in their activities and least aware of his existence.

One of Genthe’s masterpieces that conveyed his humanizing spirit was “The Chinese Cook, Grinning from the Doorway” (Figure 6). In this photograph, a male Chinese cook is taking a break from his busy work and smiles to the camera, appearing happy to be photographed. This daring close-up image of an ordinary Chinese worker was perhaps the earliest and clearest Chinese face one could see in turn-of-the-century American public media. The simple background and accentuation of the human expression—a heartfelt grin—together with the frontal image of the cook, endow this photograph with the painterly quality of a human portrait.

Genthe repeats this motif of portrait-making in some of his other photographs, such as “A Merchant” (Figure 7). In this photograph, a male Chinese merchant walks to the camera and looks into the camera eye. It appears that he is on his way to somewhere. The background is a corner of the somewhat shabby Chinatown street and its buildings. How did Genthe know this was a merchant? The only plausible answer seems to be that the photographer had some interactions with the person he was photographing. Indeed, almost all of Genthe’s photographs specify the occupations of his subjects: the pipe-bowl mender; the merchant; a family from the consulate. It is evident that Genthe, as



Figure 6: Arnold Genthe, *The Chinese Cook, Grinning from the Doorway*, ca. 1896-1906. From Arnold Genthe and Will Irvin: *Old Chinatown, A Book of Pictures by Arnold Genthe*

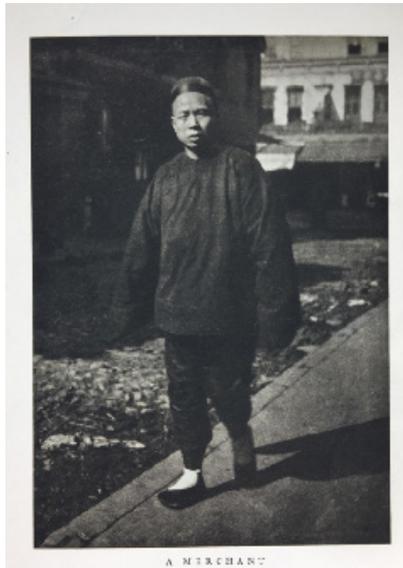


Figure 7: Arnold Genthe, *A Merchant*, ca. 1896-1906. From Arnold Genthe and Will Irvin: *Old Chinatown, A Book of Pictures by Arnold Genthe*



Figure 8: Arnold Genthe, Children of Chinatown. Courtesy of the Department of Special Collections Stanford University Libraries

a photographer, spent enough time with the Chinese and got to know them by occupation, and sometimes even by name. From the few photographs that we saw, we can conclude that Genthe's Chinatown photography restored the human aura of an otherwise demonized and unwelcome quarter of the city precisely because he treated the Chinese not as *objects* for scientific and aesthetic scrutiny, but as his fellow human beings, however alien their cultural and social customs seemed to be.

Another distinct thematic predilection for Genthe was the collective portrayal of the people in Chinatown. From his famous "The Street of the Gamblers" to "Children of High Class" and "Children of Chinatown" (Figure 8) to "A Holiday," Genthe captured moments of the daily life for Chinatown residents from different social classes and occupations. From family picnics to children walking on the streets, Genthe's collective portrayals of the Chinese dodged the ornate, the exotic, and the fantastical aspects of Chinatown, such as its opium dens and elaborate architectural details, which we saw earlier in this article. Genthe's focus on the people—mostly families—and their quotidian activities mark Chinatown as an ordinary living space in the city, making this place and its people more familiar and intimate to the American eye than they had ever been.

## *Slave Girls and Repressed Representation*

Yet beyond the portrayal of daily activities and quotidian life in Chinatown, there is a special group portrayed by Genthe that betrays the paradoxical nature of his artistic practice: the slave girls. Genthe's picture book has abundant representations of Chinese slave girls, who were openly traded and enslaved in San Francisco in the late 1800s and early 1900s. In an 1897 article, "Chinese Slavery in America," the frustrated scientist and intellectual Charles Frederick Holder claimed that "the Chinese in America [were] a constant menace to law, order and morality."<sup>13</sup> Holder presented that "in the heart of an American city, we find one of the best-organized slave marts in modern times, fostered as motley a band of criminals as could be produced in any portion of the *uncivilized world*."<sup>14</sup>

Holder's moral judgment of the barbarous nature of female enslavement in Chinese culture was typical of American elites' attitude toward Chinese customs at the time. Chinese girls and young women were routinely kidnapped or deceived into slavery and traded among wealthy Chinese households and brothels to become drudges or prostitutes in California. To the frustration of many American intellectuals, this kind of slavery could not be prevented by American law, as the Chinese formed strong networks among themselves and were good at plotting and tricking the slave girls into making false oath in court—Holder detailed this phenomenon in his essay. Yet what these intellectuals neglected to mention—intentionally or unintentionally—was that the Page Act of 1875, which aimed at preventing Chinese prostitutes from entering the U.S., also effectively prevented other Chinese women from coming to the U.S., creating a large population of single, family-less Chinese men.<sup>15</sup>

Genthe did not seem to be oblivious to the rampant slavery and the debates surrounding it when he included photographs such as "Rescued Slave Girls" and "Little Tea Rose" into his book (Figures 9 and 10). Yet Genthe's portrayals of the slave girls are problematic: the photographs do not directly reveal the misery or sufferings of enslaved girls; rather, they seem to conjure up an Orientalist charm of Chinese women, depicting them as demure and delicate.

In "Rescued Slave Girls," for example, five young girls dominate the photograph. They are dressed up in beautiful traditional Chinese apparel and engaged in a conversation with happy, content facial expressions. With no other social context added to this photograph, it would be hard for the viewer to decipher who the girls were. If it were not for the caption, one could take this photograph to be the portrayal of ordinary girls during a festival. Similarly, "Little Tea Rose" is a mystifying portrait of a Chinese girl with elaborate hair decorations. Half smiling, the girl lowers her eyes demurely. With no explanation of who Little Tea Rose was, the viewer could let his or her imagination reign free. Unlike many other photographs of Genthe, the Chinese girls he portrayed have a staged, posed flavor to them. Genthe's portraits of Chinese young women and slave girls thus emit a timeless, ahistorical feeling of



Figure 9 (above): Arnold Genthe, Rescued Slave Girls, ca. 1896-1906  
From Arnold Genthe and Will Irvin:  
*Old Chinatown, A Book of Pictures by Arnold Genthe*



Figure 10: Arnold Genthe, Little Tea Rose, ca. 1896-1906  
From Arnold Genthe and Will Irvin:  
*Old Chinatown, A Book of Pictures by Arnold Genthe*

the charming Oriental women.

Genthe's ambiguous portrayal of Chinese women—as opposed to his clearly defined photographs of other groups of Chinese people—make us wonder about the moral and cultural limits of his Chinatown photographic project. Even though Genthe held a much more sympathetic attitude toward the Chinese than his contemporaneous artists and thinkers, and he made painstaking efforts to restore the human aura of the Chinese, Genthe and his co-author of *Old Chinatown*, Will Irwin, could not exempt themselves from an essentialist tendency in their representations of California's Chinese immigrants.

In his essays that accompany Genthe's photographs in *Old Chinatown*, Irwin exhibited some of the most irreconcilable attitudes American intellectuals held toward a racial other who for centuries both awed and intimidated the West. Irwin was torn between self-contradictory sentiments toward the Chinese in his writing. At times, he regarded them as culturally superior and extremely sophisticated; at other times, he criticized them as a senseless mob. Irwin exclaimed: "In this development of civilization we are as children beside the Chinese."<sup>16</sup> Unlike many American intellectuals who condemned the Chinese for their moral corruptions and cultural strangeness, Irwin argued that Chinese immigrants' habitual contempt for American law was due to the superiority of Chinese civilization, and he spared no effort to emphasize that the Americans were "inferior and uncomprehending" in front of the cultural sophistication of the Chinese.<sup>17</sup>

Irwin's awe for the Chinese is, ironically, contradicted by his disdain and fear of this alien racial group at the same time. In his documentation of a dinner party held at Chinatown one night, as the journalist was watching the unfolding of a drinking game, Irwin made some observations that expressed his deep-seated racist anxiety. He imagined the "demonic" transformation of the Chinese at the excited game:

Their shouts became squalls; lips drew back from teeth, beady little eyes blazed... they were those *old yellow people* with whom our fathers fought before the Caucasus was set as a boundary between the dark race and the light; the hordes of Genghis Khan; the looters of Attila.<sup>18</sup>

In this passage, Irwin's change of attitude seems surprising. He invoked the Mongolian emperor Genghis Khan and the ruler of the Huns Attila to present the essentially hostile relationship between the Asian races and the Caucasian races. As the journalist was absorbed in an imagining of the historical past, he could not help but give in to the racist fear and even hatred toward the Asians. This telling passage overshadows his other somewhat sympathetic depictions of the Chinese, revealing a fundamentally ambivalent, if not rancorous, attitude many white elites like himself held toward the Chinese and other minority races at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In Irwin's writing,

the Chinese immigrants were simultaneously awed as a culturally sophisticated race and distorted as a ferocious, hostile race. The Chinese were depicted as the Oriental other who inspired both hatred and admiration from elite white Americans. This phenomenon testified to Edward Said's notion that Orientalism is "produced and exists in an uneven exchange with various kinds of power."<sup>19</sup> Because the Chinese as a racial minority and the white elite classes exchanged power unevenly, the Chinese occupied a place of extremities in American public and artistic discourses: they became Orientalized as an essential racial other, characterized by their imagined traits of both cultural sophistication and intimidation.

In line with the overall style of *Old Chinatown* as a nostalgic representation of Old Chinatown, the Foreword and Postscript of the book consist of two letters Irwin and Genthe exchanged. In these exchanges, Genthe and Irwin held fast to their memories of the Old Chinatown before the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, lamenting over the loss of the ambience of this old quarter to modernization. Irwin remarked:

We both sighed for the Chinatown which we knew, and which is not any more except in the shadowing of your [Genthe's] films... It is gone now—this Old Chinatown...Where is the dim reach of Ross Alley, that romantically mysterious cleft in the city's walls? [The Chinese] were an honest people—honest beyond our strictest ideas.<sup>20</sup>

In this passage, Irwin unequivocally invoked the "romantically mysterious" Chinatown and Chinese immigrants that he had imagined and remembered. Like his friend and co-author Genthe, Irwin's remembrance and imagination of the Chinese were simultaneously sympathetic and mystifying. Genthe went further to note that in a newly renovated theater in Chinatown, "[n]othing is Chinese there except part of the audience... The charm, the color, the atmosphere are gone. And that is true of the entire Quarter."<sup>21</sup> Genthe attributed the changes of the customs of Chinatown's residents to the Chinese Republican revolution of 1911 and concluded that the Chinese Republic "was to abolish in a short time, what we had hoped would remain Chinese."<sup>22</sup> Both Genthe's and Irwin's nostalgia for a truly "authentic" Chinatown before its permanent transformation into a tourist site in the early 1900s betrays these two intellectuals' longing for an imaginary purity and mystique of an otherwise alienated and discriminated racial minority in American society.

Indeed, San Francisco's Chinatown became much more integrated into the rest of the city after 1906, and the Chinese immigrants began to assimilate more effectively into American culture and society in the twentieth century. Irwin and Genthe, as two Euro-American intellectuals, expressed their desires of preserving an Old Chinatown that would remain culturally and economically distinct, fulfilling their utmost fantasy for a patch of ancient, Oriental China on

the “modern” land of America. Perhaps it was this imagination and nostalgia that gave rise to Genthe’s paradox: he made humanizing portrayals of the Chinese but also exhibited a somewhat dehistoricizing tendency to repress the dynamic experience of the Chinese, as he wished to preserve a Chinatown firmly embedded in the Orientalist fantasy of the West, a Chinatown that would serve as a unique colony in the culturally diverse metropolis of San Francisco. It seems that Genthe would rather crystalize the Chinese into timeless images residing in the “happy” paradise of Chinatown than revealing in full their historical struggles, particularly those of the slave girls. Irwin likewise both glorified and demonized the Chinese, mystifying the racial group as ultimately unknowable/incomprehensible. Incomprehensibility leads to further mystification and misunderstanding, which usually results in racial discrimination and bias.

Today, America is once again at the crossroads of tackling the issues of racial diversity and interethnic co-existence. Be it the Muslims or the Mexicans, minority groups continue to embody the national anxieties and cultural imagination of an increasingly multivalent American society. Studying the experience of Chinese immigrants and how they were represented in public and artistic discourses in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America would open up new window for students, scholars, and the general public to understand how the images of certain racial groups are constantly made and remade in the contemporary era. A process of demystification—the parsing and understanding of the historicized and changing experience of minority groups and their cultural traditions—would help us form not only powerful, but also comprehensive knowledge of race and racial representations. Representations are always only partial truth, but perhaps the way out of this trap is when the represented speak back with a forcefully historical voice and be understood in their own right.

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### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> “Old Chinatown” is an unofficial yet highly important term that appeared frequently in early 20-century writings to refer to San Francisco’s Chinese quarter from its inception in the mid-1800s until the 1906 earthquake and fire that radically redefined Chinatown and its economic function and cultural characters. As Arnold Genthe (1869-1942) points out, the 1911 Chinese revolution also brought about changes to the customs and cultural norms of the Chinese in San Francisco’s Chinatown (“Old Chinatown”), and the Chinese quarters were much more integrated into the rest of the city after 1906.

<sup>2</sup> The Story of Chinatown.” *Chinatown Source Guide*. PBS: Public Broadcasting Service. <http://www.pbs.org/kqed/chinatown/resourceguide/story.html>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Anthony W. Lee, *Picturing Chinatown: Art and Orientalism in San Francisco*, p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Timothy Mitchell, "Orientalism and Exhibitionary Order," p. 442

<sup>6</sup> Lee 39-40; Moon-ho Jung Jung, *Coolies and Cane: Race, Labor, and Sugar in the Age of Emancipation*, p. 142-145.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Jung 142.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Jung 142.

<sup>9</sup> Jerry E. Patterson, *Arnold Genthe (1869-1942): Photographs and Memorabilia from the Collection of James F. Carr. A Review of His Life and Work*, p.1-2.

<sup>10</sup> Lee, *Picturing Chinatown*, p. 103-104.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 103-105.

<sup>12</sup> Linda Bonnett and Wayne Bonnett, *Taber: A Photographic Legacy, 1870-1900*, p. 44.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Frederick Holder, "Chinese Slavery in America," p. 288.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 289. Emphasis mine.

<sup>15</sup> "Chinese American Women: A History of Resilience and Resistance." <https://www.nwhm.org/online-exhibits/chinese/6.html>

<sup>16</sup> Will Irvin, *Old Chinatown: A Picture Book by Arnold Genthe*, p. 130.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. p. 91.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. p. 112. Emphasis mine.

<sup>19</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism*, p. 12.

<sup>20</sup> Will Irwin in *Old Chinatown*, p. 4, 8, 9

<sup>21</sup> Arnold Genthe, *Old Chinatown*, p. 206 and 208

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. 208

# IAN MACATO

## Protesting for Pipelines: Creating Institutional Support for High School Minority Outreach

*My parents don't understand why I'm going to school. Similarly, I don't understand why they don't understand.* —Laotian College Student (Um 2003)

In 2003, Stanford University announced that the year's admit batch that came from underrepresented racial (non-white) backgrounds accounted for more than fifty percent of the class. Amongst the administration, there was pride in upholding the university's commitment to a diverse student body. However, a couple of undergraduate students in the Pilipino American Student Union (PASU) were perplexed. At their welcome event called Halo Halo Hello, there were only a handful of new freshman who attended. There was a disconnect.

While Pilipinx<sup>1</sup> are the largest Asian ethnic group in California, accounting for 3.8% of California's population, Pilipinx only made up about 1.1% of the Stanford undergraduate population in 2003. PASU, recognizing the need for more Southeast Asian students organized a campaign with ethnic voluntary student organizations (VSOs) to advocate for more underrepresented Asian American ethnic admits. As a result of this campaign, fifty Pilipinx Americans were admitted in next year's class and Southeast Asian American representation increased in the years following.

I belong here as a legacy of that campaign. As a first generation Pilipino American student, I felt a dissonance between the cultural identity I grew up with and the history of struggle Pilipino Americans had. Therefore, I joined PASU as a *Kababayan* (Political Affairs) Intern to empower not only myself, but also students of the broader Bay Area community on Pilipinx American issues.

One way I created empowerment spaces was helping to organize the Pilipinx Youth Leadership Conference (PYLC), a conference dedicated to inviting Pilipinx American high schoolers to a day of workshops, speakers and activities to help them strive for higher education and understand their identities. The dissonance I felt was apparent to many students on conference day, but by the end, they were able to start on a journey of self discovery about reconnecting with the histories and roots of their identities. The conference day seemed like a success when we received feedback that ranged from "learned a lot about myself today" to "really welcoming community." We were all riding on a high after PYLC as the culmination of all this energy we had invested into this event had been worth it. However, I kept thinking about how the attendees were going to

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<sup>1</sup> Pilipinx is used as an identifying term for those who are from or descended from the Philippines, and 'P' is used rather than Filipino because 'F' is not a letter in the native script prior to the Philippines' colonization. Moreover, the 'x' at the end is to ensure gender inclusivity when discussing individuals who may identify on the gender spectrum.

be affected in the long-term.

Therefore, I will use PYLC and other high school outreach conferences to explore effective practices when planning diversity outreach initiatives. Currently, there is research for recruitment in higher education that found that “the most effective methods of outreach [are] open houses and campus visit days for high school students” (Hanover Research 2014). However, no research looks at the interactions between internal university institutions—the Asian American VSOs, the Admissions Office and the A3C—that organize high school outreach. Therefore, my research aims to fill this gap through analyzing current outreach infrastructure and testimonies from current university students who felt impacted by outreach methods.

Overall, I aim to discover how Stanford can best partner with the internal institutions to build a successful diversity recruitment infrastructure. As a result, I conducted research through analyzing first, the history of the University’s outreach initiatives including the 2003-2004 Southeast Asian Admissions Campaign; second, the cultural determinants that Stanford VSOs should consider and third, the best models for a collaborative infrastructure to conduct sustainable high school outreach. In this paper, I will argue that when conducting high school outreach for populations that are underrepresented, Stanford should be more transparent in their outreach strategies, invest more capital into diversity initiatives that build a better educational pipeline and create a fundamental infrastructure that consists of a collaborative approach between the Asian American VSOs, the Stanford Admissions Office and the Asian American Activities Center (A3C).

## **THE 2003-2004 SOUTHEAST ASIAN ADMISSIONS CAMPAIGN**

In 2003, the Southeast Asian Admissions Campaign took hold when members of PASU, the Stanford Vietnamese Student Association (SVSA), the Stanford Asian American Activism Coalition (SAAAC) and the Asian American Students Association (AASA) noticed a lack of membership increases despite the fact that the percentage of Asian American students admitted to Stanford was increasing (Report 2013). As a result, these VSOs organized a campaign with three demands relating to the admissions pipeline for underrepresented Asian American ethnic groups. Lauren Hilario, a member of PASU in 2003, wrote a Stanford Daily op-ed titled “Foster Asian-American subgroups in admissions process” that articulates that disparities still exist between Asian-American ethnic subgroup populations in the United States and on campus. This fact highlights the need to create action around the “issue of under-representation based on race relations, background and privilege.” The article explains their three demands further.

The first is to increase the number of diverse admits Stanford accepts from underrepresented Asian American ethnic subgroups, particularly with

regards to “difference in not only culture, but in socioeconomic demographics.” The second is to solidify University policy “that gives special consideration to underrepresented Asian-American subgroups in the admissions process ... to aid ethnic groups disadvantaged because of their racial background.” While Asian Americans do hold privilege, there are subgroups of Asian Americans who are not acknowledged and are discriminated against from receiving necessary services (Klein 2016). Therefore, Asian American subgroups who require special consideration to attain equitable educational experiences should have affirming policies. The third demand details how “the Admissions Office [should] take concrete steps in providing institutional support and resources to serve” the groups such as Hmong, Thai, Laotian and Mien that do not have organizational capacity to facilitate their own outreach efforts (Hilario 2004).

To ensure these demands were acted upon by the Stanford administration and the Admissions Office, the Asian American groups joined forces with the Students of Color Coalition (SOCC), a coalition comprised of six umbrella ethnic organizations<sup>2</sup>, to conduct a rally in White Plaza. Due to the notoriety of the campaign, the organizers secured a meeting with the Dean of Admissions, Robin Mamlet. In addition, throughout the campaign, organizers built a relationship with Anna Takahashi, the A3C liaison in the Admissions Office, who worked with the demands. While the administration acknowledged diversity issues within the Asian American students admitted, they were still opposed and did not agree to providing special consideration status.

However, the groups did achieve success in the other two main demands. According to my interview conducted with Anna Takahashi, she articulated that the Admissions Office was able to utilize Census population data to strategize their outreach to schools that had large populations of underrepresented Asian American ethnic subgroups (“Anna Takahashi” 2016). In addition, the campaign resulted in increases for Pilipinx, Vietnamese and Hmong students and the effects were seen in VSO engagement. A benefit of this increased admissions pipeline is the sustainable VSO campus and community engagement conducted by new freshmen. According to Nicole Salis and Sheila Acosta Laqui, two core members of PASU during the 2003-2004 year, they claim that “Filipino freshmen make up approximately 2.5% of their class.”<sup>3</sup> This led to “eleven freshman interns” who are introduced to the organization, help coordinate programming and develop as community leaders. The campaign was a success in terms of facilitating sustained community involvement as the students who conducted this outreach work were able to develop new leaders who would continue to advocate for their community. Therefore, the university must do everything in its

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<sup>2</sup> SOCC consists of the Asian American Student Association (AASA), the Black Student Union (BSU), the Stanford American Indian Organization (SAIO), Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan (MEChA) de Stanford, the Muslim Student Awareness Network (MSAN) and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

<sup>3</sup> The methods of retrieving these statistics from their paper are not cited, therefore, a follow up item would be to determine the ways in which Salis and Laqui discovered this information.

power to create this positive cycle of student recruitment and engagement.

Overall, the campaign was able to enact substantial reforms to creating a better pipelines for underrepresented Asian American ethnic subgroups. While the campaign was able to collaborate closely with the Admissions Office, a collaborative approach between all three internal institutions of the VSOs, the Admissions Office and the A3C must be established. In addition, although the campaign was able to increase the number of Pilipinx, Vietnamese and Hmong admits, there is still a need to follow up on requests for institutionalizing special consideration and providing disaggregated data for these admits.

## NEED FOR TRANSPARENCY

Stanford as a selective institution that will benefit from enacting equitable practices, must readjust their strategies to close the gap between the number of Southeast Asian Americans students enrolled and those with potential. Although they admitted a respectable 24.5% Asian American students back in 2003, they are still complicit in creating this gap due to a lack of transparency. One major result of this lack of transparency is the perpetuation of the “model minority” myth, developed by sociologist William Petersen, that references “minority groups that have ostensibly achieved a high level of success in contemporary US society” (Petersen 1966). However, this myth is overgeneralized considering that the label of Asian American used by the US Census encompasses a variety of “more than forty” different ethnic identities. The myth that all Asian Americans are well educated is proven false when provided disaggregated data, as Hmong and Laotian individuals have low rates of bachelor degree attainment (see Fig. 1). Harmful effects that this myth generates include individuals “underserved in federal programs and routinely excluded from many non-governmental public and private sector assistance programs” (Lam 2016). One reason this is a problem is due to the lack of data disaggregation policies to assess the needs of specific Asian American/Pacific Islander (AAPI) ethnic groups, a specific demand the 2003-2004 campaign presented.

For example, as the campaign reveals, Stanford University does not release disaggregated data on the ethnic identities of students, faculty and staff. As a result, institutions within the university who need that data such as the A3C are unable to accurately understand specific ethnic needs within the AAPI community. The A3C “serves as Stanford’s primary resource for Asian and Asian American student affairs and community development” while also contributing “to the academic mission of the University through its partnerships and collaborative work with faculty, departments and academic programs” (A3C 2016). To fulfill their mission of a multicultural education, the A3C must be aware of the identities of the student population they serve because ethnic identity influences academic engagement (Chavous 2011). Therefore, an

## Educational Attainment by Asian-American Ethnic Groups

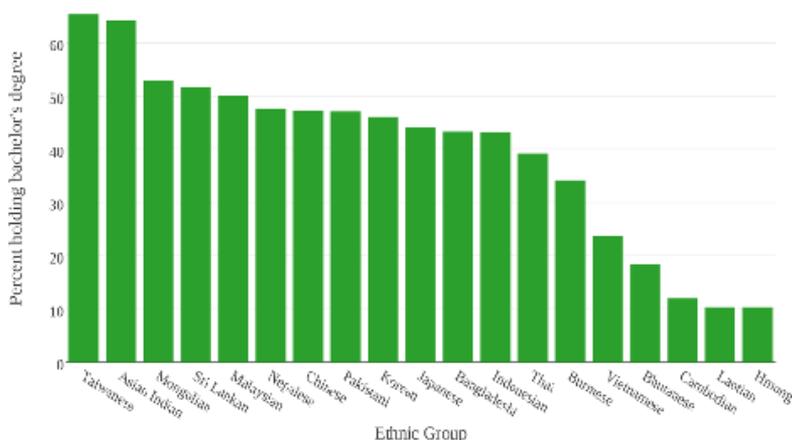


Fig. 1 A bar graph showing the educational attainment by Asian-American Ethnic Groups. (Toh 2015)

immediate action for the Stanford Admissions Office is to release disaggregated data of students' ethnic identities and make them available to the A3C and other community centers that would benefit. After interviewing Jerald Adamos, the associate director and assistant dean of the A3C, he noted that the Admissions Office argues privacy concerns for students as the reason for not providing this information ("Jerald Adamos" 2016). However, if the Admissions Office were to only release the percentages and number of each ethnic group within a race, without providing personal information for any student, then privacy concerns are not a legitimate argument.

In addition, the campaign aimed to understand how Stanford conducted admission protocols. Admission officers conduct high school outreach by visiting high schools and community organizations to encourage applicants from diverse communities, but must change their admission strategies to be more effective and specialized for different cultural groups. A recommendation is to provide assessments of these outreach efforts led by the Admissions Office to institutions that need it. Moreover, demographic information such as race, ethnicity and gender of Stanford applicants are not released. This is important because it provides insights into how Stanford is portraying itself to a wide variety of applicants. While over forty thousand individuals apply each year, it is unclear how many come from underrepresented Asian American ethnic backgrounds. It is likely that Stanford will not maintain the diverse reputation it has created if the data is disaggregated. The need for transparency across

Stanford University's admissions processes is acknowledged through the organizations conducting current high school outreach.

As the model minority myth continues today, it is imperative for Stanford's internal institutions to create transparency in their outreach efforts. Although providing more transparency may create a short-term negative response from diversity advocates, the practice will produce action by the Admissions Office to sustainably increase the number of underrepresented Asian American ethnic applicants and admits. As a result, the Asian American ethnic VSOs will be able to conduct more effective high school outreach with this new information.

## CURRENT HIGH SCHOOL OUTREACH TODAY

PASU, the organization previously mentioned, was founded in January 1990, when Julius Paras and Rand Quinn ran into each other in the bathroom of their dorm and realized the other was Pilipino. Since then, PASU has become "the sole guide and advocate for Pilipinx applicants on the Stanford campus" (Salis 2006). One way that PASU facilitates this, as I mentioned earlier, is through PYLC.

2016 PYLC's theme was "Magkaisa," the Tagalog word for "unite" emphasizes the goals for PYLC. The conference aimed to emphasize the shared Pilipinx heritage, culture and experience to empower the youth for change. The main goals of the 2016 PYLC was first, to create a communal place for family and self; second, to find and embrace Pilipinx and/or Pilipinx American identities and third, to educate the youth so that they may advocate for change in local and international issues.

The feedback for the particular event was positive, indicating a successful form of high school outreach. 96.3% of the student attendees would recommend this conference to others and are interested in attending PYLC 2017 next year. This feedback was provided in the form of an exit survey that occurred at the end of the conference, however, as I mentioned in the introduction, I continued to question the long-term impact of PASU's work with these youth.

Therefore, I interviewed Jerold Yu, a current Stanford sophomore and former attendee of PYLC. Throughout the interview, I wanted to understand the long-term impacts of PYLC and what particular details about PYLC led him to apply to Stanford. Prior to attending the conference, Jerold "never really thought about higher education...like everyone says it's tougher than high school, but aside from that, I never thought about it too much." However, he views attending PYLC as a formative moment in changing his perceptions about higher education. He articulated that meeting members of PASU and the events organized during PYLC made him feel at home and facilitated an opportunity for him to see himself at Stanford. Jerold "did not know much about Stanford before coming here" and that "after PYLC...Stanford was a place with a lot of community and seemed like a lot of fun." This theme of community is critical in Jerold's idea that he can belong at Stanford. He notes that in terms of academic

goals, he was not invested into Stanford because of its academic opportunities, but was interested in a place where he “could be himself” (“Jerold Yu” 2016). That is a fundamental narrative that is not emphasized throughout outreach conducted by university admission officers, thereby demonstrating a continued need for transparency and collaboration with the Admissions Office.

Another VSO conducting high school outreach that emphasizes identity as a modality for belonging, the Stanford Hmong Student Union (HSU) was “founded in October 2007 by undergraduates interested in building a supportive community for Hmong students.” They aim to “promote awareness of Hmong ethnic identity” and educate “the greater campus and community about Hmong culture, history, issues and contemporaneous experiences in the United States” (Stanford HSU 2016). Within the underrepresented Asian American ethnic organizations, there are distinct cultural differences that must be recognized to conduct effective outreach as there are different admission strategies for different groups. As such, the Hmong people are described as a group who value education and hard work, yet because of their refugee histories, many have not had access to formal education. Therefore, college readiness in the Hmong American experience must integrate the Hmong American cultural background to facilitate educational success for a community underrepresented in the American education institution, a result of the model minority myth. Several “recommendations to close the college-going achievement gap” include “creat[ing] financial aid informational sessions . . . , a strategic campaign for the general community and the Hmong community that has a clear message about the benefits of college” and “a support program for Hmong students” (DePouw 2003).

The Stanford HSU aims to fulfill these recommendations through the Stanford Hmong Outreach Program Promoting Education (SHOPPE) which “is an academically enriching program that provides high school students the opportunity to experience and preview college life” (Stanford HSU 2016). SHOPPE provides highlights of the Stanford college experience through attending university lectures, a campus tour, a workshop with a Stanford admissions officer and dinner with Stanford alumni. A successful event in terms of achieving their goal of recruiting Hmong Stanford students, there are five current Stanford students who attended SHOPPE and continue to be involved in HSU.

To understand the organizing behind SHOPPE, I interviewed Gaozong Vang, a recent Stanford graduate, former HSU Co-Chair and former SHOPPE Coordinator. Similar to PYLC, I wanted to understand what makes an effective high school outreach program and Gaozong details three major components of what she believes makes SHOPPE effective at achieving its goals which are distinct from those of PYLC. The first she notes is an exploration into the Hmong American identity. Over her four years of attending and organizing SHOPPE, she explains how the organizers added more expressive activities

that focus on identity development. Examples of these activities include Beyond the Line, an activity to explore several identity markers through a reflective modality, and Express Yourself, a moment for both the attendees and college students “to tell [their] experience and [their] story” by being typically “vulnerable, [and] talking about how [their] Hmong identities have impacted [their] experiences at Stanford, in college and life” (“Gaozong Vang” 2016).

The second highlight of the SHOPPE experience is the structure of the conference. SHOPPE runs over a three-day period and hosts ten to fifteen attendees which allows each attendee to have at least one mentor who they are able to form a relationship with. This intimate atmosphere is critical for authentic relationship and community building. For example, while interviewing Dee Dee Thao, a current Stanford junior, former SHOPPE attendee and coordinator, she found that developing a close mentoring relationship with an existing college student made her feel like she would have a tight-knit Hmong community here at Stanford.

Lastly, the third highlight was providing a network even after the conference ended. A Facebook group was organized to allow for continued conversation and community building within the cohort of attendees and HSU students during each year. Moreover, due to the sustained mentoring program, Dee Dee was able to have a current Stanford student who went through the same college application process and provide direct support throughout it, a key need in connecting Hmong Americans to higher education.

Although SHOPPE meets critical needs for integrating culture into the high school outreach experience and translating it into college readiness, HSU organizers acknowledge the need for the University to provide concrete support to facilitate better identity-centered outreach. There are three major recommendations that both Gaozong and Dee Dee articulated, and they are first, a need for better institutional support in transportation for the high school attendees; second, a need for more honoraria funding for conference speakers that facilitate identity formation and third, access to contact lists organized by the Admissions Office to outreach to schools that have large Hmong American populations. Both PYLC and SHOPPE lack necessary institutional support from the University in concrete ways, but the A3C is an intentional space that facilitates advocacy for the AAPI student population on campus through institutional methods.

## **CURRENT INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT FOR OUTREACH**

Cindy Ng, the director and assistant dean of the A3C, and Jerald Adamos, the associate director and assistant dean, lead a team of twenty student staff to facilitate programming related to the educational mission of the A3C and meet the holistic needs of the community. The community building coordinator, a staff position that arose out of the need of the community, facilitates leadership

development and provides institutional support to VSOs who conduct high school outreach events. This is conducted through an annual AAPI high school outreach retreat that brings together the VSOs who conduct outreach.

Currently, there are six VSOs affiliated with the A3C that conduct high school outreach programming including PASU, SVSA, HSU, Stanford Khmer Association (SKA), Stanford Friends of Tibet (SFoT) and Japanese Student Union (JSU). These groups attended the retreat which focused on three main objectives. The first is to articulate the significance of being an Asian American student leader of a VSO, especially through the history of the Asian American undergraduate population at Stanford. The second is to provide a platform for community leaders to collaborate on planning outreach. The third is to ensure that attendees feel that they have learned applicable skills to their role as a community organizer. This retreat is one major way that Jerald, the supervisor for this programming, facilitates connections between student leaders and supports the needs of the VSOs.

## **BUILDING AN INFRASTRUCTURE FOR THE FUTURE**

A sustainable admissions infrastructure for underrepresented Asian American subgroups must take into account the histories of past organizing efforts and ensure collaboration between the three principal actors of the Asian American student organizations, the Stanford Admissions Office and the A3C. Throughout the research process, it became clear that these institutions are not specializing according to their strengths or collaborating with each other to improve on their weaknesses. Therefore, there are several recommendations for building a sustainable and collaborative infrastructure for the future.

The Asian American VSOs serve a critical role in the outreach infrastructure for admitting more qualified yet underrepresented Asian American ethnic individuals. Many of the students in these VSOs come from similar backgrounds as the students that they are outreaching to—first-generation, low-income, and immigrants. Thus, Asian American VSOs' involvement with the pipeline can be best optimized through specifying their relationship with the Admissions Office and the A3C.

One major recommendation is that VSOs be financially supported for personal outreach with underrepresented students. As I mentioned before, the interviewees articulated that developing personal relationships with current university students was integral to their college admissions process. Therefore, the university's outreach efforts would benefit from providing additional funding to increase the capacity of these VSOs. For example, PYLC is only a one-day conference and with enough funding could expand to two or three days to create a more comprehensive college experience. In addition, SHOPPE would be able to accept more than fifteen students because their transportation costs for students from Fresno and Sacramento, two major cities with large Hmong

American populations, would be covered. This concrete action would allow these VSOs to have an expanded impact. The VSOs would concentrate their strength, personal outreach to the applicants, and use them to learn about the narratives that the Admissions Office could utilize.

While the Admissions Office conducts outreach to thousands of high schools nationwide and employs a staff of over sixty application readers, they could best be served through assessing their processes to best engage with these underrepresented Asian American ethnic groups. Anna Takahashi notes that “they change up their presentations,” to improve each year, yet do not acknowledge or have the organizational capacity to assess the specific needs of individual communities. Admissions officers go through yearly trainings regarding reading a holistic application which is an opportunity to collaborate. If VSOs are able to write briefings of the lived experiences of their attendees and themselves, then the Admissions Office would have a nuanced understanding of these groups. The collaborative exchange would facilitate understanding and provide direct contact between the institutions that conduct diverse outreach initiatives. In addition, the Admissions Office could offer more opportunities for organizers in the Asian American VSOs to be involved in the admissions process. One way to do this is to increase the number of undergraduate Diversity Outreach Associates who work in partnering with the student body to engage in minority student outreach. Moreover, the Admissions Office has a dedicated Asian American Admissions Liaison, but the partnership is unclear as the turnover rate for this position is frequent and the responsibilities are not solidified. Only through an established list of responsibilities can the two institutions leverage the Liaison to meet both institution’s needs.

Moreover, there are other ways that the A3C should support their relationships with their affiliated VSOs and the Admissions Office. As Jerald noted, institutional memory and advocacy are goals for the A3C in contributing to the admissions infrastructure. There are two major recommendations to ensure the organized work continues with strategic intentionality to recruit underrepresented Asian American ethnic students. The first strategy is to maintain relationships between the A3C liaison and the VSOs themselves through expanding the high school outreach retreat and having regular collaborative meetings.

The second strategy is through archiving planning resources for a sustainable and long-term outreach practice. After interviewing Jerald, he noted a need for preserving institutional memory (“Jerald Adamos” 2016). A major problem he identified is that college activism has a high turnover rate, not only due to the fact that college students only have on average a four year time on campus, but VSOs change their leadership every year. Often times these leadership changes do not include a transition plan to pass down the planning resources to the new leadership team. Jerald views the A3C as an institution on campus that can facilitate a solution towards that problem.

The A3C maintains an archival process for VSOs to ensure that the histories of these VSOs are kept in institutional memory, a component necessary for achieving the long term goal of a sustainable admissions pipeline. However, a difficulty is that some VSOs choose not to archive at all. One way the A3C has tried to alleviate this difficulty is through having two community building coordinators to develop relationships with the VSO leaders and convince them to archive their work, but also a dedicated database manager who conducts the archival process. Even with these dedicated staff members, the process of archival must be done in a way that is automated. Only through preserving institutional memory, can the work all of these VSOs are doing in terms of cultural development be sustained. Lily Zheng, a writer for the Stanford Daily, articulates that “not every organization has knowledge of or access to the resources they need” to maintain a sustainable activism practice (Zheng 2016). Therefore, the A3C occupies a collaborative space to work with the VSOs and the Admissions Office to build a better pipeline for underrepresented Asian American ethnic populations. This form of collaborative institutional support strengthens the relationships that are key to facilitating a sustainable admissions infrastructure.

## CONCLUSION

Ultimately, this sustainable infrastructure to build a pipeline for underrepresented Asian ethnicities is within arm’s reach. The student organizations, the A3C and the Admissions Office will benefit through being more transparent in their outreach strategies, investing more capital into diversity initiatives that build a better educational pipeline and creating a fundamental infrastructure that consists of a collaboration between administrators, faculty, staff, and university students. While ongoing research is understanding the best practices of outreach for each internal institution, my research builds on it and proposes an infrastructure for these best practices to be institutionalized in a collaborative sense. So that maybe one day in the not so distant future, many students like me will be able to reflect back and realize the legacy of underrepresented students who contributed to the journey.

The impact of this new collaborative approach of high school outreach model can serve as a metonym for other communities and can be scaled to other universities. The mission is to make universities an institution committed to diverse thought and practice and the best way to create that is through its students. Students like Jerold and I, who found community in PASU that provided a way to belong at this university. Ultimately, improving the pipeline for underrepresented students in any racial or ethnic group is a necessary action for universities to establish themselves as not only the bastion of diverse intellectual thought, but also as institutions fighting for collective liberation of their communities.

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# ALINE THIENGMANY

## Breaking Down the Model Minority: Redefining Asian American Mental Health

### Preface

The purpose of this preface is not to condemn or criticize the way my parents raised me; this is simply an effort to make this way of life more known and understood to deepen the understanding and stimulate the change of the mental health stigma in Asian communities. To tell the stories of others, I am first going to tell mine.

First and foremost, no, I do not have a physical or mental disability, so I cannot truly speak for those that do. I do, though, still know what it feels like being a “model minority”. I am the first daughter born to traditional Laotian immigrants in a small, Midwest town with less than 8,000 people; within this town, there is a tightknit community of less than 150 Laotian Americans. Even as young as four or five, I remember all of my family members pushing me to do my homework and practice my alphabet every day. My life was centered around school; having fun and relaxing always came second. I did my best in classes in order to make my family proud and not let their sacrifices go to waste. Throughout elementary and middle school, I became a machine that only knew how to output straight A’s; if I did get a bad grade, which I considered to be anything below an A, I never showed my parents for fear of disappointing them.

Middle school is when I first started to struggle with school and keeping up with homework, just like everyone else did. My friends never understood why I was always so stressed about school and my grades. “Why do you care so much?” “You’re Asian, you’re already smart enough.” “Aline’s so good at math; she makes it look so easy.” I often heard comments like these, and although they might seem encouraging, the commentary caused my mental health to decline. Some nights I would come home and cry for hours, wanting to rip my hair out and quit because of all the stress. Before, only my family and the Lao community pressed me to do well in school. But now, even people at school were expecting me to a model minority student. Where could I turn to?

High school was four years of extreme highs and lows. I was heavily involved in music, which allowed me to get a break from the stresses of school. I also had a great friend, a fellow Laotian American, who was the only one who understood the emotional and mental toll of achieving straight A’s. This was also the time where I would not sleep in order to finish assignments, sacrificing my health for a good mark on a piece of paper. There were several instances when I thought about giving up because school was becoming a way of showing off to the community, rather than something I genuinely found happiness in. Al-

though my friends helped me a great deal in reducing my stress, nothing made me more confused and angry when people asked me, “Why do you care so much about grades? Can’t you just relax once in a while?” I wanted to ask them, “Why can’t you try to understand what I’m going through?” After I while of trying to explain, I gave up. They would never understand why. My parents would never understand why I stress so much. Sometimes, I do not even understand why.

I realized that some of my friends at school could not understand the pressure I put on myself because they had no knowledge of Asian culture. I am living in two different cultures, two different worlds. They based their knowledge on a stereotype: the model minority. My model minority status in school in addition to my traditional Asian upbringing in a close-knit community were sources of the stress that I dealt with every day. I want my mental health to be considered and accepted in the Asian American community and society, in general. The model minority is a label that has negative effects on the mental health and well-being of Asian Americans like me, and I believe that it should be terminated. My argument is for the understanding of mental illness and cultural differences and against the labeling and pressuring of a minority to be an example to others.

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“It’s not real. Get over it’ was the gist of their advice. Then and now, to our detriment, I’m certain many Asian-American kids have heard the same thing” (Xie). These are the words of Katherine Xie, an Asian American student at Cornell. Her article, “What It’s Like to Be an Asian American With Depression”, recounts her personal struggle with depression while growing up in a traditional Asian American home. Ever since she was 13, Xie had the hunch that something was wrong when she experienced “blank, weighty periods of apathy and sadness.” Unfortunately, when she finally had the courage to tell her Chinese-immigrant parents, they pushed her feelings to the side as a sign of weakness and shame. She felt defeated, but she continued to try her hardest in school. Xie was a model child: she excelled in academics with a 4.0 GPA, won national titles, and had a promising future at an Ivy league university. Seldom did people in her school and community know about the depression and stress she was going through in order to meet familial and societal expectations. Her condition worsened and she began cutting. Eventually, she was hospitalized four days before her graduation and put on an antidepressant. The pivotal moment in her healing process occurred when her parents “acknowledged the Asian-American community was in sore need of greater awareness and resources for mental illness” because they realized how broken their daughter actually was. Because of Xie’s hospitalization, her parents educated themselves about depression and anxiety to better understand mental illness (Xie).

Unfortunately, cases of mental illness are a common and growing issue, and many parents do not come to the realization that Xie’s did before it is too late.

Asian Americans and Asian Pacific Americans (APA) have been dubbed as a “model minority” because they supposedly possess many “favorable” characteristics, including academic excellence. With academic achievement comes a price: the mental health and wellness of these students is never a concern. In addition, Asian Americans who suffer from mental disabilities, like autism and bipolar disorder, are often ignored and pushed aside in order to adhere to the model minority or to prevent “shame” from being associated with the family. Religion and medicine, both cultural influences, are reasons as to why disability is associated with sin, karmic debt, and shame within Asian society. There is no doubt that the model minority myth is detrimental to the mental health of these individuals. Scholars tend to examine the effects of school on Asian American mental health, but they do not account for the influences from home. This is proven by personal anecdotes, such as those of Xie and Can Truong, a Vietnamese refugee diagnosed with bipolar disorder whose has to overcome both the pressures of society and his family. Countless studies throughout the years have also revealed the effects of the model minority on mental illnesses. As Xie and other Asian Americans have shown, we should not be pushing students to do well in school to the point where they are developing mental illnesses. I will begin by introducing the documentary, *Can*, and argue that the cultural and societal origins of the model minority stereotype have affected the attitudes towards mental disability in the Asian community. Following the historical introduction of the model minority, I will explain recent and ongoing impacts of the model minority on the mental health of the APA community and how it has caused a number of illnesses. Finally, I will suggest steps society should take in order to remove the stigma surrounding mental disabilities and overall mental health.

There are many more individuals like Katherine Xie who have experienced the damaging effects of the mental health stigma found in Asian cultures. Now, I will analyze a film trailer for *Can* to provide another personal account of the model minority myth's effects. *Can* is a documentary by Pearl J. Park that follows the life of 37-year-old Can Truong, who immigrated to the United States with his family from Vietnam when he was two. It sheds light on what life is like for a model minority: a “successful” Asian American who is later diagnosed with bipolar disorder and depression. Learning about the struggles Can experienced in order to achieve success helps the general public to realize the emotional toll the model minority stereotype has on students who are in a similar situation. Can explains that he was “very happy in junior high and high school” (1:28). He was a model student who got good grades, had a group of close friends, won national academic titles, and graduated at the top of his class. The pressure to do well eventually caught up with him: Can was diagnosed with bipolar disorder during his junior year at the University of Chicago (0:37), and he left the university in 1994. He remembers feeling “ashamed” to go to the hospital (0:28). As an adolescent, Can was bullied, but he told himself that he had to be mature because he was an immigrant (7:05). He endured being called derogatory terms similar

to “chink” and other forms of emotional abuse, often going home every night to cry. The young man felt as though he had no one to talk to due to the stigma surrounding mental health, so Can eventually went to a therapist and sought out help for the emotional suffering he experienced (Lightfisharts & Park).

Halfway through the trailer, Park interviews Manh and Dung Truong, Can’s parents. Manh describes, in his strong voice, that he pushed Can to become a doctor because that would be the best job he could possibly have. When the interviewer asks if the father put too much pressure on his son, Manh argues that he “didn’t put pressure,” but instead gave him “my experience” (3:58). Manh’s success in his business and on the battlefield are used against Can; in fact, Can was told that he would never surpass his father. By insisting that their son uphold the family name and worth, Can must put his mental health and happiness to the side in order to fulfill the family’s wishes. In addition, Dung explains she was disappointed that her son could not go to school because of his condition. She attributes Can’s sickness to a sin he committed in a past life because of her Buddhist beliefs. Her advice to her son was to “try and tough it out” and do good deeds to acquire good karma (5:18). The mother’s reluctance to realize the true cause of his disability made Can feel ignored, often pushing those with similar cases deeper into depression. One of the most powerful quotes from the trailer is when Can reminds the audience of a very important truth: “I know that my dad loves me” (9:50). It is a simple and painful truth for Asian American students who neglect the pain and stress they go through to please their families; both parties need to realize that the child’s health and happiness is just as important as his/her grades in school (Lightfisharts & Park).

It is apparent to the audience how the Truong’s cultural beliefs combined with the model minority stereotype in America eventually triggered Can’s bipolar disorder, mania, and depression. These cultural influences play a role in how disabilities are viewed and treated within the Asian community; some of the most common teachings come from Taoism, Confucianism, Buddhism, animism, and Christianity (Watanabe 158). Generations of Confucian beliefs and the pressure to succeed in a new country make Can’s parents feel justified in their teachings and treatment of their son. In countries where Confucian beliefs are the primary sources for familial and societal organization, each home places a high value on their familial hierarchy. This system takes into account “age, gender and generational status. Harmony in family and society is maintained by self-restraint and collectivism, with everyone acting in accordance with their hierarchical status” (“Developmental Disability...”). Asian communities that follow traditional Confucian beliefs place a high importance on appearances and “saving face”, so individuals with disabilities and their families are reluctant to seek professional help. In Can’s case, he tells the audience that he was afraid to talk to a doctor for this exact reason; he was weary of how his parents and community would react to his diagnosis. Can’s mother, a Buddhist, believes that his disability is a way of him repaying karmic debt from a sin in a past life. Some

traditional Asian religions also consider being born with a disability a punishment for the parents or ancestors for committing a sin. This also causes the community to view the family in a negative light when they should be providing them with support (“Developmental Disability...”). He lacks proper care and understanding because his mother’s judgement is clouded by religion (Lightfisharts & Park). Family members will tend to experience a wide range of emotions upon realizing their child has a disability, but unfortunately, acceptance is seldom one of them. According to Watanabe, parents go through a period of “mourning or grief” initially before feeling “anger, frustration, guilt, denial, fear” and even “the loss of self-esteem” (157).

When it comes to treatment options, the Chinese will first turn to traditional medicine and acupuncture. Japanese and Koreans tend to avoid the issue and feel helpless. Because the Vietnamese believe that depression is purely sadness, they turn to home remedies, herbs, or exorcists (Kramer et al 228). The lack of mental health care services in Asian countries can be traced back to the time of colonization. Between the early 1800s and late 1950s, the most popular form of mental health care, the asylum, was separated from the main healthcare system and built far away from civilization. These asylums eventually fell behind in development as the hospitals became more advanced. As a result, several Asian countries still do not have access to mental health services, so they solely rely on religious healers. The cultural influence in conjunction with America’s perception of the Asian community gave birth to a new stereotype in the United States: the model minority.

The term “model minority” includes “ideological, political, racial, and cultural contestations between the mainstream society” and first arose in 1966 in a *NY Times* article by William Peterson: “Success Story: Japanese American Style” (Li & Wang 3). Peterson argues in his article that Japanese Americans overcame discrimination in the United States by maintaining their cultural values and working hard, but he did not account for the effects of the 1965 Immigration Act; it allowed for a greater inflow of immigrants by reducing some geographic restrictions. Still, only select groups were granted immigration status, one group being highly educated professionals. As a result, the majority of educated, well-off Asians came to America to have a better life for their children (Kasinitz 173). It is clear that the term “model minority” was invented as a way of stereotyping. Since the origin of the term “model minority”, Peterson wrongly branded all Asian Americans as hard-working, obedient, and intelligent individuals. Although being a model minority seems like a “positive stereotype” it continues to negatively affect the Asian American community.

I will now expand and examine the numerous reports on Asian and Asian American mental wellness that have been done. Asian American youth regularly hear comments like “Asians are always good at math,” “you don’t even have to try to be smart,” or “it’s just because you’re Asian.” Seemingly harmless statements like those push the students to overwork themselves in order to meet the expect-

tation of their families and schools. Unfortunately, Asian American children feel as though “their needs are often overlooked” in their homes and school (Pang & Cheng 3). A study by Onoda (1977) found that Asian American high schoolers tend to be more stressed in school than Euro American students, and D. W. Sue & Kirk (1972) found Chinese American college students often experienced higher levels of anxiety than students from other ethnicities. Chun and Sue echo this by concluding that depression and other mental illnesses are more likely to be experienced by Asian American students compared to European American students (76) The model minority stereotype puts an overwhelming amount of pressure on students and their families and as a result, APA students have a higher risk of developing depression, anxiety, and other mental illnesses from both the environmental and cultural factors. Xie’s parents and her community’s expectation for her to be an example of a model child eventually caused her depression and hospitalization. Similarly, Can mentions how he was bullied by his peers, but the pressure for him to do well in school forced him to stay silent about the abuse. Can felt that as long as he was getting good grades, it did not matter that he was being harassed in school. This is not how students, or people in general should feel towards their wellbeing and mental health.

When comparing second generation Asian Americans to the first generation who have spent a majority of their lives in an Asian country, the second generation of Asian Americans were more likely to have mental illnesses (Meyers). It can be linked to the fact that second generation Asian American students, like myself who grow up in the United States, have to deal with the pressure to not only adjust to the new American culture, but the expectation that they should thrive and be an example to their peers. Because of these influences, those who are diagnosed with mental illnesses are less likely to seek professional help, according to the National Latino and Asian American Study of 2002 (NLAAS) (Meyers). The director of the documentary, Pearl J. Park, also uses her website to clearly point out this issue of neglecting to speak up about mental illness. She notes that the “code of silence around the issues of mental health may prevent Asian Americans...from seeking help” (“Can...”). Park explains the shame that comes with diagnosed with a mental illness causes these individuals to suffer alone, so she uses her documentary as a success story; viewers will watch and know that they can overcome their mental illness if they speak up and seek help, just as Can did (“Can...”).

Recently on September 2013, it was reported by Maya Wang that in China, children with disabilities are being denied access to education even though Chinese law guarantees the right to education for all children over six years old. Administrators and teachers rarely let children with disabilities enroll into their public institutions with the fear that it will affect the learning environment of the other students. An option for these families is enrolling their children in “disability schools”, but they are scarce, inconvenient, and scattered throughout the country. Ultimately, children with disabilities remain at home. In China,

there is an estimated 83 million individuals with disabilities; of those 83 million, “more than 40 percent are illiterate and at least 15 million live on less than US \$1 a day” because they were denied education as adolescents (Wang). This shows how taboo and neglected the idea of mental health is in these countries. Although it is not in the United States, Asians still value education more than they value the mental health and well-being of its citizens to the point where children with disabilities are excluded from society. When “saving face” and maintaining a clean image is more important than the acceptance of an individual, that is when something is wrong. This discrimination even transfers itself into higher education in China; when students are completing applications to universities, some are turned away because the admission officers do not feel as though their disability “matches” their preferred field of study (Wang). For example, a student with a hearing impairment would not be allowed to be a musician or a band director. It all cycles back to the idea that image and the family name are both of extreme cultural importance.

Disabled children are not the only ones that face discrimination; their parents are also affected by the model minority myth, specifically when it comes to the education system. Mr. Ko, Mrs. Liu, Mrs. Yee, Mrs. Ho, Mrs. Law and Mrs. Chin are Chinese immigrants who have been in the United States for three to seven years. Four individuals were not proficient in English, and the other two had limited speech or spoke the language fluently. Each parent has a child with a mental disability: autism, cerebral palsy, or Hunter’s syndrome. The study’s purpose was to document the interaction between the immigrant parents and the professionals administering Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings in public schools. When the researchers spoke to the parents after their IEP meetings, the universal response by the parents was that they did not feel respected by the professionals. “I left work for this meeting,” a parent begins, “but the teachers left before the meeting was adjourned” (Lo 200). Apparently, these meetings were not as important to the professionals and some even scheduled meetings at the same time. When parents would voice their concerns, it seemed out of the ordinary and somewhat annoying because usually Asian parents “are not difficult and they don’t complain” (Lo 201). The model minority myth has painted Asians as compliant and quiet, which discourages them from speaking out for the sake of their children’s well-being. Neglecting the input from the parents resulted in less collaborative meetings where suggestions were discouraged. All the parents wanted was for the professionals to respect their wish to have a voice in their child’s education (Lo 204). It is instances like these where society remembers that Asian parents are not the only source of judgement when it comes to Asian special education. Teachers and even professionals who are hired to ensure that these students are getting the best education possible are blind to the harm the model minority stereotype is causing.

The idea of a model minority also affects the communities of other ethnic minorities. As society continues to praise Asian Americans for how “obedient”

and “hardworking” they are, it provokes a divide between minorities. African Americans or Latino Americans might feel as though they are being portrayed as lower-class citizens, which creates more discrimination towards the Asian minority (Kasinitz 175). “Motivating” other minorities by using a specific group is similar to the feeling siblings have when they are always compared to the “better” sister or brother; it creates tension and resentment towards Asians. Consequently, Asians are less likely to be viewed as troublemakers while other minorities constantly have to live under a hypercritical eye.

Fixing the manner in which we view Asian American mental health will require effort from society as a whole, not just the Asian community. One of the first tasks to accomplish is to begin with schools by implementing a more “inclusive” approach to education. Asia-Pacific governments are focusing their efforts on the most inclusive and effective way to give students with disabilities the best education possible. The Hong Kong government has taken steps towards inclusive education by ordering a curriculum reform in 2000. In 2001, the *Special Education Act Amended of Republic of China* improved the country’s special education services by reducing the size of inclusive education classes, providing more teaching assistants and aids, and allowing parents to play an active role in their child’s education (Forlin, Lian, Wu, Ashman, & Kim 15). Schools should implement workshops “that give parents ‘tips on how to help your child do better in school’” (Wanatabe 163). Normalizing mental disability requires schools to be inclusive and provide an environment where all students are welcome and accepted.

This will not be a simple switch, unfortunately. Modifying the regulations on special education does not address some of the main obstacles preventing effective, inclusive education (Wang). Training teachers and administrators is of the most important steps in changing education for disabled students; they need to be equipped with the skills and information required to properly execute their jobs. Both “normal” and special education teachers in Hong Kong reported higher levels of stress once the inclusive programs were implemented because they were not trained properly (Forlin, Lian, Wu, Ashman, & Kim 25). There have been virtually zero special education training programs for teachers since 1874, and as schools are transitioning students from “disability schools” to mainstream ones, the only way to make these changes successful is to properly prepare teachers (Jiacheng 43). Some of the main issues that administrators must address are the large class sizes, the fast paced and exam focused curriculum, and the excessive amount of homework. Forlin suggests that the curriculum reform have three main components: “(1) the philosophy of inclusive education; (2) disability, diversity, etiology and education implications; and (3) strategies for implementing an inclusive curriculum” (66). The three will work together to educate teachers about the philosophy of inclusive education and mentally prepare them for the classroom. Researching disabilities can help classrooms to better accommodate children with disabilities instead of forcing them

to adapt to the system. Lastly, schools should be able to apply new, more effective strategies with the tools they have gained and collaborate with other districts to constantly improve and evolve their approaches (Forlin 68).

Teachers will also have to change their perception of the “typical” Asian American “whiz kid”. Viewing students through the model minority lens ignores the possibility that they might actually be dealing stress, anxiety, or other mental issues behind closed doors. In the documentary, Can mentions to the audience that no one visited him in the hospital when he was admitted for his mental illness. It is shocking that he did not receive a visit from his teachers or fellow classmates. This shows how the idea of mental illness is not typically associated with Asian Americans, so it is easy to forget that APA students deal with these issues, too. Teachers should pay attention to the “whole child”; rather than focusing solely on intellectual growth, have educators be mindful of how Asian American students are growing emotionally and socially. APA children are much more than just academic machines without feelings, and the pressure to please their teachers and parents can cause achievement anxiety (Pang 270). Pang also notes that being a model minority is difficult for students who do not do as well in school because “teachers assume that students from Asian Pacific American groups will be top achievers” (278).

In the real world, there are a number of factors that can deter Asians from seeking professional help: the negative stigma surrounding mental health, fear of shaming their parents, and a lack of knowledge and awareness of mental health issues are a few. In fact, some traditional Asian societies do not have any careers that are related to psychological and mental health (Lee et al. 8). Some might argue that Asian Americans have lower rates of mental illness when compared to other minorities, but they are still much less likely to seek professional help. When they do end up consulting a professional’s opinion, they tend to find themselves highly satisfied. Jennifer Abe-Kim, PhD, notes that one of the most important tactics to use for the sake of increasing the use of mental help professionals is the use of education. “A lot of immigrants aren’t aware of resources,” so educating communities about the types of programs and options available will encourage them to take advantage of these resources (Meyers). Other ways for the general public to distribute information to the Asian American population can involve other communities they are already a part of, like church or culture-organizations. Providing exposure to mental wellness in an environment in which APAs are comfortable is convenient and less embarrassing (Lee et al. 9).

Strides have already been made towards breaking down the mental health stigma in APA communities. The National Asian American Pacific Islander Mental Health Association (NAAPIMHA) is a nonprofit aimed at the mental well-being of these communities. They work with community-based groups, advocate policy change, provide training to service workers, and translate mental health facts into various dialects. Another important group the NAAPIMHA supports is the college population; they teach these students about “the impor-

tance of mental well-being and how to locate mental health resources (“Advocacy...”). I believe that implementing more programs like NAAPIMHA will help to make mental health more widely accepted in Asian American communities.

Just as it took several years for the model minority stereotype to integrate itself into our society, it will take several years to eliminate it. It might not be realistic or advantageous to break apart the Asian American community’s cultural beliefs, but we can utilize education and support programs to provide safe spaces for students and adults. If Can’s family understood how harmful their religion and cultural beliefs were to him, there is the possibility that his mental health would not have deteriorated to that extent. Similarly, if Xie’s peers and teachers at school did not constantly pressure her to do well by showing her off as a model minority, she might have been much more relaxed about school and not have ended up in the hospital. I believe that both cultural and environmental factors can cause Asian American students to develop mental illnesses. We have to consider both aspects in order to better understand the positions these individuals are in. Only then can we truly provide the effective professional help they deserve. Can Truong could not have summed it up any better: “recovery is possible for everyone.”

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# JAMES HUYNH

## I'm Not Sick, I'm Gay: A Comparative Critical Discourse Analysis of Gay Asian American Psychological Distress in Asian American Studies and Public Health

### Introduction

#### *Personal Investment and Stakes*

It was the fifth grade when I started to notice that I might be a little “different” from others. It was a feeling that I could not quite name. Despite not being able to name what I was feeling, I knew in my mind and body that I was different. I sensed it. That difference, as I grew older, was (and is) my sexual orientation. In high school, I knew that I was attracted to other male bodies, but because my school environment did not openly welcome LGBTQ people, I stayed in the closet. That decision to stay in the closet was shaped by growing up in a Vietnamese immigrant family that had strict gender expectations and existing in a society that prescribes to heteronormative ideologies and practices. From that decision, I had created this mental world in which male bodies were relegated to the realm of only pleasure and consumption, while female bodies were ones that I could have “real, romantic” relationships with.

Eventually I outgrew that mental framework because I outgrew being stuck in the closet. During my second year as an undergraduate student, I came out to my college friends who openly and warmly embraced my “new” gay identity. A year and half later, I came out to my parents. I remember this moment so vividly. I had just come home for spring break. We were eating dinner when my mom decided to ask me a series of pointed questions: “Do you have a girlfriend?” “No.” “Why not?” “I just want to focus on school.” “*Do you like girls?*” It was the utterance of that question that I knew what would transpire next. I said no and admitted to being gay. My dad’s immediate response, “*Con cần đi bác sĩ không?*” The literal English translation is, “Do you need to go to the doctor?” My dad implied that I was sick – mentally ill with the disease of gayness.

As I continually reflect upon my experiences of negotiating my sexuality and sexual orientation in relation to my race and ethnicity, I begin to wonder how that all affects not just my own health but of others who are like me. Thus, my central research project investigates how the dual minority status of gay Vietnamese American men affects their mental and physical health outcomes. Here, I define dual minority as belonging to both a racial/ethnic minority group and a sexual minority group. In addition to the personal motivations behind this project, I intervene in the fields of Asian American Studies and public health in order to fill in the gaps between these two disciplines.

## Objectives

Although this project focuses on a specific ethnic group, I will widen the scope of my population to include gay Asian American men in general for the purposes of this paper. I also want to draw attention to the fact that I am only focusing on literature about Asian American men who identify as gay and/or heavily involved in the gay community. As such, I am excluding other sexual identities from my work so that I can narrow my analysis to one specific population. My primary objective for this paper is to critically analyze the discourse around gay Asian American men and their psychological distress. Specifically, I attend to the discursive ways in which the fields of Asian American Studies and public health approach this subject. Not only do I aim to conduct a critical discourse analysis of both fields, I will compare the two fields' discourses as well.

There are various questions that I want to explore and problematize in this final paper: (1) How does the Asian American racial and political identity affect gay Asian American men's conceptions of sexuality? (2) In turn, how does the negotiation of these identities create psychological distress? Specifically, how do gay Asian American men deal with being a sexual minority within their own racial group and deal with being a racial minority within the gay community? What are the social, political, and cultural implications of this liminal and abject status? (3) What are the ways in which hegemonic notions of gender, race, and sexual orientation impact how civil and social institutions enact violence upon gay Asian American men? Consequently, how does that violence impact their health – mentally, psychologically, and physically? Given the length of this paper, I acknowledge that my exploration of these questions will be limited.

## **Theoretical Frameworks**

### Affect & Queer Theory

Thirteen years have passed since I first felt that feeling that I still cannot fully and accurately name. This unnamed “intensity that exists prior to its capture by language” is what feminist anthropologist and cultural studies scholar Purnima Mankekar describes as affect (Mankekar, 2015, p. 13). Mankekar posits that affect does not simply exist in individual subjects, but rather these subjects are produced through the traces that affect leaves on them. In thinking about queer bodies and subjects, I would like to expand upon the concept of affect by situating it in queer theory. Traditionally, queer theory focused its inquiries on the theorization of *queerness*, as it related directly to sexual minorities such as gay and lesbian people; however, it now encompasses discourse about bodies and topics that do not fit into stable, normative categories

(Mikdash & Puar, 2016; Sullivan, 2003). By thinking about a kind of *queer affect*, I describe it as the pre-linguistic intensities that queer people and bodies experience as a result of occupying abject positions of non-normativity in regards to gender and sexuality.

Queer theory, as a theoretical framework, informs the ways in which I critically analyze the discourses of Asian American Studies and Public health as it relates to the gay Asian American male. Under this framework, I attempt to deconstruct hegemonic notions of gender and sexuality. By challenging heteronormative and gendered practices in regards to how male bodies should perform (sexually and romantically), I explicate the contestations that gay Asian American men experience by existing in a “straight” society that afflicts violence on them. I also move beyond looking at the sexuality of gay Asian American men as queer, and include the effeminized Asian American man as a queer subject as well.

### Masculinity

When discussing the gay Asian American male subject, the concept of masculinity must be included. Masculinity as a framework can be used to explain how Asian American men and gay Asian American men are racialized and sexualized in ways that are deviant from the white straight male body. I plan to explore how gay Asian American male bodies are demasculinized, and further deconstruct the essentialism of masculinity because it positions Asian American males at the bottom of the gay social hierarchy, thus making them a minority with a minority (Wilson & Yoshikawa, 2004).

### **Methodology**

In this paper, the main methods that I will use are critical discourse analysis, comparative discourse analysis, and textual analysis. All three of these methods will be intertwined throughout the paper as I engage with selected texts from Asian American Studies and public health. Since the objective of this paper is to compare how each discipline approaches and discusses the gay Asian American male, I inevitably will rely more on critical and comparative discourse analyses. By employing this methodology, I aim to critique how the discourse in each discipline fails to fully incorporate the gay Asian American male. For public health, this means attending to the discursive attitudes that marginalizes and pathologizes gay bodies by reducing them to subjects of HIV/AIDS interventions. As for Asian American Studies, I will explore how the discourse has shifted from inherently masculinist and heteronormative views towards one that is increasingly incorporating queer theory and queer subjects. Finally, as I am engaging with various written texts I will use textual analysis as a complement to my critical and comparative discourse analyses.

## Analysis

This section makes up the bulk of my analysis and research. I start off by conducting a critical discourse analysis in Asian American Studies, and then move onto public health. To preface the analysis, the literature in both Asian American Studies and public health disciplines lacks a breadth of critical discourse that engages the health of gay Asian American communities. Despite queer theory increasingly being used in Asian American Studies, the subject of the gay Asian American male, much less queer Asian Americans, has not gained prominence (Sueyoshi, 2016). Therefore, part of my analysis will discuss why the lack of this critical engagement in both discourses motivates me to contribute scholarship on this topic.

### Critical Discourse Analysis of Asian American Studies

In analyzing the Asian American Studies discourse regarding the gay Asian American male body, I will discuss these selected texts: (1) Anthony Ocampo and Daniel Soodjinda's (2016) "Invisible Asian Americans: The Intersection of Sexuality, Race, and Education among Gay Asian Americans"; (2) Kimberly Kay Hoang's (2015) *Dealing in Desire: Asian Ascendancy, Western Decline, and the Hidden Currencies of Global Sex Work*; and (3) C. Winter Han's (2015) *Geisha of a Different Kind: Race and Sexuality in Gaysian America*. Out of these three texts, only the Ocampo and Soodjinda piece explicitly addresses stress in gay Asian American men. The other two pieces indirectly discuss the psychological distress of Asian American men through other avenues such as blocked economic mobility, stunted masculinity, and internalized racism. I chose these three texts because they exemplify the wide range of interdisciplinary discourse present within Asian American Studies: spanning disciplines in education, sociology, and LGBT studies.

Ocampo and Soodjinda's study reveals that despite past research on bullying in LGBT students, gay Asian American males utilize the model minority stereotype to evade harassment. Using retrospective interviewing of 35 gay Asian American men, the authors conclude that educators need to be mindful of the intersection of race and sexuality especially as it affects the educational experiences of gay students of color. Within this piece, I analyze the discourse around how the authors speak about the stress that gay Asian American males perceive from being in a civil institution (i.e. school) that reifies hegemonic notions of race, gender, and sexuality. Consequently, I then analyze how the authors make linkages between the violence perpetrated by the civil institution and the health of the informants.

From the interviews, the authors discuss the roles that bullying, harassment, and identity crises play in the educational experiences of gay Asian American men. They note that "being gay adds an additional variable of stress, as many

gay Asian Americans struggle with finding compatibility between their sexual and ethnic identity” (Ocampo & Soodjinda, 2016, p. 483). Despite explicitly noting that this negotiation and contestation of identities adds a layer of stress, the authors never make the connection between stress and its implications on mental and physical health, thus making apparent the lack of cross-disciplinary exchange when it comes to Asian American Studies and public health (at least in this context).

Even though I am critiquing this lack of exchange, I also want to recognize that the ways in which this article talks about stress, especially the coping mechanisms that these informants use, offers a subtler way to discuss health. To use the jargon of public health means to prescribe to a Western biomedical lens, which is not always accessible nor appealing to communities of color and LGBT peoples. Ocampo and Soodjinda found that many of their informants coped with their identity crisis, bullying, and harassment by utilizing the model minority stereotype to their advantage. Not only did gay Asian American men look to education as a distraction strategy at school, but they also “rechanneled their parents’ attention to their academic achievements” thereby employing education as a dual-layered protective factor against stress (Ocampo & Soodjinda, 2016, p. 493).

One of the other strategies that the informants from Ocampo’s study used was attempting to “deflect gossip about their sexuality by playing up their masculinity,” which is something that we see in the Vietnamese American men who participate in Vietnam’s sex industry per Hoang’s *Dealing in Desire* (Ocampo & Soodjinda, 2016, p. 488). Hoang’s book posits that the various niche sex markets in Vietnam’s Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) serve as a microcosm that reflect the re-ordering of the global political economy. I specifically analyze Hoang’s discourse on Vietnamese American men who contest their blocked masculinity in the U.S. and the superiority of Western (read: white) masculinity. By arguing that Vietnamese American men “displayed a class-based transnational masculinity” in Vietnamese “spaces that were often explicitly unavailable to white men,” Hoang shows a sense of Asian ascendancy that plays a role in the decline of Western masculinity (Hoang, 2015, p. 68). These overseas Vietnamese men compensate for their blocked masculinity by consuming copious amounts of alcohol and presumably sex in Vietnam, a country where their low Western wages translate into considerable wealth.

Hoang’s Vietnamese American informants are straight men, but I posit that their narratives are important to my discussion of gay Asian American men. From a queer theoretical framework, both straight and gay Asian American in a U.S. are queer figures because they are non-normative bodies in terms of race and gender. Asian bodies in the U.S. have a history of Otherness and deviancy, as evident by laws such as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the Gentlemen’s Agreement of 1915, both of which barred immigration from Asia due to nationalist anxieties over an Asian threat. Additionally, straight Asian American

males are often feminized in popular U.S. culture, thus rendering their masculinity fraught and practically nonexistent. This rhetoric of feminizing the Asian American male body has consequences for the gay Asian American male, which I will touch upon in Han's *Geisha of a Different Kind*.

In *Geisha of a Different Kind*, Han (who identifies as a member of the gay Asian American community) embeds himself in his ethnographic research about the Seattle gaysians (gay Asians). Han's project centralizes the figure of the Asian drag queen, recuperating the effeminate Asian male from the margins. The main conclusion of Han's text is that the Asian drag queen is a figure that will bring salvation to the gay Asian community because of their visibility from winning drag shows. Instead of typical Asian Americanist discourse that tends to critique the ways in which Asian American men are feminized, Han problematizes that by claiming femininity as a source of power. Han argues that Asian drag queens have been strategic in obtaining a platform for themselves by "using precisely the characteristics that lead to their stigmatization in the first place" (Han, 2015, p. 148). By flipping traditional, inherently masculinist Asian American discourse on its head, Han's project displays a negotiation of racial and sexual identity in ways that can be categorized as resilience and resistance. I argue that these spaces of resistance, such as the Asian drag queen space, offer reprieve from environments of toxic masculinity. By reterritorializing this subject positionality, the gay Asian American male figure can recuperate himself to combat his psychological distress that comes from being a dual minority.

From these three texts, I have analyzed how each of these authors intervened in Asian Americanist discourse by providing new ways to reframe masculinity, femininity, race, and sexuality as they pertain to the gay Asian American male. Ocampo and Soodjinda show how gay Asian American males utilized their academic achievements, which is racially coded, as a protective factor against the stress they perceive from being bullied and harassed for their sexual identity. Hoang offers a transnational lens with which to understand how the Vietnamese American man can express masculinity abroad that contests Western superiority. Finally, Han completely counters the need to reclaim masculinity in Asian American males by centering the Asian drag queen as a source of salvation for the Asian gay community.

### *Critical Discourse Analysis of Public Health*

For my critical analysis of the discursive ways in which public health approaches the gay Asian American male body, I engage with the following texts: (1) Yung-Chi Chen and Georgina Shick Tryon's (2012) "Dual Minority Stress and Asian American Gay Men's Psychological Distress and (2) Patrick A. Wilson and Hirokazu Yoshikawa's (2004) "Experiences of and responses to social discrimination among Asian and Pacific Islander gay men: Their relationship to HIV risk." Through my analysis, I aim to critique public health's reductionist,

non-intersectional discursive treatment of the gay Asian American male.

Chen and Tryon's study on the "Dual Minority Stress and Asian American Gay Men's Psychological Distress" is one of the first public health studies to ever target the gay Asian American male population. Public health interventions, in general, tend to leave out Asian Pacific Islanders (APIs) because aggregate data shows that APIs have one of the highest household incomes and educational attainment levels ("The Rise of Asian Americans," 2012). Due to the quantitative nature of the discipline, public health scholars and practitioners buy into the model minority stereotype, rendering Asian Americans less attractive for interventions. Although Chen and Tryon's article contributes important scholarship to the public health discourse, the discursive ways in which it treats the gay Asian American male body is not as fully nuanced as it could be.

In Chen and Tryon's study, they measure psychological distress in gay Asian American men by using an additive model, which is quite common in public health and other health fields. In this context, the additive model, a statistical method, is used in conjunction with the minority stress model – whereby the stress perceived from being a racial minority is added to the stress perceived from being a sexual minority. Chen hypothesized that both racial minority stress and sexual minority stress "would be directly and uniquely associated with lower self-esteem and higher psychological distress" (Chen & Tryon, 2012) Their findings did not match their hypothesis. In fact, the results showed that the added stress from being a racial/ethnic minority did not increase levels of psychological distress. Most of the gay Asian American men's psychological distress came from their sexual minority identity.

Public health and other health-related fields discursively treat identities as if they are disparate and exist in individual realms. This is evident in Chen and Tryon's decision to use an additive model that did not account for intersectionality of race/ethnicity and sexual identity. As such their conclusion can be read as problematic because it suggests that gay Asian American men do not perceive much stress from their racial/ethnic minority identity, reinforcing public health's complicity in prescribing to the model minority stereotype.

On the contrary, Wilson and Yoshikawa's 2004 study paints a much more nuanced picture of the discrimination that API (I use API here instead of Asian American because that was this study's target population) gay men face. Rather than prescribing to traditional public health discursive approaches that rely on quantitative data, Wilson and Yoshikawa used qualitative methods (mainly semi-structured interviews) to understand the relationship between social discrimination and HIV risk amongst API gay men. Their findings included that API gay men experience a wide variety of discrimination including homophobia and anti-immigrant discrimination. Although the authors do not use intersectionality discourse, they implicitly engage in it when they show that API gay men face the most discrimination from the gay community (27% of discrimination episodes) as opposed to the Asian community (9% of discrimination episodes) (Wilson &

Yoshikawa, 2004, p. 73). From the gay community, API gay men faced several different types of discrimination, with racism being the highest as opposed to anti-immigrant discrimination. This illustrates the complexities of the intersectionality between race and sexual identity.

My one critique of this study is that it continues the public health trend of pathologizing certain foreign bodies as inherently diseased. The authors believe that the increased immigration from China, South Asian, and Southeast Asia caused a rise in HIV/AIDS amongst the API gay community. By prescribing to this discourse, the authors play into the historic and continual construction of the Asian figure as a diseased, perpetual foreigner that needs to be corrected. However, I also acknowledge that the authors cite data pointing to high HIV incidence rates in these countries, which brings up a question: how do we avoid pathologizing bodies, but also acknowledge that some areas do, in fact, have high rates of HIV infections?

From these two studies, we can see that the public health discourse has a fraught relationship with concepts of intersectionality, minority stress and psychological distress, and pathologizing non-White bodies. In doing a critical discourse analysis on public health's treatment of the gay Asian American male, I have shown that the field does not always attend to reductionist, non-intersectional methods as I originally thought. With that said, the public health discourse must continue to evolve its quantitative methodologies to better account for intersectionality in its measurements.

## **Conclusion: Comparative Discourse Analysis of Asian American Studies and Public health**

Both the Asian American Studies and public health disciplines discursively approach the gay Asian American male in varied, complex ways that do not always attend to the nuances of the intersectionality between race and sexual identity.

Historically, public health as a discipline has not disaggregated data on the API population. Since public health is largely funded through state and federal sources, the discipline tends to use the racial and ethnic categories that are defined by the U.S. census. In general, finding disaggregated data on specific Asian ethnic groups has been extremely difficult, which is why my research specifically looks at Vietnamese American men. Due to public health's inherently White-centered discourse, Asian Americanist discourse provides counter-stories and research that diversify the data (whether it be qualitative or quantitative) and narratives available.

However, we cannot look to Asian Americanist discourse as unailing in its treatment of the gay Asian American male figure. Historically, Asian Americanist discourse has shunned the gay Asian American male figure in order to recuperate the masculinity of Asian American males who have been feminized

by a Western “superior” masculinity. Recent trends in Asian American discourse shows that queer theory is increasingly being incorporated into research, with a handful of scholars actually attending to the gay Asian American male subject such as those discussed in this paper. These scholars provide a unique intervention into the field of Asian American Studies by positing that the gay Asian American male has his own tools and frameworks to resist hegemonic masculinity present in both the Asian American community and the gay community.

Through a comparative lens, Asian Americanist discourse lacks the research that ties its rich qualitative work done on the gay Asian American male to the health of this population. Public health discourse shows potential in bridging this divide. In order to do so in an academically rigorous way, the discipline must adopt more creative ways in which to account for intersectionality in its quantitative methods. Additionally, public health discourse can learn to dismantle its racist tendencies and history by taking a page from Asian Americanist discourse to not pathologize Asian or any non-White body.

As a scholar who works at the nexus of Asian American Studies and public health, I will continue to attend to the ways in which each discipline treats the gay Asian American male. In doing so, I hope to combine these discursive approaches in order to design and carry out a research project that does not fall into the critiques that I have provided above.

## **Limitations and Future Considerations**

My paper has limitations due to its short length and narrow scope in terms of population. Firstly, I recognize that I used male, male body, man, and men interchangeably throughout the paper. To invoke all of these without including a section discussing the essentialism of gender could prove to be dangerous as it might unintentionally exclude the experiences of transgender men and gender nonconforming individuals who present as masculine (which we socially conflate with being a man). Therefore, in future iterations of this paper (as this is an ongoing project), I plan to provide a more thorough discussion on the social construction of gender as it relates to the gay Asian American males. What do I really mean by male? Who am I including and excluding when I use that identity? These are important questions for me to consider as I think about recruitment of informants for my project.

Secondly, the critical and comparative discourse analyses that I conducted in this paper are limited in their generalizability to the entire disciplines of Asian American Studies and public health. I only analyzed a few texts from each discipline, which clearly cannot and should not represent their respective academic fields as a whole. However, I still see a utility in making these analyses because it provides preliminary data for me as I continue to conduct my literature review.

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# JAMES HUYNH

## Masculinity in Gay Asian American Males Historiography

### Introduction

Amy Sueyoshi's (2016) *Queer Asian American Historiography* is quick to point out that "queerness has only just become visible in Asian American studies" (p. 267). One of the reasons why queerness was not visible beforehand stems from homophobia that existed during the Long Sixties of the Asian American Movement. In the field of queer studies, there is a dearth of an Asian American presence within the literature, which reflects a larger cultural practice of shunning gay Asian American males within the gay community. The absence of the gay Asian American male (GAAM) from these two fields is indicative of the abject position that he occupies within society.

In this historiography, I focus on three contemporary texts that discuss the (de)masculinization of GAAM bodies. I am interested in this lens of masculinity because its essentialism posits gay Asian American males at the bottom of the gay social hierarchy, thus positioning them in a space known as "dual minority" (Wilson & Yoshikawa, 2004). Despite my desire to focus on queer Asian American males, my initial literature search showed that much of the research has been done only in the gay community. Therefore, in the historiography, I narrow the focus of my population from the broader umbrella of queer to GAAM. My research interests center on the state of the dual minority and how that intertwines with health outcomes for the GAAM population. This study illuminates how GAAM are feminized, sexualized, racialized, and colonized in gay and transnational spaces that engender hegemonic white masculinity. These texts – C. Winter Han's (2015) *Geisha of a Different Kind: Race and Sexuality in Gaysian America*, Eng-Beng Lim's (2014) *Brown Boys and Rice Queens: Spellbinding Performance in the Asias*, and Nguyen Tan Hoang's (2014) *A View from the Bottom: Asian American Masculinity and Sexual Representation* – subvert the way we think about GAAM bodies by illustrating how the performative body is resistance to the colonizing figure of the gay, white cis-gender male.

### Femininity

Asian American males (AAMs) have long been subject to emasculation at the hands of hegemonic white masculinity. In essence, AAMs are the antithesis to the supposedly strong, desirable white male. "Masculinity is rewarded while femininity is discouraged" within the gay community, where a run through of personal ads on online dating sites offer the ubiquitous message, "Straight acting, no femmes" (Han, 2015, p. 2). Each of the three texts addresses the feminized Asian male in distinct ways that transgresses the typical correlation

that feminization of Asian males, especially in a U.S. context, is inherently and solely negative.

Nguyen writes that the deep anxieties cast around Asian American masculinity continue to be perpetuated because of a failure to explicitly interrogate sexual representation of Asian American males. *A View from the Bottom* analyzes pornographic films, scenes, and online gay cruising websites, which “have been deemed too peripheral to warrant serious academic inquiry” (Nguyen, p. 2). This unique intervention into the field of Asian American studies, queer studies, and film studies complicates how the bottom positioning “refract[s] the meanings of race, gender, sexuality, and nationality in American culture, and in so doing, simultaneously enable and constrain Asian American men in visual representation” (Nguyen, p. 3). The sexual, and often binary, roles of top and bottom in the gay community exemplify hegemonic masculinities that are at play and reflects the desire to replicate heterosexual norms. Top is the role of the person who penetrates, while bottom is relegated to the person who is to be penetrated. GAAM, due to their feminization, are stereotypically cast as the bottom in pornography films. This intentional act by the pornography industry subjects GAAMs to occupy abjectness. Even off the screen, GAAMs are seen as the bottoms of the gay community - feminine, weak. Their masculinity is literally stripped from them as they are being penetrated by white men.

Nguyen coins the concept of bottomhood, which he argues is more than just a fixed role/identity; rather, it is a position that is sexual, social, affective, political, and aesthetic. He cautions that the concept of bottomhood should not be a simple reclamation of the bottom position as one that is masculine, but rather one seeing power and resistance from femininity. Therefore, bottomhood transcends gender and sexuality because it is seeking to reframe femininity, extending the idea to other bodies besides the GAAM. For example, the character of Anacleto in *Reflections in the Golden Eye* – a film based on the American military which supposedly resembles security of masculinity at its core – forms a unique connection with his white mistress, Alison. Both represent a deviation from traditional gender norms: Anacleto as the gay, effeminate Filipino houseboy, and Alison as the troubled, white wife who rejected parts of her femininity by cutting off her nipples (Nguyen, p. 84). Their relationship represents a conjoining of the repudiation of gender norms thereby establishing a bottomhood union across multiple bodies that are not only GAAM.

In *Geisha of a Different Kind*, Han, who identifies as a member of the gay Asian community, embeds himself in his ethnographic account of the Seattle gaysians believing that his “own experience as a member of the group being studied led to a richer understanding of the phenomenon being explored” (Han, p. 11). He reviews various media objects and interviews to highlight the intersectional effects of sexuality, race, gender, familial and social ties on GAAMs. While Nguyen discusses femininity in GAAMs using methodologies that review the sexual role of the bottom, Han takes the Asian drag queen as

the central figure of his study. A white drag queen at a competition notes, “I’m never entering another pageant with Asian girls again” because “they’re just way too real” (Han, p. 22). The realness here implies that Asian men have the natural, delicate-like features to pass as a woman. However, that conception of a woman need not be purely based on biological phenotype, but rather it is the gay community’s collective imaginary of a “real woman, a larger-than-life and more graceful than a swan woman who demands attention” (Han, p.147).

Han also analyzes contemporary gay media such as Advocate and OUT magazines that reinforce the effeminate perception of the GAAM by superimposing feminine images of Asian men to contrast that of the mainstream young, attractive, muscular white men. He argues that the promotion of these images help to construct gay masculinity, which “is largely founded on transposing white masculinity over that of men of color” (Han, p. 91).

On a transnational level, the comparison between the feminized Asian male and the masculinized white male translates into the white man/brown boy dyad that Lim speaks about in the contexts of colonial Bali, postcolonial Singapore, and diasporic New York. Lim traces the transnational formation of the white man/brown boy dyad by analyzing performance in the Asias to center the narrative on the brown boy, who has typically been cast aside as a fetishized racial object. Centering the native boy is “crucial to the erotohistoriography of performance in the Asias” (p. 12). Other transfigurations of the white man/brown boy dyad can be “colonial/native, white/ethnic, poco-daddy/cosmo-homo, patriarch/boy, rice queen/ Asian houseboy” (Lim, p. 14). These dyads speak to the greater subjugation of a feminized Asia and Asian bodies within the Western imperial imaginary that can be rooted in hegemonic masculinity.

### **Foreignness/Racialization**

GAAMs face not only an imposed feminization upon their bodies but also a racialization that confers upon them perpetual foreignness that furthers their paradoxical status of being desexualized and hypersexualized in gay communities. As an extension of the “no femmes” message seen in gay online dating websites, there is also the, “Sorry, not into Asians. No offense. Just a preference” (Nguyen, p. 196). A pervasive discourse in the gay community is that preferences are free from social and political malintent. For the GAAM, this sentiment is grotesquely mistaken.

To understand the alienation of GAAMs that occurs in U.S. gay communities, Lim intervenes by proposing that it is rooted in the colonial dyad of the white man/brown boy that creates a transnational orientalism of the Asian male. Lim interchangeably uses brown boy and native boy in his book to represent the indigenous Southeast Asian male who has been infantilized and orientalized by Western colonizers. In the first chapter of *Brown Boys and Rice Queens*, Lim exposes the *kecak*, a homoerotic cultural dance that is now the

staple of Balinese tourism, as a project of constructed orientalism. According to Lim, the origins of the kecak came from Walter Spies, a German artist who made Bali his home. Spies played an integral role in promulgating Bali as a tropical paradise for Western travelers. He created and choreographed the kecak for the 1931 orientalist film *Island of Demons*, thus, puppeteering a homo-orientalist project through performance that has affected Bali's national discourse. From this vantage point, the Asian body is merely one that bends to the will of the Western male gaze.

The racial conjuring that appears in Bali extends to the present in U.S. gay communities. Han's interviews with GAAMs and his research from online dating websites such as Grindr digs beneath the surface of the usual discourse of "preferences as not racist" that was mentioned earlier. One of Han's interviewees responded to this messaging with, "I feel more like a minority in the gay community than I do in the Asian community because I'm gay" (Han, p. 95). That sentiment is taken a step further for some GAAMs who wish to be white or to be accepted by the white gay. Lim's analysis of the colonial dyad comes into play here because the diasporic gay Asian male now pines for the attention of the colonizer for the sake of validation. This validation comes in the form of rice queens. Rice queen is a term in the gay community that generally denotes a white man who fetishizes and desires the gay Asian male body. Han adds nuance to this term by noting that rice queens are "men who specifically prefer more feminine men, [that] many gay Asian American men find it easier to perform a submissive role in order to maximize their sexual capital" (Han, p. 144).

Nguyen complicates the idea that only white men could Orientalize the Asian male with his case study of Brandon Lee, a late 90s porn star who played the very rare role of the Asian top. Lee would appear in scenes penetrating other Asian men who had heavy accents. The latter represented the fetishized Asian body, while the former came to embody both the hegemonic masculine position as the top and the Western colonial figure as the American dominating the Oriental. These scenes represent the broader internalized racism that some GAAM hold as they attempt to embody gay whiteness. It is important to mention that Lee, himself, was subject to the Western male gaze as he was marketed by the industry as exotic and Oriental.

### **Performative Bodies as Resistance**

Although GAAMs are constrained by hegemonic masculinity and the Western male gaze, the three authors provide points of resistance that this community has produced as a means to survive and thrive in their racialized femininity.

The main theme in *Geisha of a Different Kind* is that Asian drag queens will bring salvation to the gay Asian community. The drag queen space is one of few in which GAAMs have a platform to raise their concerns, and act as

agents of change. Drag performance empowers GAAMs to draw power from feminine stereotypes in order to earn cultural capital. RuPaul's Drag Race, a popular TV show where drag queens compete, and other contemporary shows "have positioned drag queens at the forefront of gay life and on the cutting edge of gay culture" (Han, p. 144). Yet, drag queens are caught in the paradox of being this fantastical spectacle for gay men, while also being heavily stigmatized for embodying the stereotype of an effeminate gay man. Nonetheless, Asian drag queens have been able to appropriate this space to gain notoriety and connections by trading their more stigmatized status of race for the less stigmatized status of queen by "using precisely the characteristics that lead to their stigmatization in the first place" (Han, p. 148). Some Asian drag queens have been able to use their status to take leadership positions within LGBT community-based organizations, using that arena to address racism in the gay community. In this sense, Nguyen's bottomhood concept applies perfectly to the drag queen performance as a role that is sexual, political, aesthetic, and affective. To further elucidate this theme of Asian drag queens, Nguyen includes an analysis of the drag queen, Iron Pussy, the protagonist in *Iron Pussy III*. Iron Pussy as a name denotes indestructible femininity. In the film, Iron Pussy fights to safeguard a group of Asian bottoms in support of sex tourism. Much like the alliance between Anacleto and Alison in *Reflections in the Golden Eye*, we see another instance of bottomhood unity. Therefore, Asian drag queens effectively resist hegemonic masculinity by upholding their abject, feminized status as a platform to enact racial change.

Regarding online gay chat rooms, Nguyen and Han both discuss the necessity of racial markings in screen names. GAAMs use screen names such as "chinkorama, BBChink, chinkytwink, sxy\_chink\_boi, chinkyme" and so on because the lack of a racial mark means that other men will assume you are a white, gay male (Nguyen, p. 202). Nguyen posits that GAAMs are reterritorializing abjectness through mimicry. In doing so, these men do not reclaim Asianness in a nonabject way but rather employ the position of abject to be a threat.

Finally, *Brown Boys and Rice Queens* approaches performance as resistance in its third chapter about G.A.P. (Gay Asian Princess). Lim analyzes Asian American performance artist Justin Chin's queering of "Asian encounters with colonial histories" in his 1990 solo performance, *Go, or The Approximate Infinite Universe of Mrs. Robert Lomax* (Lim, p. 164). Chin queers the white man/brown boy dyad by acting as Boy, who is Mr. Robert Lomax's (the main character from Quine's *Suzie Wong*) Thai male lover. Chin's character of Boy plays opposite that of Suzie Wong, calling out Mr. Lomax's orientalist and colonialist actions, "He wants to paint me, but I tell him that I don't want to be painted. He says, Paint to draw a picture of you. He thinks that I think that he wants to paint me. I tell him what the fuck he means, and he laughs." (Lim, p. 156, emphasis in original). Lim argues that Chin's queer colonial dyad flips the

traditional dyad by placing the brown boy in a state of colonial consciousness.

The performative body, whether through sexual acts, screen names, drag queen shows, or performance act, acts as the GAAM's tool to resist and dismantle hegemonic masculinity. Han, Lim, and Nguyen make a call to go beyond decrying the emasculation of the Asian male body. Instead, there is already power existent in the feminized and racialized body.

## Conclusion

Masculinity studies, queer studies, and Asian American Studies historically have left out the GAAM as a subject of focus. When discussing masculinity in the Asian American context, the contemporary anxiety lies around the emasculation of the Asian male, rendering him a desexualized object, while traditional anxiety centered around his sexual predatory habits towards white women. These anxieties sometimes manifest in the Asian male's attempt to engender masculinity, resulting in anti-feminist behaviors and attitudes. What does that mean for the GAAM? Is he doubly marginalized for embodying sexual deviancy and femininity? How does that marginalization affect him? Is femininity inherently negative?

I chose to cover Nguyen's *A View from the Bottom*, Han's *Geisha of a Different Kind*, and Lim's *Brown Boys and Rice Queens* precisely to answer this question that I have posed for myself since "coming out of the closet". Not only does this historiography highlight the recent (years 2014-2016) interventions in the field of Asian American Studies, queer studies, and masculinity studies by positioning bottomhood, GAAMs, and brown boys as resistant to hegemonic masculinity and colonialism, but it was a personal journey for me to find strength in my own forms of femininity and Asianness. Femininity in a GAAM body does not equal weakness.

In the field of public health, research has shown that minorities inhabit the constant discrimination that they face as chronic stress as well as differential access to social goods and resources, which carries negative health consequences. My research interests are in the health outcomes amongst queer Asian Americans males as it relates to their dual minority status. By looking at the (de)masculinization of GAAM, the intersections of gender, race, and sexuality explain their abject position in both the Asian American community and the gay community. However, now my research has evolved beyond thinking that the position of abject only correlates with negative outcomes. Rather, how can I incorporate into my research the notion that resistance, and therefore, positive health outcomes can come out of GAAMs who draw strength from this notion of bottomhood? With this new way of thinking, I hope to subvert the way public health thinks about lower socioeconomic positions as groups that occupy the lower rung of the social gradient in health, and more of as groups that have assets based upon their existing conditions and bodies.

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# VRINDA VASAVADA

## A Balancing Act: Experiences of First-Generation Indian Americans at Highly Selective Universities

In 1965, Congress passed the National Immigration and Nationality Act that removed nationality-based quotas and created channels for the immigration of highly skilled workers, paving the way for an influx of students and professionals from many Asian countries, especially India. Today, Indian citizens receive 70% of the country's H-1B visas for highly-skilled work, and more than half of them go on to reside in this country and build their families here. As a result, over the past ten years alone, the Indian population in the United States has grown by 70%, one of the largest minority group growth rates this country has ever witnessed (US Census, 2010). While 76% of Indian immigrants came to this country with a bachelor's degree or higher, a majority of them either did not study in the United States or completed their master's degrees, as opposed to bachelor's degrees, in this country ("Indian Immigrants," 2017). When they make the decision to stay in the United States, often for the educational opportunities this country would offer their children, Indian parents face the arduous task of navigating a foreign education system and reconciling its goals with their own educational goals for their children. This also makes their children the first in their families to pursue an undergraduate education in the United States, adding an extra layer of uncertainty to an already confusing transition for every teenager going to college. Thus, although 70% of Indian Americans have college degrees, more than double the national percentage and higher than any other minority group, the severe difficulty of the transition out of the comfortable community their parents have created for them into the college environment often goes unnoticed (US Census, 2010).

Current scholarship on the experiences of Indian Americans focuses heavily on the parental perspective and on conflicts between Indian parents and their American-born children. However, there is much more to the Indian American experience—beyond the tensions of this relationship—that is often ignored. Specifically, many first-generation Indian Americans who attend highly-selective universities are often considered the epitome of "success" by their home communities, but struggle during the transition to college which often feels like a balancing act. To gain insight on both the shared and unique experiences of these students, I engaged in in-depth conversations with seven male and female college freshmen attending Stanford, Carnegie Mellon, and Harvard: I asked them about their childhood experiences, expectations set by parents and both Indian American and non-Indian American peers, and how their perspectives on education and identity have been reaffirmed or challenged since coming to college. This paper focuses on my findings pertaining to these students' relationships with

their parents and peers and how these previous bonds shape their adjustments to the new academic and social environment of college. As they make this transition, first generation Indian Americans, especially at highly-selective universities, face numerous cultural conflicts between the sheltered environment they have been raised in and that which they now call home. While many of them have internalized their parents' and peers' academic expectations of them, they still struggle to reconcile the vastly different purposes education serves in American and Indian cultures. As they leave their home communities where being "Indian" has an accepted communal definition, they strive to develop a more personal definition of their cultural identity that they can hold onto and share with their peers.

### **Effects of Parent-Child Relationship on Academic Development**

In their early years, first-generation Indian Americans often develop very strong connections with their parents and family, a result of both their parents' positive mindset towards their child's academic performance and their parents' attempts to keep them safe. A majority of these students report that their childhood was a blissful time of uninhibited growth and curiosity during which they did not face any tremendous difficulties or hardships. They fondly remember time spent with their parents and siblings and note that their parents never pressured them but were very involved in and placed great value on their education.

This emphasis on education is a result of both the filtering that the immigration system performs and the fact that many Indian parents have chosen to remain in the United States to ensure that their children receive a higher quality education. Because such a large percentage of Indian immigrants come through the H1-B highly-skilled worker visa or to pursue further studies, they bring with them very high levels of academic pursuit and a reverent mindset towards education. As a result, "it is impressed upon the children from the very start that their sole vocation, as children, is to work hard and get the best possible education" (DasGupta, p. 61). They are also taught from early on that if they get a good education, they will be successful, much like their parents, many of whom "came here with very little and had to work their way up" (Jay, personal communication, March 1, 2017). They place an added level of emphasis on a good work ethic and academic excellence as safeguards against "color-prejudice... which...they themselves [have experienced] in their own places of work and commerce" (p. 61). As a result, parents imbue in their children a strong linkage between education and success, defining education as a means of overcoming any racial obstacles or economic hardships they may face.

Education holds an even greater amount of importance for the first generation because, at some point in their lives, most Indian American children become aware that their education was a key factor in their parents' decision to stay in this country. This reasoning places a higher degree of responsibility on the children's

shoulders: they feel the need to succeed and live up to parental expectations in order to justify their parents' decision. And it does not stop at their individual success. As Meera, a freshman at Harvard, recounts, "Our parents came here not totally just so that their families back home would have a comfortable life but so we and our kids would have a comfortable life" (personal communication, February 25, 2017). This collectivist mindset sets up extremely high standards for Indian American children—they are taught that their current hard work and focus will have long-term gains and that they as individuals are simply part of a greater familial cycle. Their success determines whether their parents made the right decision by staying in this country, and also directly determines the success of their progeny; and, since getting a high quality education leads to success, Indian Americans often internalize their parents' emphasis on academic pursuits.

Parents often instill this same value for education in their children by getting very involved in their child's early academic pursuits and encouraging them to be inquisitive. Jay, a freshman at Carnegie Mellon, recounts, "Anytime I wanted to know anything, I would ask my mom, and, if she didn't know the answer, she would find me a resource to learn about it" (personal communication, March 1, 2017). Most students do not recall their parents getting mad at them when they occasionally performed poorly in school, but instead remember their parents asking if they had done their best. The unsaid rule in many Indian American households was that missing a hard question was okay but making a stupid mistake was not. As Rahul, a freshman at Stanford, recalls, "If I was capable of getting a 100% my parents would definitely have expected it of me" (personal communication, February 26, 2017). Despite the stereotype of many Asian parents being "tiger parents" who are demanding at the expense of their child's mental and emotional wellbeing, Indian parents of students at highly selective universities often did not set the academic expectations for their children or push them to achieve the objective best: they encouraged their children to instead perform to the best of their abilities. This attitude towards academic performance pushed many of these students to set high goals for themselves early on, encouraging them to foster their intellectual curiosity. As a result, they also often developed a healthy, loving relationship with their parents. Many Indian Americans at highly selective universities shared that they "consider their parents their best friends," especially their moms with whom they often spent more time growing up. Students report "always feeling very comfortable confiding in their parents" and cherishing this relationship that many other teenagers their age often see more as a burden (Pooja, personal communication, March 5, 2017). They associate their parents with support and encouragement, especially when it comes to academic performance, because in the past every time they have not performed as well as they expected, they have never received a negative reaction from their parents. One student, a freshman at Stanford, recalls that her parents' approach to her frustration about a subpar performance has always been very logical: "it's always been like 'why,' 'why did this happen,' 'how can you work on it next time,' 'don't

worry about it, it's only temporary"—it's always a very positive interaction so now I feel very comfortable talking to them about those things” (Pooja, personal communication, March 5, 2017). In this manner, not only do parents encourage their children to adopt high standards for themselves but also establish a positive relationship with them, providing necessary guidance along the way but steering away from the “tiger parent” stereotype that many Asian parents succumb to.

As a result of their parents’ positive growth mindset towards and early involvement in their education, Indian American students often internalize their parents’ academic expectations even when it comes to career choices. Although the parents of a majority of these students do not explicitly steer them towards science and math, their parents’ occupations and the inherent definition of education as an enabler of success and stability prompts Indian American students to heavily lean towards STEM majors. The first major component in this phenomenon is the lack of exposure to the humanities while growing up. One interviewed student explained the reason for this lack of early experience with history in particular: “my parents are engineers. They don’t know anything about American history and so I never was exposed to that side of things growing up” (Meera, personal communication, February 25, 2017). Thus, their parents are more heavily involved in their math and science education, because these are fields their parents often studied in great depth growing up and have more knowledge about. The second, often more serious, motivator is the emphasis on education as a means of ensuring success and securing a comfortable life for their progeny in the future. Many Indian Americans have heard their parents’ accounts of financial difficulties upon first arriving to this country, so a comfortable life for themselves and their progeny means first of all being financially secure and prosperous. Unfortunately, this sense of financial stability tends to be associated with a career in science or technology as opposed to the humanities, because these careers have higher average incomes and correspond to higher social status in many Asian countries. As a result of this greater parental involvement in math and science education and the collectivist mindset that creates pressure to pick a career that can support both themselves and their offspring, first generation Indian Americans often come into highly selective universities biased towards pursuing a STEM-based major.

### **Expectations from Peers and Effects on Academic Growth**

Most Indian Americans do not see the expectations discussed so far as burdens: they internalize the importance of education, of setting high standards for themselves, and of picking a career that is sustainable and stable. However, the expectations that many report as overwhelming are those that their peers place on them in terms of their academic performance. Pooja, a freshman at Stanford, reports that after a few weeks of high school, when her Indian American peers had established that she was really intelligent, they started comparing themselves to

her. Her peers would tell her “that their moms always talked about” and “compared them to” her, which greatly alarmed her (personal communication, March 5, 2017). For her, academic goals had always been personal, and she remembers thinking: “I don’t wanna be a benchmark for how well or poorly you are doing!” (Pooja, personal communication, March 5, 2017). This interaction is greatly reflective of the peer-to-peer competition that many Indian Americans who grow up around other Indian Americans report having experienced. While most Indian Americans at highly selective universities state that unlike others’ parents their own parents never compared them to their peers, they do agree that there is often an unhealthy level of competition within the Indian American community. This competition is often originally ignited by ineffective and harmful parenting strategies but is perpetuated by students’ own desires to live up to their parents’ expectations and gain praise. Most Indian Americans at highly selective universities understand the difference between healthy and unhealthy competition: “there’s healthy competition where you admire someone and strive to be like them or even do better than them” and then there is unhealthy competition “that comes with the desire to bring the other person” (Pooja, personal communication, March 5, 2017). They acknowledge that their parents never promoted this negative type of competition but admit that even being surrounded by it places immense pressure on them to continue to “operate at this level because you are not allowed to drop down in the eyes of your peers” (Rohan, personal communication, February 27, 2017). Thus, like many other high-achieving and high-performing students, they feel the need to live up to their perfect reputation of academic excellence, which can often lead to an unhealthy level of stress.

### **Conflicting Academic Priorities during the College Transition**

First generation Indian American students enter highly selective universities carrying the weight of and motivation that results from all these expectations. While many of them admit that it is better that people hold them to extremely high standards as opposed to having negative expectations for them, they agree that the combination of parental and peer expectations creates an unrealistic level of perfection that they strive to reach. When they start college, they suddenly find themselves surrounded by a completely different purpose for education: “what Stanford tells us is explore—find what makes you happy, find what you are really interested in, take advantage of the amazing opportunities you have here” (Rohan, personal communication, February 27, 2017). They are surrounded by narratives of and messages to find their true vocation or calling—to focus on self-development and allow their education to transform them. The definition of education in this environment becomes more self-centered: the teachers and mentors that parents have all along taught their children to idolize now emphasize personal inquiry and channeling one’s passions to impact the world. Until now, many parents have explicitly or implicitly advised their kids, “Don’t

let your passion become your career because that might significantly impact your life and its stability” (Rahul, personal communication, February 26, 2017). Now, these students are instead encouraged to abandon concerns about the stability of their families in the future in favor of thinking about what they truly enjoy and are passionate about, a consideration that many of them have never made in their lives until now.

In the light of these new ideals that inundate them as they find their place in the college community, Indian American students face a seemingly unresolvable conflict between the academic expectations that their parents and peers back home have for them and those that their new educational environment sets for them. Throughout their entire lives, these students have been taught to think beyond the present when it comes to education: to work hard to justify their past and secure their future. Getting a high-quality education has higher stakes than personal development and growth for them: it is a means of ensuring their family’s stability in this seemingly foreign land. One student, a freshman at Carnegie Mellon, shared that her parents have always told her she could pursue any career she wanted, but they wanted her to be good at it and happy doing it. She explains, “[my parents] sort of assumed that the ‘happy doing it’ part was there and focused on the ‘good at it.’ And so now I’m coming here and I’m thinking, ‘I’m not really that good at it and I’m not that happy doing it either,’ so its raising some questions” (Priya, personal communication, March 9, 2017). Yet, students like Priya and Rahul, a freshman at Stanford, are hesitant to explore other majors and careers, for fear of “pulling the rug from under [their] parents’ feet,” of “putting the work of all the former generations to no use” (personal communication, February 26, 2017). When it comes to their parents’ and peers’ expectations, they have less to do with the exact choice of major or career and more to do with consistency and stability: several students shared that if they had shown interest in a different career early on, their parents would have encouraged them to pursue it. However, one student shares that changing her mind right now would be “concerning” and would raise many questions including “how will you get a job in this, you have no preparation” (Meera, personal communication, February 25, 2017). Thus, not only are there high levels of academic excellence they are held to, but also a level of commitment and consistency that corresponds directly with the tremendous value the entire community places on stability and financial prosperity. As a result, Indian American students find themselves attempting to reconcile these two vastly different purposes of education in their first years of college: they wish to make the most of their educational opportunities—to allow their educational environment to transform them into better human beings—and yet, to avoid letting their parents and community back home down by abandoning the stable path to a secure future that their parents have carefully paved for them.

Faced with this conflict, Indian American students develop a number of coping mechanisms to reconcile these differences. Many, like Rahul, who have fully internalized the perspectives of their parents maintain their original

definition, adopting other interests they develop along the way as hobbies and essentially sacrificing the discovery of their own passions in favor of a “financially secure future for their children” (personal communication, February 26, 2017). Others completely abandon the perspectives and concerns about their community back home and explore their options, often straining the previously strong bond with their parents. Most students, however, find themselves somewhere in the middle, attempting to balance all of these expectations, many of which they have at least partially internalized: to pick a sustainable career, to stick to what they had told everyone, to be open to being transformed by their education, to develop their own understanding of the true purpose of education. They struggle with the risks, especially the possibility of letting their parents down, which often haunts them as they remember that their parents often came to this country and stayed for them—so their lives and those of their children would be more stable, more comfortable, and more prosperous. Despite all this confusion, there is, in many of them, a level of optimism that they have learned from their experiences balancing expectations for the past 18+ years: as one student eloquently phrased it, “I do have some degree of faith that when I graduate it will be with the degree that I want” (Meera, personal communication, February 25, 2017).

### **Transitioning from a Tight-Knit Indian Community**

Alongside this drastic shift of academic mindsets that first generation Indian American students encounter when they enter highly selective universities comes an often equally significant change in the demographics of their peers and friends. While many students report having gone to high schools that were extremely diverse or where there were not many other Indian American students, they usually report having many Indian American friends inside or outside of school. Often times, their parents helped form their friend group when they were young, with other Indian families in their neighborhood. In other cases, students themselves report “gravitating towards people with the same values as them,” who often ended up being other Indian American students. In addition, some parents implicitly preferred that their kids were friends with other Indian Americans, as a means of ensuring a safe and comfortable environment for their children. Finally, some whose parents encouraged them to be open to friends from all backgrounds still found themselves expected to socialize with other Indian Americans by their peers in schools with a white majority and a small but growing Indian American population. Thus, as a result of some combination of social pressures and parental efforts in the years before college, many Indian Americans found themselves forming friendships often, but sometimes solely, with other Indian Americans.

These friendships often lead to the development of an extremely strong first generation subculture and community. Many students agree that there is definitely a communal definition of Indian American identity that grows from this strong subculture. Some scholars trace the development of this definition back to the

parents' desire to preserve "authentic" Indian ideals in their children, which has led to the "selective importing of elements and agents of Indian culture" that refer to the India from a few decades ago as a land of perfection (Maira, 2002, p. 55). Members of this community often assess "true" Indianness according to "watching Hindi films, speaking Indian languages...going to 'Indian parties' and socializing with other Indian Americans" (p. 11). The adoption of this identity is also often viewed as binary—either one is a "true" Indian and fits all aspects of this definition, or he/she is considered "white-washed" and separated from the group. Thus, the Indian American community ends up coming up with an implicit definition of their identity through a combination of various factors.

## **Defining Cultural Identity Independently**

Regardless of whether or not they agree and identify with these aspects of the communal definition of identity, most Indian Americans subconsciously bring it with them during their transition to highly selective universities. For many, this is the most diverse environment they have ever been in; it is often much more reflective of American demographics than any other they have experienced. For most, if not all, it is vastly different from their home environment and immediate community. Many students report there being way fewer Indian Americans, while others note the genuine diversity they notice. In previous environments, "diversity was often just a set of statistics to put on the high school's website" as "people still expected you to hang out with the 'Indian clique'" (Priya, personal communication, March 9, 2017). Upon coming to highly selective universities, many students notice how free they are to form friendships with people from vastly different backgrounds "simply on the basis of our inherent humanity and personality traits that we have in common" (Priya, personal communication, March 9, 2017).

This major difference in environments often produces a variety of responses from students. Many who had internalized the communal definition of their identity often find it difficult to open up to their peers, as they think those around them do not understand the aspects of culture, notably music, songs, foods, and languages, that shape their preferences and contribute so strongly to their identity (Meera, personal communication, February 25, 2017). These students often end up holding onto outward representations of culture and continuing to seek out other Indian Americans. In contrast, those who previously felt uncomfortable with the communal definition of "Indianness," and saw their identity as more than just "various objects that [came] to stand in for tradition, such as clothing...food or music" feel relieved to finally receive the opportunity to define their identity for themselves (p. 117). These students, however, face the more arduous task of definition, one that scholars of the Indian diaspora continue to struggle with even today. Like many students, most scholars critique the commonly accepted definition, asking the first generation to take a more substantive approach to

their cultural identity: they advise them to reflect on the underlying values of traditions, while foregoing some of the outdated aspects as opposed to deifying them. By nature, there is no conclusive answer that all students reach in their defining process: being Indian American holds a different meaning to each and every student. Yet, by embracing this opportunity to define their personal meaning of their cultural identity, Indian American students can hold onto and share aspects of their culture that they truly appreciate.

Thus, while transitioning out of the comfort of their home environments, first generation Indian Americans at highly-selective universities struggle to reconcile the academic goals their parents and peers have established for them with those of the American higher education system. They also find themselves in an environment where they are given the freedom to define what their Indian American identity means to them: to choose which aspects they consider crucial to it and share those with their peers. Often until this point, Indian American students have been sheltered by their parents in the bubble of their community. As a majority of the interviewed students reported, they have never thought this much about their cultural identity, despite the fact that it is very important to them. With this transition come incredible opportunities: to think independently of the sometimes skewed communal definition and to blend what they have learned in their previous environment with the change in perspective that a higher educational institution provides. While this mixing is not always harmonious, it empowers Indian Americans to reflect and to define themselves and their place with relation to their rich past and undoubtedly bright future.

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# KIMIKO HIROTA

## The Japanese Art of Haiku

Just 3 lines consisting of 17 syllables total – how can so little carry so much meaning? Haiku has remained a salient art form over centuries, with Japanese aesthetic notions and cultural values interwoven in every reflection and image. Although haiku is historically Japanese, it is also important to note haiku’s development over time and its integration into Western culture as well. To understand haiku, it is necessary to first analyze traditional Japanese haikus written by “the Great Four” – Basho, Buson, Shiki, and Issa – for their foundational, formative influence. From its aesthetics to its socio-cultural implications, an investigation of haiku will help provide an appreciation for how and why haiku was created and why it continues to remain a popular art form today.

The general public of the Western world typically recognizes haiku as a rigid, short form of poetry, without taking into consideration its purpose, implications, and cultural insights. Especially for haiku’s initial leading poets, the art is more than just an art; it is a way of learning about and perceiving the world. Although haiku is indeed quite brief, this element is what makes haiku so special and significant. Its precise language leaves room for suggestiveness and requires that authors choose their imagery and observation with great care. For readers, haiku requires that they actively bring their own thoughts and experiences to the art presented. This relationship grants the haiku to evoke genuine emotion merely based on an image and an observation, all within 17 syllables (usually, less than 17 syllables when written in Japanese). Additionally, haiku is the essential art form to capture a small moment that carries a fleeting insight. It allows authors and readers to reflect on nature and life in a way that is foreign to the structure of everyday reality. Despite its necessary reliance on direct, vivid imagery, haiku still provides readers the opportunity to form their own opinions and impressions, as authors gently and intentionally place an image with an observation side by side without their voice or reaction explicitly included.

The origins of haiku began in the 16th century with its refined form developing predominantly by Japanese Zen poet Matsuo Basho, a man known as the greatest master of haiku. He lived during the Edo period, when there was economic growth, strict hierarchical roles, isolationism, and active consumption of arts and culture. After quitting his career as a teacher, Basho spent his time wandering the countryside, mastering his ability to simply and naturally reflect on the world. Given the Edo period’s political and social climate, Basho grew to fame during his lifetime and even more so afterward. He provided influential wisdom to those who considered themselves “his disciples” and the general public. One example of Basho’s intuition can be analyzed through the following haiku:

Nobly, the great priest  
deposits his daily stool  
in bleak winter fields

While this haiku appears to only make an observation, Basho is noticing the ordinary while raising much deeper implications. Basho intentionally presents the priest completing a ridiculously natural, normal task instead of an extraordinary task to create a larger commentary on nobility; a priest is not noble for his exceptional robes or authority. Rather, nobility can exist in any moment or effort. This idea is drawn out of a seemingly standard moment in time, but it reflects traditional Japanese culture and philosophy. Order and status are crucial to the function and harmony of Japanese life. Hierarchy is considered natural, and one's role or distinction is not dependent upon external factors or actions. Therefore, Basho's respect and understanding of the priest's nobility is clearly reliant on his status and not on the current action he is performing.

Basho's work demonstrates the Japanese aesthetic *sabi*, which values desolateness and aged beauty. In this haiku, the priest is alone, placed "in bleak winter fields," creating an image of the priest surrounded by nothing and no one for significant distance. He is in the midst of barren area that likely was once full of life, but now its beauty stems from its desolate ambience. At the same time, there is a quality of tranquility in the simple nature of the priest's action. Basho chooses to focus on an activity that does not boast or highlight the priest's duties because Japanese aesthetic values humanity's connection to nature and its significance over the extravagant and ornate. Basho's ability to capture Japanese heart and mind ensured his legacy as the most famous poet of his time.

Another important voice in haiku was Yosa Buson, who is remembered as one of the greatest masters of haiga, which incorporates painting and linked verse. He considered Matsuo Basho his idol, and traveled along the same wilderness that Basho had when writing his famous travel diary, *Oku no Hosomichi* (The Narrow Road to the Deep North). Buson wrote 3,000 haikus that demonstrated his mastery of observation. Below is just one example of his expertise:

The spring sea rising  
and falling, rising  
and falling all day

Buson's haiku recognizes the *wabi* of nature, for this pattern of the sea would not be worth noticing by Western ideals or aesthetic. Buson does not write about the sea's crashing waves or its storms; the understated beauty of its effortless rising and falling deserves to be distinguished and praised. *Wabi* – simple, austere beauty – exists in this image seeing that despite its uneventful nature, the reader, by such aesthetic, has a lack of desire or want for anything else. Simplicity, tranquility, and emptiness are all showcased in this haiku through its lack of variation or powerful

action, declaring this force as enough and worthy of appreciation. There is a sense of modesty in the spring sea's repetition that may be overlooked in Western culture, but Buson brings its shy beauty to the light.

Today, one of the Great Four outnumbers the Japanese books on Buson and almost equals that of Basho: Kobayashi Issa, a Japanese poet and lay Buddhist priest. He wrote over 20,000 haikus which were popular for his use of local dialects and casual speech. In his personal life, he suffered deeply from the loss of his mother and later his wife and four children who died in infancy. Although he faced so much grief, Issa's poetry was considered childlike in its simplicity, with many haikus referencing small plants and insects. In comparison to Basho and Buson, Issa is generally perceived as more accessible because of his willingness to put his own personality and passion into his haikus. A personal favorite highlights Issa's strength through his vulnerability:

This dewdrop world  
is but a dewdrop world  
and yet, and yet...

This haiku was supposedly written a year after the death of Issa's firstborn child with the prescript "Grieving." Issa begins the haiku by expressing the Buddhist idea of *mujo*, or impermanence, in which one should not have attachments considering that life is like a dewdrop, soon to disappear. Regardless of this belief, Issa reveals that he still grew to have a fond attachment, surely referring to his late son. Compassion and suffering come hand in hand, existing in the world despite its ephemerality. The most important, personal piece of Issa's haiku is actually unsaid, left for readers to develop their own response based on their personal experiences. Attached to impermanence is the Japanese term *mono no aware*, which is nearly synonymous except for its larger implications regarding emotion. *Mono no aware* encompasses the nostalgia connected to the passing moment as well as the deeper sadness of this brief state being the reality of life. Issa's haiku is immersed in both of these raw emotions, a rarity found in any of the other Great Four poets' work.

In the development of modern poetry beyond Basho's foundation, Masaoka Shiki is credited to have reformed and developed haiku into what it is today. He lived during the Meiji period of Japan, a time in which the nation began to move away from isolation and toward pluralism and civil rights. In this context, haiku was no longer particularly popular, but Shiki dropped out of university and began to advocate for haiku reform. In his lifetime, he wrote over 25,000 haikus, even becoming a haiku editor for a newspaper. Shiki's influence is especially notable as he coined the terms "haiku," which replaced "hokku," and "tanka," which replaced "waka." Most importantly, Shiki's works of literary criticism, including *Haikai Taiyo*, included various suggestions on how to improve haiku, leading the art form to regain its prestige. One of the key innovations to Shiki's version of haiku than

that of Basho was his emphasis on realism, an idea induced by the new Western influences trickling into Japan at the time. Shiki's most famous haiku is as follows:

I bite a persimmon  
the bell tolls  
Horyu-ji Temple

Unlike yugen and wabi's imaginative nature, Shiki wished for a "third literature" that lies somewhere between fantasy and reality. In this haiku, Shiki succeeds. First, a reader may initially assume that Shiki is just eating a persimmon as a bell rings for temple. However, Shiki intends to tie both the past and present together in this haiku. By taking a bite of a persimmon, he is drawn back to a memory of the Horyu-ji Temple, recalling the vivid sound of its bell. While there is a layer of realism, he also connects to a deeper subliminal level. Through his convincing belief in realism, Shiki presents a haiku that carries meaning on the surface while also portraying an even larger significance – that insight can be found through in anything, anywhere.

From Busho to Shiki, haiku transformed the way people understand and appreciate a single moment. Without haiku, nature and observation would not be considered so naturally and poetically intertwined. Today, haiku is popular and established in Western culture because it is typically taught in elementary school as an introductory form of poetry. In Western culture, haiku is diluted down to its structure and one rule: it must include nature in some way. While these two recommendations are generally true in Japanese culture as well, westernized haikus will forever miss some of the art form's most essential aspects: Japanese aesthetics and cultural philosophies. Despite this impairment, haiku remains a beloved form of poetry; it is one that creates multiple worlds in just a few words.

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# OLIVIA POPP

## Asian American media activism through alternative media in the television/non-film visual entertainment industry

### I. Introduction

In recent years, examples of Asian American misrepresentation, which encompasses both a lack of representation as well as incorrect, stereotyped representation, is simultaneously becoming more prominent, more controversial, and more of an issue for both the Asian American community and other communities of color. Asian American activists and entertainment industry professionals continue to discuss this unsettling phenomenon and helm a massive, progressive social movement of Asian American activism within television and alternative media, with the latter typically defined as lesser-used forms of media used or created in nontraditional ways. With repeated incidents of misrepresentation on television appearing much more noticeably and frequently in news and media sources, members of this movement not only push for total correction of this problem, but also advocate for purposefully increased Asian American representation in television shows, and, by extension, the utilization of alternative media as a secondary outlet for social change. The Asian American media activist movement is rapidly growing and receiving more support within the visual entertainment industry, with series that showcase dynamic, respectfully-portrayed Asian American characters being lauded for their pioneering approach and series that perpetuate stereotypes harshly criticized by the Asian American community. This movement also has had a sizable impact upon the increase in the appearance of complex, multifaceted Asian American roles in television shows, and advocates of this new movement suggest varying solutions to the issue of misrepresentation. While there have been many past, present, and proposed solutions to overcoming Asian American misrepresentation, a solution that is currently gaining ground is the pursuit of broader, less mainstream avenues of media, or alternative media such as online video and noncommercial programming, social media for activism, and independently-produced streaming content, in order to support a rising new generational wave of artists.

Issues regarding misrepresentation of Asian Americans in media, particularly non-film productions that are smaller in scale and budget, are addressed again and again in popular culture, social media, education, and the entertainment industry. The address of this flaw is becoming increasingly stronger and the case for it is becoming increasingly larger as more and more of our society identifies as individual of color who are thus not represented fairly or equally on television. Thus, out of this problem comes the Asian American media activist movement, which in part advocates for the elimination of Asian American mis-

representation and for actively increasing not only the diversity of Asian American bodies onscreen, but also increasing the scope and size of Asian American representation in the entertainment industry. This movement, as it continues to gain momentum, has been spread throughout a variety of sources, but continues to mainly garner the most success and effect through social media and web outlets, riding on the shoulders of Asian Americans willing to speak out against controversial casting, problematic television shows, and others who believe in the continued suppression of Asian Americans onscreen.

## II. The historical to contemporary landscape of Asian Americans in the television sector

The Asian American media activist movement has deeper roots within the greater framework of television history itself, with decades of onscreen characters preserving the continued misrepresentation of Asian Americans. Television became popular in the 1950s with portrayals of Asian Americans that relied mainly on the concept of “Asian Americans...viewed as a yellow blight upon the land” and the distorted “white/dominant-yellow/subordinate relationship.”<sup>1</sup> Attempts to effect change in existing programming were unsuccessful, seen through the progress, or lack thereof, of television shows over the course of the 20th century including *Bachelor Father* (1957-62), *Have Gun Will Travel* (1957-63), *Bonanza* (1959-73), *Valentine’s Day* (1964-65), *Star Trek*, (1966-1969), and *Falcon Crest* (1981-90). For example, all of these shows featured the popular “stock Chinese bachelor character,” a stereotype that continued to perpetuate sentiments stemming from hatred towards early immigrants to the US.<sup>2</sup> Shows such as *M\*A\*S\*H* (1972-83), which, despite being set in Oujonbu, South Korea, fail to include more than a few Asians or Asian Americans over the course of the entire series; *M\*A\*S\*H* also marked a shift in misrepresentation from false, stereotyped, or improper representation to include a lack of Asian American representation that deserved to be there within the context of the show.

With increasing misrepresentation, dissent began to break out almost immediately in the form of the creation of Asian American media activist groups, protests, and rallies. Activism subsequently continued far into the following decades, with the term broadened to include any sort of activities “designed to bring about awareness or act as symbolic gestures,” with the goal of “[making] meaningful, long-term change in the media landscape.”<sup>3</sup> This thus developed into versions of activism seen in the media-rich society of today, including in their roles as “cable channel owners, owners of advertising agencies, YouTube

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<sup>1</sup> Darrell Y. Hamamoto, *Monitored Peril: Asian Americans and the Politics of TV Representation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 1-8.

<sup>2</sup> Hamamoto, *Monitored Peril*, 7.

<sup>3</sup> Lori Kido Lopez, *Asian American Media Activism: Fighting for Cultural Citizenship* (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 23-24.

videographers, Twitter users, bloggers, and others.”<sup>4</sup>

With the advent of the Internet and smaller-scale forms of visual entertainment besides television, media activism has turned to a younger, more technologically-driven audience, finding outlets through social media, streaming content, and online video, all of which form the foundations of alternative media. YouTube stars such as Anna Akana, Ryan Higa, Lilly Singh, and Timothy DeLaGhetto receive millions of views and subscribers through their videos that not only highlight their personalities but discuss, counteract, and disprove fallacies surrounding Asian American representation in media, the subject of which is unique to content produced by people of color. Many Asian American Twitter users, which encompasses but is not limited to a number of authors and actors including Constance Wu, Ming-Na Wen, and Eddie Huang, have been very explicit and vocal in their arguments against Asian American representation, taking to social media in order to spread their message to a wider audience. Through a variety of different platforms, Asian American artists and audience members seek to transform how America views Asian Americans through an introduction of a burgeoning new platform that is starting to take shape as a core component of media activism today: alternative media.

### III. The problem with the traditional television system

Even today within the traditional network television system, compared to Americans of other ethnicities and backgrounds, Asian Americans have incredibly fewer opportunities to be cast in the television industry, and even more end up onscreen past pilot season and cancelled shows. A 2007 analysis from National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium shows “2.5 percent Asian Pacific Islander American (APIA) representation on television, only slightly more than the representation a decade ago,” with only 18 APIA actors on prime-time television.”<sup>5</sup> This very stark lack of change demonstrates that industry-wide adjustments to representation have thus far been unsuccessful, indirectly suggesting that going beyond the simple formulaic methodology of producing a television show must be used. Over more than 50 years’ worth of television, studios have utilized essentially the same production format, directly correlated to very little change in onscreen demographic makeup. In order to properly and effectively enact change, this methodology must be fundamentally altered by means of supporting independent artists in creating their own content, especially through alternative media, essentially disrupting the flow of network and cable studio shows. In order to do so, the industry must utilize an external method of creating content that does not directly rely on the funding and support of television networks and executives, many of whom take pride in the tradition of white-dominated onscreen culture that television currently provides.

<sup>4</sup> Lopez, *Asian American Media Activism*, 25.

<sup>5</sup> Edith Wen-Chu Chen and Grace J. Yoo. *Encyclopedia of Asian American Issues Today*, (Greenwood: ABC-CLIO, 2010), 646-648.

With the television industry so strongly rooted within the confines of tradition and custom, the industry does not take into account the ever-fluctuating state of society and many of those making the decisions continue to deny Asian Americans onscreen roles and perpetuate stereotypes, which ultimately harms the success of potentially profitable television shows.<sup>6</sup> In films such as *The Last Samurai* (2003), *Exodus: Gods and Kings* (2014), *Aloha* (2015), *Doctor Strange* (2015), *The Great Wall* (2016), and *Ghost in the Shell* (2017), Asian American actors are either overshadowed by their white counterparts or entirely replaced by white characters, and television follows this model closely as seen in popular shows such as *How I Met Your Mother* (2005-2014) and *Games of Thrones* (2011-present). Hundred of television pilots are produced each year, and the majority that make it to air feature white actors; white families and friend groups are especially featured in extremely popular sitcoms such as *Full House* (1987-1995), *Seinfeld* (1989-1998), *Friends* (1994-2004), and *Arrested Development* (2003-2006, 2013-present). Even with those that include Asian American supporting actors, they are typically featured as the highly stereotyped, token Asian character as seen in *The Big Bang Theory* (2007-present), *Ally McBeal* (1997-2002), *Gilmore Girls* (2000-2007), and *2 Broke Girls* (2011-2017).

Television executives refuse to change, even with so much evidence suggesting that change is both needed and desired in order to cater to audiences that still want to watch and that staying with the same material and same casting methodologies as before will soon fail to attract audiences as before. Famed television producer Aaron Sorkin has repeatedly expressed the opinion that there are “no Asian movie stars” as justification to not put Asian American actors in his television shows, yet ironically enough, an Asian American actress of half Chinese descent, Olivia Munn, rose to prominence on his television show *The Newsroom* (2012-2014). Munn has now starred in big-budget films including *X-Men: Apocalypse* (2016), *Office Christmas Party* (2016), and the upcoming films *Ocean's Eight* (2018) and *The Predator* (2018). Sorkin thus not provides a convenient counterexample about Asian American actors not being marketable enough, but also goes even further to suggest that Asian American actors on television can go on to even larger success if they are given a chance. With resistant television executives stubbornly unwilling to change yet constant evidence pointing towards the marketability of Asian American actors, circumventing the established industry itself by producing independent content on television and web services such as YouTube and Vimeo as well as supporting artists and groups unable to secure their big breaks onscreen again serves as an effective solution to the issue.

Nevertheless, if the television sector is to truly change, it must look to evolving to fit the population makeup of society which leads to bringing in new artists, particularly Asian American artists, through independent sources and relying on an external route not directly associated to the industry itself. By adapting

<sup>6</sup> Shilpa Davé et al., *East Main Street: Asian American Popular Culture*. (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 341.

as such, television thus attracts and adapts to newer audiences, fulfilling network desires to remain economically profitable, all the while improving representation of communities and narratives onscreen.<sup>7</sup> Against many preconceived notions of the entertainment industry, utilizing an all-white cast has not and will not necessarily prove to be successful, as the population of individuals who identify as Asian American or a person of color is continuing to rise, and television thus must change in order to cater to this audience and keep its viewership numbers high. This ideology implemented within the industry itself has been relatively successful, and there are several shows featuring Asian American actors that have been critically lauded, but resistance to change is still extremely high.

#### IV. Shifting towards alternative media activism

While alternative media sources may appear to only serve as a form of casual activism, every act still contributes in some way to changing the landscape and correcting the misrepresentation of Asian Americans in television and alternative media. This broad scope that extends across the globe allows Asian Americans to not only respond to the media representations that they see onscreen, but also to critically consider and question the importance of the nuance behind Asian American representation and portrayal, particularly that of Asian American narratives, encouraging them to “challenge a ubiquitous postracial media discourse that insists upon race as merely an individual quality.”<sup>8</sup> These new forms of media are making way for individuals to discuss and communicate on many levels, allowing a vital interplay between artist, activist, and audience by “opening up a space...to create networks of cultural citizenship that seek to impact their broader community.”<sup>9</sup> Whether it be video, original content, or response in any form of art, communication, or otherwise, each small comment, contribution, and commentary on Asian American media representations encourages the force of sheer numbers to permit the effectiveness of “calling attention to the inequalities and injustices facing the Asian American community, [redefining] the nuances of an ever-changing Asian American identity, and [insisting] upon recognizing and remedying the injustices that media industries and practices have long upheld.”<sup>10</sup>

Small acts not only improve onscreen representation, but also foster the aforementioned sense of cultural citizenship for Asian Americans of all backgrounds, suggesting that the erasure of Asian American misrepresentation serves to educate and unite in more ways than one. The effects of such small acts on social media can be seen through the early May 2016 trending hashtag “#whitewashedOUT” which served to allow Twitter users, especially Asian American and people of color, to post about instances when they felt erased by or overlooked by a society that is

<sup>7</sup> Kim, “Be The One That You Want: Asian Americans in Television Culture, Onscreen and Beyond,” 127.

<sup>8</sup> Lopez, *Asian American Media Activism*, 5.

<sup>9</sup> Lopez, *Asian American Media Activism*, 217.

<sup>10</sup> Lopez, *Asian American Media Activism*, 217.

dominated by an overarching white default and majority. Similarly, many Asian American authors such as Ellen Oh, who originated the hashtag, have spearheaded and garnered support through social media as well as through the audience of their books, consisting of individuals of many ethnicities, by writing about their own experiences and stories through their books as well as their social media presence.

By redirecting viewers to less traditional sources and creators of television such as artists who promote and produce their work online, both audience and content creators alike can erase stereotypes and recreate public perception of Asian Americans in television. Because the white-Caucasian individual is seen by viewers as the default, Asian Americans are automatically viewed as inherently different, which explains the problematic portrayals of Asian Americans as foreign or exotic throughout the history of television; they are still seen as “forever strangers in their own country” and they must go out of their way to “[demonstrate] their familiarity and congruence with the dominant Euro-American culture” before becoming “passably acceptable to the social audience.”<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, since Asian Americans are seen as such, these artists in the industry must subsequently work much harder to prove their worth, having to first justify the obstacle of their physical appearance before showing their skill. Thus, this creates issues in that high-ranking media professionals are less willing to employ Asian Americans onscreen as they expect their audience to be less familiar with Asian Americans or find it odd that Asian Americans are equivalent to white actors. This also begins a vicious cycle when Asian Americans do not have the opportunity to enter the industry in the first place, and if they happen to receive this rare chance, they are unable to prove their worth as they are not judged on the same playing field as other individuals. In addition, of the few Asian American leads in television, most are still told what to do and externally controlled by Caucasian characters, constantly being pushed aside in favor of the stereotyped white version of Asian Americans and people of color. In order to disrupt this, content must be created that contains correct portrayals of Asian Americans, and this can only be done via independent routes.

Many have suggested that a systemic shift must be made to uproot the industry from its ways by moving towards more unconventional methods so as to enact change. UC Davis Asian American studies professor Darrell Y. Hamamoto and UC Santa Cruz film professor L.S. Kim both discuss the television industry’s misrepresentation of Asian Americans and how over time the support and activist movement towards correcting this representation continues to increase dramatically as problematic material surfaces.<sup>12</sup><sup>13</sup> Both argue that it is vital, and a devastating failure if unsuccessful, for Asian Americans to be properly represented in television. On one hand, Hamamoto emphasizes the immediate importance of support-

<sup>11</sup> Hamamoto, *Monitored Peril*, 243.

<sup>12</sup> Kim, L.S. “Be The One That You Want: Asian Americans in Television Culture, Onscreen and Beyond,” *Amerasia Journal*, vol. 30, no. 1, (2004), 125-146.

<sup>13</sup> Darrell Y. Hamamoto, *Monitored Peril: Asian Americans and the Politics of TV Representation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 1-8.

ing and encouraging independent artists to seek out their own opportunities for progress rather than wait for change to arrive in the industry. On the other hand, Kim suggests that a better way to promote and effect change is for Asian Americans, both artists and viewers, to take advantage of their presence as an audience and communicate their desires in existing programming. Hamamoto's asserted solution is currently enacting and exhibiting stronger change and removal of Asian American representation within the television industry, gaining more support from individuals in support of this form of alternative media activism. Instances of Asian American misrepresentation continue to be highly prevalent within the framework television industry itself despite public outcry, as seen in the white savior narrative of *Iron Fist* (2017), in which a white protagonist acts as a hero and either metaphorically or literally saves individuals of color from harm or danger. At the same time, independent artists and groups such as Wong Fu Productions have been gaining immense support and acclaim for their shows and content featuring Asian American actors.<sup>14</sup>

Another obstacle that can be conquered through these independent outlets of alternative media is the issue of institutional network bias. As stated previously, systemic change of the industry itself has been and will continue to be unsuccessful for Asian Americans, as network and television executives rarely enact change without external pressure or complaint, instead choosing to stay with "the status-quo of idealized stories of white middle-class families."<sup>15</sup> By relying on this skewed version of expectations and with a need to meet fiduciary goals, television executives refuse to move past the formulaic nature of television casting and simply utilize white actors with the notion that television series will also be successful in the future. High-level television professionals and industry executives continue to take a staunchly conservative stance on taking risks and putting forth Asian American material or even using Asian American actors in roles that deserve or require them. Considering the small, not particularly well-established nature of Asian Americans in the industry coupled with a proven record of a lack of change, attempting to change the industry from the inside is currently proving to be more ineffective than external methods. Many Asian American actors such as John Cho, Margaret Cho, and BD Wong have continuously expressed their disapproval for the television industry's bias in casting and character writing, but without being famous enough and without a large enough platform, trying to change the industry from the inside has been highly unsuccessful. Thus, "required most immediately are the sustained creative efforts of public-supported independent film and video artists," made possible by online platforms and public support by the overall Asian American artistic community.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> "YouTube's Wong Fu Productions Debuts First Feature Film: 'There's Been a Culture Shift,'" last modified April 28, 2015, <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/wong-fu-productions-debuts-feature-791945>.

<sup>15</sup> Kim, "Be The One That You Want: Asian Americans in Television Culture, Onscreen and Beyond," 127.

<sup>16</sup> Hamamoto, *Monitored Peril*, 252.

## V. Conclusion

Many have both proposed possible remedies to Asian American misrepresentation, including actors and industry professionals using any leverage they have to push for proper representation when continuing forward in casting for subsequent television shows. Scholars of the new field of Asian American media activism, including Hamamoto and Kim, share closely intertwined ideals regarding the future of Asian Americans in the television and non-film media industries as well as simultaneously push for active resistance against the continuation of misrepresentation as well as for increased representation. The storied history of television has been plagued by issues surrounding Asian American misrepresentation in the industry, but the Asian American media activist movement has continuously worked to correct this issue. As a consequence of this, activists and advocates of the movement have proposed a plethora of different solutions, most rigorously defined as working from the inside of the industry to enact change or utilizing external, nontraditional methods to enact change. By supporting and working outside of the standard network television format, the external method has been supported by both scholars and artists alike as an increasingly effective way to garner support for artists, seen through the scope of alternative media that has garnered public and critical popularity. Ultimately, this huge wave of independent support via alternative media from a massive base of Asian American artists, fans, and individuals can be seen as having a profound, tangible effect in the visual entertainment industry and will continue to effect change in the hopes of erasing misrepresentation in television, and by extension, the rest of the entertainment industry, for good.

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## VIV LIU

### Symbol of Solipsism: *The Last Spike's* Appropriation of Chinese-American Labor

On May 10th, 1869 at Promontory Summit, Utah Territory, Leland Stanford drove an engraved golden railroad spike, also known as *The Last Spike*, into the ground. This symbolic act ceremoniously completed the last link of the United States' First Transcontinental Railroad, connecting the Central Pacific and Union Pacific railroad lines that were originally constructed separately.<sup>i</sup> Andrew J. Russell's photograph taken of the event, *East and West Shaking Hands at the Laying of the Last Rail*, captures a crowd of men in varying styles of dress—suggesting the congregation of social castes, hireling and industrial magnate alike, for the sake of this ritual. They are arranged in lines that draw the eye to the center of the composition, where two figures exchange a handshake to christen the joining of these eastern and western rail networks. However, confronting this narrative of unification is the conspicuous marginalization of Chinese Americans in this photograph, despite the fact that they comprised the bulk of the labor force for this construction effort.<sup>ii</sup> The placid composition and the staged, triangular formation of the largely European-American figures conveys the sense that the photograph has already crystallized – as if the moment it encases has concluded, congealed, and remains hermeneutically closed. Taking up the propagandistic mantle of this photograph, *The Last Spike*, as a commemorative object, in itself, is deeply exclusionary in that which it celebrates. Through its role in the spike driving ritual, *The Last Spike* embodies the racist forces that sought the erasure of Chinese American labor to this railroad, and instead, emphasize the contribution of European Americans.

From the vantage point of European-Americans who were privileged enough to closely engage with the object during the ceremony, *The Last Spike* accentuates its own physicality, as well as that of the white body – crediting what they believed to be “true” Americans as the source of the railroad's labor. The size of the spike indicates that it is fashioned to be a hand-held object, and its facets allow it to be tightly gripped, wrapped neatly under jointed fingers. The pointed end and swollen head of the spike gesture towards its function, to fasten the rail, and its interaction with the body, in which the holder of the spike hammers it into the ground. The object is constructed to look functional, requiring labor to activate it – labor that was attributed only to a select few. The European-Americans in the ritual are at a vantage point in which they are able to see their own reflections in the spike; visually implicated within the object, the holder becomes one with the spike, equating his body with the tool of labor. In addition, one of the most distinguishing features of the spike is its engraving of the names of the railroad officers and directors. The inscription of these curvilinear lines mimics the digging

of the railroads themselves: long, arcing trenches etched by hordes of Chinese American laborers – “coolies,” as they would have been called – upon the sprawling landscape. However, the spike seems to flatten the various temporalities of the railroad’s construction and credit it to these English names. As Stanford hammers *The Last Spike* into the ground, he not only christens the railroad, but also re-digs it – not only imagining, but also enacting, this revisionist account.

From the vantage point of the Chinese-American laborers – excluded from the ritual and looking on from afar – *The Last Spike* demolishes all traces of its own materiality as well as the bodies of the Chinese Americans. The highly reflective, gilded surface of the spike bathes it with light. As the viewer moves around and shifts their point of view, the spike’s facets reflect the light in ever-changing ways, manipulating and warping its form and integrity as an intact object. From afar, the object may even only be visually registered as a shimmering gleam. This disintegration of the object’s materiality in these conditions of its viewing also extends to the erasure and destruction of Chinese-Americans’ bodies. The reality of their hours of earthly, physical toil – moving rocks, digging into the dirt, and pushing every inch of flesh past its limits – is eclipsed and swallowed by the spike’s gleam and choice to err on the celestial and non-material. They are denied the representation of the physical labor they contributed to the endeavor. Furthermore, this act of beholding this blinding light begins to, slowly but surely, deny the Chinese American onlooker of his eyesight. In contrast to the Euro-Americans who gaze at the object to empower the use of their bodies, *The Last Spike* invalidates Chinese-American bodies by undermining their functionality. The writer Rebecca Solnit describes the railroad as an instrument that facilitate the “annihilation of time and space”; and, likewise, the spike driving ritual that finished the railroad erases the Chinese Americans’ capacity to assert their presence in both of such dimensions.<sup>iii</sup>

The racist devaluation of this ritual anticipates the anti-Chinese movement that would develop only a few years later during the 1870s, which led to riots, massacres, and the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act. After being replaced by an iron spike following the ceremony, the golden spike was donated to the Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts for safekeeping.<sup>iv</sup> As such, the permanent display of *The Last Spike* in The Stanford Family Gallery provides us a key reminder that the institution, like any museum, is not a politically-neutral space. Museums are reservoirs of power – the material legacies of colonial violence – bound inextricably to acts of violence against marginalized bodies. The spike does not simply embody the atrocities of the distant past, as its mirrored surface also reflects the present as we look upon it, and the legacies of systemic racism and xenophobia that it structured affects the world today. However, our current moment also holds radical potential. As I reinvest the spike with a gaze privy to these overlooked histories, I begin to hear the ghosts of Chinese America, thought to only silently haunt the object. Activated by the voice I offer, a response rings within the spike, radiant and true as its golden exterior.

## Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> Glenn Willumson, *Iron Muse: Photographing the Transcontinental Railroad* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 52–63.

<sup>ii</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>iii</sup> Rebecca Solnit, *River of Shadows: Eadweard Muybridge and the Technological Wild West* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2003), 3–23.

<sup>iv</sup> Bowman, J.N. “Driving the Last Spike at Promontory, 1869”, *California Historical Society Quarterly*, Vol. XXXVI, No. 2, June 1957, pp. 96–106, and Vol. XXXVI, No. 3, September 1957, pp. 263–274.

# TERENCE ZHAO

## The Rebirth of Chinatown, Los Angeles: Erasure and Recreation of Racialized Ground

### INTRODUCTION

When thinking about the Chinese American community in Los Angeles, most people typically think of two major areas. One is the newer, more suburban San Gabriel Valley, to the east of the city. The second (and more popular) is the much older Chinatown, located in the city's urban core. Because of this dichotomy, many assumed that the area now known as Chinatown had been Los Angeles' original Chinese settlement. Some, including supposed experts of the city who should know better, like longtime *Los Angeles Times* columnist Steve Lopez, have even taken to calling it "Old Chinatown."<sup>1</sup>

Yet, the present Los Angeles Chinatown is not the city's original Chinese ghetto. In fact, when it was first built in 1938, the neighborhood was called "New Chinatown." The term "Old Chinatown," on the other hand, properly refers to a much older settlement that was once deemed the second largest Chinatown in America.<sup>2</sup> Old Chinatown was demolished beginning in 1933 to make way for the construction of Los Angeles Union Station, and has since vanished from both the map and the memories of Angelenos alike. Gone with it, also, are memories of the fascinating history of how New Chinatown came to be. In this paper, I will explore the history behind the destruction of the forgotten Old Chinatown of Los Angeles and the construction of its replacement. Through this narrative, I will illustrate the ways in which one of the enduring themes of Chinese American - and broader Asian American - narratives, the struggle for attaining self-definition, manifests itself in the intersection between the abstract context of cultural representation on the one hand, and the concrete context of geographic place in the other. It is a story that begs the question: in a white-dominated society where Chinese Americans have found themselves marginalized at every turn, what does a truly Chinese American space look like?

### OLD CHINATOWN

In 1850, there were only two people of Chinese descent in Los Angeles, both manservants of a merchant.<sup>3</sup> Significant populations of Chinese arrived

<sup>1</sup> Steve Lopez, "Touring L.A.'s old Chinatown before it's too late with a man who knows all the secrets," *Los Angeles Times*, January 31, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Gordon L'Allemand, "Chinatown Passes," *Los Angeles Times Magazine*, March 19, 1933, 12.

<sup>3</sup> Raymond Lou, "The Chinese American Community of Los Angeles, 1870-1900: a Case of Resistance, Organization, and Participation," (PhD diss., University of California, Irvine, 1982), 16; and Thomas A. McDannold, "Development of the Los Angeles Chinatown, 1850-1970," (masters thesis, California State University, Northridge, 1973), 26.

in earnest beginning in the 1870s. Many of these new arrivals came from other parts of California, notably the north. Some of them had been railroad workers who were jobless after the railroad's completion, and moved to Los Angeles as its economy began to boom thanks to the railroads they had built; others left due to overcrowded situations in the Chinatown of San Francisco.<sup>4</sup>

The Chinese community began near the Old Plaza of Los Angeles, which had been the focal point of the city during the Pueblo times. As both the Chinese population and that of the city as a whole grew rapidly, the Plaza area became overcrowded. As a result, the Chinese settlement began expanding eastward, with Chinese settlement spanning both sides of Alameda Street, located one block east of the Plaza, by 1888.<sup>5</sup> At this point, Chinese-owned stores and structures remained near the Plaza west of Alameda Street, while the bulk of settlements had shifted east of the street to a piece of former ranchland called the Apablasa tract, owned by and named after one of the pioneering Californio families of Los Angeles.<sup>6</sup>

The conditions on the ground were never ideal, given the community's simultaneous geographic and economic marginalization. However, by the turn of the 20th century, Old Chinatown became especially plagued by a vast host of issues, including shoddy buildings, poor sanitation, and rampant vice - principally gambling, although there were less substantiated claims of the presence of prostitution as well.<sup>7</sup> However, it is important to note that Old Chinatown's squalor and decay had been nearly guaranteed by its circumstances. It was almost entirely unserved by city services, not receiving street lighting until 1913 and having only two paved streets until 1922.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, Old Chinatown was located on one of the worst parcels in the city. It directly adjoined the Los Angeles River, which did not have the extensive flood control as it does today. So, the river and, by extension, Old Chinatown, frequently flooded.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the parcel was sandwiched between a rail yard and gas works on the north and south, respectively, and was bisected by active rail tracks, all of which made the site extremely polluted and noisy.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, Old Chinatown's conditions were reminiscent of many of the same undercurrents found in modern environmental justice movements in the way that people of color were constrained to objectively

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<sup>4</sup> Roberta S. Greenwood, *Down by the Station: Los Angeles Chinatown, 1880-1933* (Los Angeles: Institute of Archaeology, University of California, Los Angeles, 1996), 9-10.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Jan C. Lin, *The Power of Urban Ethnic Places: Cultural Heritage and Community Life* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 173.

<sup>7</sup> Josi Ward, "Dreams of Oriental Romance: Reinventing Chinatown in 1930s Los Angeles," *Buildings & Landscapes: Journal of the Vernacular Architecture Forum* 20, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 23; and William D. Estrada, *The Los Angeles Plaza: Sacred and Contested Space* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2008), 225-26.

<sup>8</sup> Mark Wild, *Street Meeting: Multiethnic Neighborhoods in Early Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008), 23.

<sup>9</sup> Greenwood, *Down by the Station*, 13.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

less healthy and less desirable neighborhoods.

The end of Old Chinatown came as a result of the construction of the city's Union Station. Los Angeles had long lacked a central rail nexus, and discussions to build one had begun as early as the 1910s. The process was delayed by decades due to the unclear nature of the ownership of the land on which Old Chinatown sat. It was assumed to be the case that the land was still owned by the Apablasa family, with the Chinese occupants leasing the property. However, the documentation for this was nebulous, and through a series of convoluted legal actions, the land eventually came into the hands of the Southern Pacific Railroad in 1928. Southern Pacific then began planning what would become Los Angeles Union Station, even as litigation dragged on. For the Chinese community, the legal conflict effectively ended when the California Supreme Court issued a ruling in 1931, allowing Southern Pacific to begin eviction and demolition of Old Chinatown to build the station.<sup>11</sup> However, it was not the final ruling for the Apablasa family, who continued litigation and was eventually awarded a sum of money for their ancestral holdings.<sup>12</sup>

In the flurry of litigation that preceded the construction of Union Station between the parties competing for the land title and, consequently, the ability to profit from the station, one party was conspicuously missing - the Chinese Americans, who were actually living on the land, and who had the most to lose from any evictions. Yet, precisely because the Chinese community were the tenants and not the absentee landlords, it did not have standing in court on the matter, and was effectively rendered powerless in the process that would end in the wholesale erasure of their community. Demolitions began near the end of 1933, and Union Station opened for service in 1939.<sup>13</sup> The portion of Chinatown west of Alameda was not be affected by the construction, and remained until 1949.

## CHINA CITY

Whatever the injustices of Old Chinatown's destruction was subsumed by the even more immediate need for a replacement site for the Chinese community. One of the leading efforts for that reconstruction was known as "China City," which stood from 1937 until it was destroyed by a fire in 1949.<sup>14</sup> The project was envisioned by a socialite by the name of Christine Sterling, who had made a name for herself in the business of "historical preservation" and "urban development" by leading those efforts on Olvera Street, an alleyway just north of the Plaza.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Jan C. Lin and Eugene Moy, "The Removal and Renewal of Los Angeles Chinatown: From the Exclusion Era to the Global Era" (Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, Montreal, August 11, 2006), 12-13.

<sup>12</sup> Greenwood, *Down by the Station*, 37.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>14</sup> Bonnie Tsui, *American Chinatown: A People's History of Five Neighborhoods* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009), 117-18.

<sup>15</sup> William D. Estrada, "Los Angeles' Old Plaza and Olvera Street: Imagined and Contested Space," *Western Folklore* 58, no. 2 (Winter 1999): 121.

It is worth examining the nature of the place Sterling created at Olvera Street (which still stands today), because it is deeply revealing of what China City was. Sterling called her project *Paseo de Los Angeles* (but people stuck with the old name), and it was, at its heart, a fastidiously-manufactured but ultimately imaginary landscape. Realism, indeed, was never part of the goal of the development, which was framed as “A Mexican Street of Yesterday in a City of Today [sic],”<sup>16</sup> while Sterling was hailed as the savior of “*Old Los Angeles* [emphasis mine].”<sup>17</sup> As such, the street was filled with romanticized tropes of what Anglos imagined “Old Mexico” to be like, which amounted to stuffed donkeys, cacti, piñatas, faux-Mission architecture, and a proliferation of elaborate Mexican costumes.<sup>18</sup> Needless to say, this vision of “Old Mexico” was a rose-colored one. In Sterling’s romanticized vision, Olvera Street was presented without its squalor, aging buildings, and dirt-covered surface. But, more importantly, the manufactured nature of Olvera Street also divorced it from the realities of the real Mexicans that lived in Los Angeles, which had already earned a reputation as “the Mexican capital of the United States.”<sup>19</sup> In essence, Olvera Street a polished and whitewashed piece of nostalgia, designed for tourists while being divorced from both the history and the present of Los Angeles, not to mention the Mexicans who lived there. So manufactured was the environment of Olvera Street that it has been described as a proto-theme park, predating Disneyland by nearly four decades.<sup>20</sup>

With China City, Sterling effectively sought to recreate her “successful” concept for Olvera Street, and that motivation clearly showed. China City was, in essence, identical to Olvera Street in terms of purpose and style, for it, too, was a manufactured reality catering to tourists. However, since it was not built at the site of the now-demolished Old Chinatown, China City lacked even the most basic connection to an authentic community or place, and that consequently made for an arguably even more garish and contrived caricature of ethnicness. Instead of anything close to a realistic portrayal of China or Chinese Americans, China City represented - as can be expected of a project envisioned by an Anglo woman with no significant connection to either China or the Chinese American community - the image of Chinese from contemporary popular culture and imagination; that is, a distortion of Chinese identities to fit Anglo tastes. The connection to popular culture is particularly literal, as much of the complex was literally constructed out of sets used for shooting the film *The Good Earth*.<sup>21</sup> Inside China City, one found, like they would at Olvera Street, a proliferation of ethnic tropes designed to present a romanticized image of what Sterling called the “wonders and

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<sup>16</sup> Charles H. Owen, “A Mexican Street of Yesterday in a City of Today,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 26, 1929, 2.

<sup>17</sup> Estrada, *The Los Angeles Plaza*, 187.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 191, and Estrada, “Imagined and Contested Space,” 116-17.

<sup>19</sup> Ricardo Romo, *East Los Angeles: History of a Barrio* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1994), 80.

<sup>20</sup> David Rieff, *Los Angeles: Capital of the Third World* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 72.

<sup>21</sup> Lisa See, *On Gold Mountain, the One-Hundred-Year Odyssey of My Chinese-American Family* (New York: Random House, 1995), 221-222.

beauty of Cathay,”<sup>22</sup> which had been highly-choreographed to cater to the Anglo American consciousness.<sup>23</sup> There was a crew of rickshaws that would transport guests around the development, even though the block-sized complex was clearly not big enough to need such transportation.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, the operators of the rickshaws were made to speak in the broken English stereotypically associated with Chinese, despite the fact that the operators did not speak in such fashion.<sup>25</sup> Expectedly, workers within the complex wore outdated traditional costumes from the 19th century.<sup>26</sup> Less expectedly, alongside its selection of more traditional Chinese eateries, the complex offered “China Burgers” - a hamburger topped with bean sprouts - in order to cater to Anglo palettes.<sup>27</sup> Finally, because the complex had been constructed essentially out of Hollywood’s conception of what China ought to look like, it continued to be used as a set for filming, and Chinese who were inside China City were regularly tapped as extras.<sup>28</sup>

However, when it came to catering to the needs of actual Chinese, China City fell woefully short, and it meant that many of the same issues that plagued Old Chinatown were simply re-created anew. For one, the development was entirely commercial and contained no housing; the Chinese, the developers reasoned, would simply move into the decrepit vacant buildings around the China City site (which they did), even though those buildings were not in much better shape than those in Old Chinatown.<sup>29</sup> China City also contained many narrow alleyways, another disliked feature of Old Chinatown.<sup>30</sup> Worse yet, they appear to have been included purely because of Sterling’s desire to incorporate aspects of what she understood to be Chinese vernacular architecture or, as she described in her own manifesto, “patches of light and shade” and “old doorways leading into funny little courtyards.”<sup>31</sup>

## REFLECTIONS ON CHINA CITY

Perhaps most worthy of mention of China City’s many features was the so-called “Great Wall” that encircled the premises.<sup>32</sup> For something entirely unremarkable in construction and scale, the wall held immense meaning. The first

<sup>22</sup> Sojin Kim, “Curiously Familiar: Art and Curio Stores in Los Angeles’ Chinatown,” *Western Folklore* 58, no. 2 (Winter 1999): 134.

<sup>23</sup> Lawrence Lan, “The Rise and Fall of China City: Race, Space, and Cultural Production in Los Angeles Chinatown, 1938-1948,” *Amerasia Journal* 42, no. 2 (2016): 12.

<sup>24</sup> Estrada, *The Los Angeles Plaza*, 220.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Ward, “Dreams of Oriental Romance,” 23.

<sup>27</sup> Tsui, *American Chinatown*, 117-18.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 118-19.

<sup>29</sup> McDannold, “Development of the Los Angeles Chinatown,” 106.

<sup>30</sup> Ward, “Dreams of Oriental Romance,” 28-29, 31, 34.

<sup>31</sup> Christine Sterling, *Olvera Street: Its History and Restoration* (Long Beach, CA: June Sterling Park, 1947), 23.

<sup>32</sup> Estrada, “Imagined and Contested Space,” 121; and Harry Quillen, “China City’s North Gate,” Los Angeles Public Library. n.d.

is physical. In using the wall to delineate a place where Chineseness - or rather, Sterling's personal interpretation thereof - was welcome, she was also implicitly signaling where it was *not* welcome - namely, near the Plaza, where the Chinese settlement had actually organically formed. Despite the fact that the areas around the Plaza (and Old Chinatown itself, for that matter) had always been ethnically mixed, Sterling insisted on "preserving" the "unadulterated Hispanic character" of the area around the Plaza,<sup>33</sup> which had never existed until she embarked on her Olvera Street project. This fastidious attention to creating segregated and mutually unadulterated (faux) ethnic spaces was not only more evidence of Sterling's predisposition against accurate ethnic representation, but also once again draws attention to the extent to which Sterling's developments resembled theme parks. Like its Mexican counterpart, China City, too, has been described as theme park-like, even by contemporaries.<sup>34</sup> However, when Olvera Street and China City are viewed together as a single entity, the resemblance to a theme park was even more pronounced, with Sterling's insistence of containing the presence of the two cultures in their respective allotments being strikingly similar to the way in which differently-themed "lands" are kept visually and spatially distinct in Disneyland. The fact that maintaining this spatial arrangement is more important to Sterling than locating China City in the historic site of Chinese settlement is extremely telling. While Sterling and her contemporaries may consider her projects "preservation," her actions show that true preservation was never her intention. Under the guise of helping the Chinese community rebuild and preserve their culture, Sterling was actually building a tourist destination with Chineseness as its main attraction - in other words, appropriating ethnicity and ethnic identity into commodified entertainment.

In a metaphorical sense, then, the walls served to delineate the parts of Chinese American identity that was useful to Sterling and her white business partners: namely, orientalist tropes that can be commodified and exploited for profit. As part of this business model, those Chinese Americans who worked within the walls had to conform to the stultified "Chinese" roles that they were assigned, whether it be the rickshaw operator who had to speak broken English even if he doesn't, or the vendor who had to don traditional 19th century costumes that no one wore anymore - all while the *actual* Chinese Americans leading three-dimensional lives beyond the wall were hidden from view. China City is emblematic of the white American cultural institutions (like the Hollywood movies from which it was partially descended) that continuously create and reinforce racist caricatures of Chinese Americans, falsely presented to the unsuspecting public as an authentic and complete representations of the people. Chinese Americans, meanwhile, were effectively pigeonholed into the sole purpose of satisfying a western society's fetish for exoticism.

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<sup>33</sup> Estrada, *The Los Angeles Plaza*, 224-25.

<sup>34</sup> Lin and Moy, "The Removal and Renewal of Los Angeles Chinatown," 14-17; and Ward, "Dreams of Oriental Romance," 21-22.

## NEW CHINATOWN

The New Chinatown project, by virtue of being constructed in chronological parallel with China City, was almost perfectly set up as China City's natural foil. And indeed, from the surface, New Chinatown appeared to be the polar opposite of everything China City was and stood for. Unlike China City, New Chinatown attempted to alleviate the problems of Old Chinatown, such as crowding and squalor, by creating wide streets and durable, up-to-code buildings that could withstand fires and earthquakes (which is particularly ironic considering that China City was destroyed by fire).<sup>35</sup> Unlike China City, whose streets were named with vaguely orientalist phrases such as "Passage of Many Surprises," New Chinatown's streets carry proper Chinese names ("Gin Ling Way", the main street, for example, was named after the literary name for Nanjing).<sup>36</sup> Unlike China City, which was conceived entirely by Sterling and her cabal of Anglo businessmen backers, New Chinatown was built using the Chinese community's own money and led by its own leaders, most notably a man named Peter Soohoo.<sup>37</sup> Consequently, unlike both China City and Old Chinatown (and other Chinatowns around the country at the time, for that matter), New Chinatown was unique for being situated on land that was controlled by the community itself, and not a white landowner.<sup>38</sup>

Yet, beyond these clear differences, New Chinatown also shared many commonalities with China City. While it is certainly less ostentatious, it nonetheless was no stranger to comparisons to theme parks.<sup>39</sup> A contemporary guidebook described New Chinatown as follows:

*"The Little World's Fair, it is called by strangers who see it for the first time, is in a very conspicuous [sic] location. Tourists, entering Los Angeles from the east and the north, never fail to get a glimpse of New Chinatown... When trains from the north and the east enter Los Angeles at night, children on the west side of the coaches flatten their noses against the windowpanes and say, "Look at Fairyland!" The last thing that is seen before the train gets into the new Union Depot, are the lights of New Chinatown."<sup>40</sup>*

The theme park connection is deepened by the architecture of New Chinatown. In order to lower costs, its Chinese motifs were not built in traditional forms or with traditional techniques. Instead, the buildings were essentially modern concrete buildings with Chinese motifs tacked on, without which they would appear nondescript.<sup>41</sup> And, rather than using traditional materials, these motifs were overwhelmingly built using cardboard cutouts, a pioneering example of a technique that would be extensively used later on for the construction of theme

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<sup>35</sup> See, *On Gold Mountain*, 214.

<sup>36</sup> Estrada, *The Los Angeles Plaza*, 224-25; and Tsui, *American Chinatown*, 117.

<sup>37</sup> McDannold, "Development of the Los Angeles Chinatown," 104-5.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Lin and Moy, "The Removal and Renewal of Los Angeles Chinatown," 17-19.

<sup>40</sup> Garding Lui, *Inside Los Angeles Chinatown* (Los Angeles: self-published by author, 1948), 20.

<sup>41</sup> Lin and Moy, "The Removal and Renewal of Los Angeles Chinatown," 15-16.

parks.<sup>42</sup>

Fundamentally, New Chinatown was not significantly different from China City in that it was also very much oriented towards a tourist clientele.<sup>43</sup> Lisa See, in narrating her family history, concedes precisely this point about her great-grandfather Fong See, the operator of a Chinatown curio shop, calling his success a product of “innate racism” and the ability to play the role of “a charming Chinaman” who “[performed] for customers” in “put-on” broken English.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, despite New Chinatown supposedly being more geared towards the actual Chinese community, its central plaza was nonetheless home to mostly shops that sold not goods necessary for the daily lives of Chinese Americans, but rather souvenirs that appealed to tourists.<sup>45</sup> Their proprietors, too, would purposefully play up their exoticity to appeal to this market, with gimmicks ranging from rubbing asphalt on items to make them appear more ancient to the ever-familiar donning of traditional costumes that they do not normally wear (much like workers in China City did).<sup>46</sup> And, indeed, the opening of New Chinatown was preceded by either features or full-page advertisements in every major Los Angeles newspaper that were decidedly oriented towards the tourist.<sup>47</sup> For example, a full-page advertisement in the *Los Angeles Examiner* promised would-be visitors “the enchanting charm of Old China in Los Angeles,”<sup>48</sup> which was almost identical to the tagline for Sterling’s project - “China City - a little bit of Old China.”<sup>49</sup>

## REFLECTIONS ON NEW CHINATOWN

Peter Soohoo did not initially want to build his own Chinatown. He and his business partners had originally intended to collaborate with Sterling on her China City project, but walked away from talks after realizing what Sterling’s vision entailed.<sup>50</sup> In a defiant statement published in the *Los Angeles Examiner* two days after Sterling announced her own project, the leaders that would become the founders New Chinatown proclaimed:

*“Our objective is not only to establish in Los Angeles a unique and modern walled city, but to rehabilitate our people. No longer are Chinese content to live in old, unsanitary shacks”*<sup>51</sup>

<sup>42</sup> James Shen, “Repositioning Chinatown Las Vegas: Theming Authenticity and a Theory of Boring Architecture,” (master’s thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2007), 19-20.

<sup>43</sup> Kim, “Curiously Familiar,” 134; Lin and Moy, “The Removal and Renewal of Los Angeles Chinatown,” 4; McDannold, “Development of the Los Angeles Chinatown,” 104; Tsui, *American Chinatown*, 117; and Ward, “Dreams of Oriental Romance,” 32.

<sup>44</sup> See, *On Gold Mountain*, 145, 317-18.

<sup>45</sup> Kim, “Curiously Familiar,” 134-136

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Lin and Moy, “The Removal and Renewal of Los Angeles Chinatown,” 16.

<sup>48</sup> Tsui, *American Chinatown*, 117.

<sup>49</sup> Reproduction of original advertisement flyer reprinted in Estrada, *The Los Angeles Plaza*, 222.

<sup>50</sup> Estrada, *The Los Angeles Plaza*, 221.

<sup>51</sup> “Chinatown Group Takes Land Option,” *Los Angeles Examiner*, August 13, 1937, 8.

In this statement, one can feel the convictions of Soohoo and the other founders. The goal was not simply to build another Chinatown, but to build a better Chinatown, one where Chinese Americans would find themselves in control of their own community and destiny, rather than be subject to the redevelopment desires of absentee landlords (as they were in Old Chinatown) or be forced to perform the choreographed roles that Anglo developers impose for the sake of entertaining tourists' appetite for commercialized exoticism (as they were in China City). In this sense, New Chinatown represents a significant and remarkable exertion of agency as Chinese Americans, because it represented a self-propelled effort by the community to better its own conditions. And, in that regard, New Chinatown succeeded. Its clean, modern, and well-built environment was indeed a step up from Old Chinatown and its substandard infrastructure, and the community's ownership of its land did (and still does) provide the guarantee that it will be able to control its own destiny, and not once again be uprooted and erased without consent. These are concrete, positive improvements that Soohoo and his co-founders were able to provide, and that accomplishment must not be minimized or overlooked.

Yet, the limitations of New Chinatown are also abundantly clear. In spite of all that Soohoo was able to achieve, neither he nor New Chinatown was able to break the ultimate barrier - culture. New Chinatown was a story of limited triumph for the Chinese Americans of Los Angeles. It represented a triumph over many formal aspects of their marginalization from society: the new buildings were representative of the triumph over economic deprivation, and the land ownership represented the triumph over economic and legal marginalization from the planning process. It could even be said that the presence of numerous political dignitaries at the opening of New Chinatown, which included the sitting Mayor of Los Angeles and a former Governor of California, represented a degree of triumph over the Chinese community's political marginalization.<sup>52</sup> However, all of these triumphs were, for the most part, institutional. In the cultural sense, the community largely remained where it had always been: pigeonholed into serving the white majority's demand for something exotic, mysterious, and foreign. And so, even as New Chinatown represented a step forward in many aspects, it also remained frustratingly tourist-oriented, full of curio shops that cater to Anglo visitors and, ultimately, *similar to China City*. Of course, this cannot be blamed on Peter Soohoo. Neither he nor the Chinese American community was in a position to change prevalent cultural narratives that were ingrained in millions of Americans, nor were they able to change the economic reality that catering to these orientalist desires often represented the most viable path for economic survival and advancement for many Chinese Americans at this time.

## CLOSING

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<sup>52</sup> Tsui, *American Chinatown*, 117.

The story of New Chinatown is, on the one hand, deeply particular to its specific time and place. In a grander sense, however, the frustrating pattern of continued stagnation in the fight against cultural pigeonholing in the face of continuous economic and political advancement is a part of the broader narrative of the struggle for identity and self-expression which forms a central theme of the Asian American experience, and which transcends far beyond the limits of New Chinatown. For example, while the completion of New Chinatown well preceded the formal development of the model minority stereotype, the modern narrative of mainstream white society allowing and praising economic advancement on the part of Asian American groups while simultaneously reinforcing stereotypes that serve to differentiate them and exclude them from that mainstream seems nothing but a frustratingly familiar reenactment of the story of New Chinatown.

At the beginning of the paper, I asked what a truly Chinese American space might look like. While it is fairly clear that both Old Chinatown and New Chinatown were highly flawed spaces that could not claim to be such by today's standards, they also represented genuine exertions of agency on the part of Chinese Americans to secure the best space that they were able to obtain. Today, eighty years after the initial opening of New Chinatown, the Chinese American community has changed in dramatic ways, and so has the production of new Chinese American spaces, and the question of what that perfect space might look like remains as unanswerable as ever, precisely because these struggles of the past and those of the present remain part of a continuous narrative whose next chapter remains to be defined. New Chinatown, with all its triumphs and all its flaws, serve as a milepost in this narrative, a reminder of not only the progress made in the past, but also of the continuity of the Chinese American experience and the struggle for space and identity.

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CREATIVE  
NONFICTION

# ANNA LE

## Minimal on the MSG

### Portrait of My Mother

My mother grew up in a large family living in the bustling streets of Saigon. My grandfather was the sole breadwinner, trying to support twelve children on a cargo truck driver's pay. With their father frequently away for work trips of unpredictable length, the children waited for his phone call home in order to know when he would be returning. As a young child, my mother stayed up late to anticipate his arrival and the gifts that he brought home. When his truck's headlights illuminated the windows of their home, my mother and her siblings would jump out of bed to greet him. The gifts he carried were usually street food he picked up on the commute back, noodles and broth densely packed in flimsy plastic sacks and tied with an elastic band. Regardless of the time of night, the family blissfully ate in a huddled bunch, savoring the unique, indulgent feeling of eating food past midnight. My mother often told me of this memory, always forgetting that she had already told me it before. I never bothered to confirm with her, but I considered it her favorite memory of home.

As a child, my mother valued the importance of dinner time and deeply desired to continue the tradition in her own family. Each meal in our household was always a ritualistic feast. Newspaper had to be laid on top of the dining table. Placemats and dining table covers were no use for us, since we often dripped our dipping sauces and splashed our soups all over. Newspapers were convenient and cheap to wrap up to throw away after our meals. On top of the blanket of newspapers, we laid down small porcelain bowls and ten chopsticks for our family of five. Only then would we place the entrees down alongside a steaming bowl of white rice. While rice was always reliably served in our meals, dishes almost always came in a group of three varying entrees. Common entrees were crispy fried fish garnished with garlic and chili sauce, rich Vietnamese braised pork slow-cooked with hard-boiled eggs and coconut juice, and refreshing soups containing lightly seasoned shrimp balls with bok-choy and other greens. The rice would act as the buffer against the richness of the cuisines. Our meals followed the same process each time but featured different dishes each day. It was important that we never tired of our food; disrespecting it would upset my father, the family cook, who would grumble about our lack of gratitude for the food and his kitchen work.

My mother often liked to say, "Even without wealth, we are still rich with food." With a tight budget, each inedible purchase had to be scrutinized carefully: was it necessary? Useful? Able to be used regularly? Long-lasting? If it was

food, however, there were no second thoughts – buying food was enough justification for my family. A resounding “Yes!” meant there was no looking back; we were going to eat and we were going to eat good (eating well, however, was not a strict requirement for us). Although never explicitly established, the motto to unabashedly and unapologetically enjoy life through eating was obviously instilled in everybody in my family.

## **Portrait of My Father**

During my senior year of high school, my best friend moved into a house where a rooster stubbornly refused to leave. No one in her family knew how to drive it out. As a joke, I asked my father if he was interested in bringing home a rooster. He liked to raise just about any animal known to man, and we never had a rooster before.

“Yes!” I sent a text saying we were coming to get the bird and off we went.

Here was my father, a Vietnamese man approaching his 70s with his arms outstretched, jogging after a squawking bird in the dark. When the rooster was finally cornered, my dad squatted and snatched the bird with his bare hands before we could even suggest using garden gloves. He would do anything to make his garden a more interesting one.

My dad is the type to take extreme pride in his house’s front yard and backyard. There’s a picture of my mom and me when I was about six, where I’m clinging to a thick squash twice my size in the backyard of our old house. My arm is casually around the waist of the squash like we’ve been friends since it sprouted, and I’m flashing my cheeky smile in all its silver-crowned-front-teeth glory. What you don’t see are the wooden frameworks my dad built to support the gravity-defying squash, because all the climbing plants wrapped around the bars and covered the ground. That basically defined my whole life – playing among my father’s lush garden, running to the rows of vegetables to pluck whatever my parents had wanted to eat for that dinner. It always tasted better knowing my dad grew and made everything from scratch.

Although we were stuck in the middle of the San Jose suburbs, entering my house most likely meant finding at least fifteen assorted vegetables in our little backyard, looking fresh, green, and ready for harvesting. At one point, my dad raised several animals simultaneously for the simple thrill of raising pets. Most animals he acquired from his friends, and some he occasionally caught himself. Rainbow-feathered pheasants were fenced in at one corner and ducks in the other. An annoying rooster that crowed like clockwork at sunrise usually strutted around like it owned the place. Inside the house, we had a magnificent but terri-

bly screechy parrot (a gift from our family friends), several koi and parrothead fishes, and, of course, dogs. My mom often complained about how pet feed and water contributed to a big chunk of our monthly bills. A wannabe farmer in the suburbs, my dad ignored her and kept the backyard lively with his green thumb.

We joked that he could make bank if he had a vegetable stand on the side of the street. That never happened but we were confident he would have succeeded. No one had the farmer's touch like my dad; my aunt could never raise her plants to reach the same magnitude of growth. We often had more than enough ripe crops to spare and usually dumped it on any unsuspecting friend who dropped by for a visit.

A prideful man in the kitchen, my dad singlehandedly cooked for the family. Juggling work in the night and dealing with me in the day, he somehow found time to embrace the role as the best chef in the household. Wielding the spatula like a sword, he made the kitchen his battlefield (it looked like one, too). Dishes would be made from scratch, hot from the stove, fresh from the garden and minimal on the MSG. Most restaurants relied on these crystalline grains to elevate the tasty flavors - he relished in his ability to make relatively healthy foods without using the MSG crutch. Anything we wanted to eat that week, he would make for us. He always sought the opinion of my siblings, asking if we thought the dish of the night was tasty enough. It was a sketchy trap for us, since constructive criticism was not my dad's strong point. If we became too critical, it would hurt my father's ego and evidently prove that we were ungrateful; if the dish was not good and we weren't honest, he would misinterpret and cook more of it in the future. It was unpredictable and mostly depended on my dad's mood at the time. I never learned to pick up on his cues as well as my mother and my siblings did.

Craving my brother's signature steamed soy sauce and ginger seabass dish, I made the mistake of asking my father to make it. I couldn't ask my brother; he had moved out. I watched my brother throw the ingredients together in a pot several times, but I wasn't ready to ruin a whole fish with my guesswork. My father agreed to fulfill my request, considering it a simple dish to cook. Thrilled at the thought of having my cravings satisfied, I lifted the pot lid. I became immediately confused. Steamed fish, if you haven't had it before, is supposed to be cooked by the rising steam of a tall heated stockpot. Water is placed on the base of the pot while the fish rests on a steamer above the water level. Instead of that typical layout, my father placed the seabass on a bed of skinny clear noodles and dried mushrooms. Where were the green scallions and the trademark ginger strips? The dish I craved was served with rice, not noodles. It didn't even smell of soy sauce. My dad brushed my protests off, telling me to trust his judgement, this would be a million times better than what I wanted.

Much to my disappointment, it didn't taste better. I was searching for the airy, mildly salty flavors that my brother's dish always had. I wanted the spiciness from the cooked ginger, but all I tasted were mushrooms and herbal aromas. It might've been nice to eat what my dad cooked on a different day, but it wasn't what I wanted right now. In hindsight, it probably wasn't a good idea to argue with my dad about the right way to steam a fish. He didn't take it lightly. My insistence that he was wrong probably drove him crazy because the argument ended with my dad unexpectedly dumping the pot down the drain. My father wasn't good with his words. If he was upset with you, he would most likely tell everyone around you – multiple times. Never you, though.

My dad is as unspecific in speech as he is unexpressive with his emotions. If my father wrote a cookbook, it would probably be useless to an aspiring chef (not because it would be full of bad recipes, just bad instructions!). Nowadays when I call home to ask my parents about what vegetables to buy from Safeway or how to cook a dish, I'm always mildly frustrated at my father's directions.

"You put in a little fish sauce when the broth starts to bubble."

"What do you mean? How much?"

"Just a little! You know, like two shakes. Don't put too much or it'll be salty."

Okay, that makes sense but do I shake the bottle or let it angle, what amount of force do I apply to the bottle, how much should I tilt it forward, ah never mind – "...okay Dad."

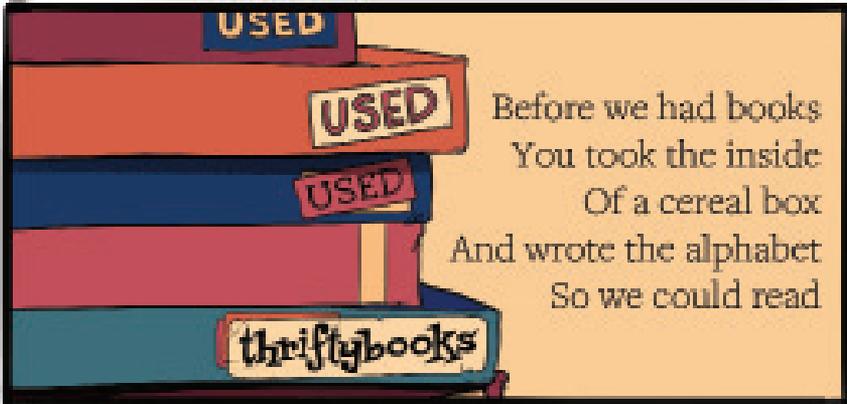
Each conversation would end with my dad unsuccessfully trying to go into as much detail as he could and me, dejected and deciding to wing it instead. Secretly, I thought my dad spoke vaguely because he didn't want me to surpass him as a cook – which could possibly be true, but wouldn't effectively explain my dad's imprecise speech all the time. When he wanted me to fetch something for him, he'd tell me to get something over there. Of course, I would be confused, asking what did he want and over where?

That's just how my father vocalized everything – vaguely. He struggled with confrontations and talking about his feelings to us kids. The only time he spoke loudest (besides when he was actually mad and yelling) was through his cooking. His words weren't explicit I love you's – something about the stereotypical traditional Vietnamese male character prevented him from doing that. No, they were packed in a rainbow assortment of Tupperware containers, smelling like all of our favorite foods. Even if you didn't ask him to, there it still was, prepared to be taken back to Stanford for the next hectic week of school.

# VISUAL ART

# KRISTEL BUGAYONG

## Before We Had



Before we had books  
You took the inside  
Of a cereal box  
And wrote the alphabet  
So we could read



Before we had coats  
You held us close to you  
Against your first winter  
So we could go outside

To all of the mothers and mother figures  
Who build homes in a country  
Far from their home countries,  
Thank you.

# MOMO HOSHI

-isms and -phobias



# YEJI JUNG

Sustenance, 48" x 48", oil on canvas, 2017



This painting is an homage to kimchi, the food that sustains me and my community—physically, emotionally, spiritually. Food is an incredibly important part of my connection to my family and my Korean culture and heritage, and kimchi specifically is present in almost every meal I share with my family and Korean/Korean American community. The original image was a photo I took of a pot of stew my father was cooking for me while I was home; this in itself was something I dearly cherished, and the launching point for this work. I painted impasto, liberally applying the paint in gestures of abundance, a concept heightened by the fact that the painting itself is 16 square feet. Painting such a large canvas required physically moving my whole body, embracing the abundance and feeling of sustenance that this work evokes for me. The scale and the centered, circular arrangement of the kimchi elevate this everyday food into a position of near sanctity.

ANNIE NG

Hong Kong



# PHOTOGRAPHY

# KINJAL VASAVADA

Untitled



Untitled



# KINJAL VASAVADA

Untitled



# KINJAL VASAVADA

Untitled



# POETRY

# BELLA MIRANDA

## Geology Lesson

I have this rock in my hand  
it is my memories of Bobo.  
It isn't too big because I never actually knew him  
but I've heard stories  
and I've packaged them into this piece of Earth.

You hold it now, here.  
Do you see the tiny crack fissure  
running through the center?  
That is a scar that won't go away  
It is the day Rodrigo Costancio Arios  
with an island heart and larger land eyes  
kissed the barrio goodbye.

Do you feel the rough edge?  
That is my grandfather's callouses  
from working in sugar cane fields  
but the smoothness next to it  
That is the smile he always wore  
for he wouldn't dare take another man's pity

And the luminescence that hits the stone  
at just the right angle to the sun  
That is the promise he gave  
and carried through to  
welcome Uncle Augustine to America  
with open arms, to his home  
even when his own young wife was hungry, too.

He made do.

In fact, I think the rock as a whole,  
Feel its force for its size?  
Feel its complexity and cracks?  
Feel its matte finish mysteriousness?

I'd say your nearly  
holding Bobo right there in your palm.

# BELLA MIRANDA

## With Me, My Family

Water overflows with memory. Emotional memory. Bodily memory. Sacred memory.  
-Jacqui Alexander

Water overflows with memory.  
The chill shocks my remembrance  
until slowly the waves of vignettes  
engulf me.

Maybe it's the schools of butterflyfish  
that sting me with community  
of the barrio.  
Or, coral bommies  
so massive and full of activity  
remind me of young Ama  
running along a green island coast.  
Emotional memory.

In a swim dance  
with forests of seaweed  
their waves remind me deep inside  
of ever-changing identity.  
I see her face so clearly  
in Point Lookout sea foam, as if  
I look now at my own reflection.  
Bodily memory.

And at Land's End,  
this can't possibly be real –  
In the clouds I spot  
7107 islands in the exact shape  
of a tiny spot on my skewed map  
so expansive, so full of secrets  
connected to something I know little of  
It is potent in my bones.  
Sacred memory.

And so whenever I see the Pacific  
in any of its boundless forms  
from any point of the world  
my soul remembers the refrain of my prayers:  
Water overflows with memory.



# JOSH DE LEON

## Chaplin/Kono

Charlie knows, silent era, king of slapstick  
How to look the part  
Big screen, big lines, the Tramp in gleaming Cadillac  
Slick palm city of liquor, all seasons parched

Kono dances, churning night, sharp in his only suit  
A couple coins for a spin and a smile  
Fresh off jazz and gin and fizzing brut

Where good men turn to rich men  
These days of black and white  
When anyone who's anyone has tabloid headlines,  
Celluloid sex, sprawling villas, and a butler brown.

They think he's exotic, they do, they say Kono got style  
She's jitterbugging smitten for the strapping kid  
His coffee eyes and a whisper, "Stay awhile,"

Charlie knows how to accessorize –  
That's what stars do?

Kono's blushing when she meets his lips  
But They don't like that, laws against that

This self-made man cannot appear again threadbare

Chase *damn monkey* down the jagged streets

He matters now, this movie star, he matters

Catch that Kono, leave him battered

The night

Scattered –

Charlie don't know

what to say

but

*the bruise don't show*

# JOSH DE LEON

## Cartography (Learning my mother tongue)

Mountains and valleys  
Dance to a strange  
Tune in my ears

Hills and peaks now seem  
The same  
Though I know  
The views are different

Wonder what those  
Lands must hold –  
Eons and egresses  
In this clamoring  
Topography of sound

May I get lost in it –  
Or lost from it  
Even well-worn paths  
My virgin soil

Wonder what those lands must hold –  
Wonders.

# CHESTER THAI

## Refugees

Dad and I search google images  
for his Thai refugee camp.

I watch the Olney downtown bustle  
from the library window.

Brian Stevenson said in *13<sup>th</sup>*,  
“African Americans left the south  
as refugees from terror.”

Soldiers found my dad  
on the beach, led him  
to a jail cell.

The Federal Housing Administration  
redlined neighborhoods and forced  
black people into ghettos.

The Refugee Act of 1980  
settled Southeast Asian refugees  
in the inner cities.

To keep boats from landing,  
the Thai coast guard  
pushed them from shore.

My bike training wheels  
crackle over splintered glass.

On the balcony, Dad and I listen  
to the tiny explosions.

# MINI RACKER

## Kiln

### I.

The west, I thought, could finally  
make something of me.

California stuck my fingers  
in grey-blue clay beds off the south bay,  
washed me up, again and again,  
on the beaches of my life.

California's waterlogged sand  
swallowed my handprints,  
knowing me guilty of that great, unforgiveable crime  
of being.

### II.

My full name means "clay doll."  
I once liked its careful femininity,  
its unmuddiness. Now I see how unfinished it leaves me.

In second grade, I did a clay self-portrait.  
A carefully rounded nose, eyes open  
to gulp the whole world. Glazed it olive green,  
the color of my skin, and then it didn't look human.

Let me tell you what happens: you regard yourself  
as atmosphere. You keep trying to sever yourself  
from the earth of your body. Of course you fail.  
Instead, you start to love the earth around you, unwillingly.  
It's the same way you've loved every land,  
loved your alien skin,  
unwillingly.

# JULIE FUKANAGA

## mochitsuki

one two three four . . .

ichi ni san shi

outside:

smooth mallets in hand  
aged wood with countless rings and  
occasional splinters and  
weathered handles  
we move like clockwork  
circling, taking turns  
in a slow rhythm  
gradually gaining pace  
pounding the steaming white rice  
on a cold sunday with the mist rising  
over the gently curved  
ornate gold dragons that  
lined the pitched roof where  
the tap tapping of excited children echoed  
and fatigued muscles ached  
from pushing and rolling and smashing and soaking

inside:

sprinkled corn starch dusts  
the linoleum floors  
“watch out, it’s hot”  
the kids squeeze together  
around the tables  
scratching away at the bits of rice that  
stick to their fingers  
and line their cuticles.  
like their parents did  
and their parents did  
and so on and so forth  
they roll the smooth inside out.  
small round clumps held by small hands  
take one,  
pass it down,  
no such thing as perfectly round  
though it doesn’t stop them from  
striving for perfect

rolling the rough outside in  
competing for the top  
holding dear the pyramid towers of  
pure white rice that  
conceals azuki bean  
and has no wrinkles

outside:

my hands reach for the creamy  
smooth peanut butter cups  
and the chocolate kisses  
and the sticky red jelly  
that get all over my hands  
and taint the rice strange colors  
and make visible folds.  
“frankenstein mochi”  
my grandma used to laugh  
“no one will eat that”

everyone else loved  
mixing shoyu with clumps of sugar  
until the granular crystals dissolved and  
it was sweet on the tongue  
sometimes we ate it plain  
sometimes we made it crisp with a metal sheet  
that made the rice toast with the  
hot air floating like spirits -- yūrei  
but sometimes

inside:

i hid as many kisses in the  
center of the rice  
as i could melt into  
sickeningly sweet,  
strangely shaped,  
colorful concoctions,  
and went back outside  
to push against the grain

# JULIANA CHANG

## Migration Story

### I.

When my grandfather is diagnosed with Parkinson's  
my family moves back to Taiwan.  
The night we arrive from the airport,  
Yeye prepares hand pulled noodles,  
pork ribs simmered in black bean sauce,  
eight treasure rice. His hands shake as he  
carries the pot of soup to the table,  
and everyone pretends not to notice, even him.  
For five years we watch Yeye grow smaller,  
the fluttering of his hands across a kitchen cutting board  
slow to a silence.

In the days before he passes,  
we sit around his bedside and tell stories:  
from when he and Nai Nai first met,  
from when my father went to college, from when I was born.  
Tongues curl and uncurl,  
and every doorway in the house holds its breath.

### II.

Years and years before I am born,  
A mother's life savings  
are a clinking pouch in the back of wooden cupboards.  
The day Mao Zedong declares himself Chairman,  
she trades it all for a single boat ticket to Taiwan.  
The oldest son in a family of eight,  
my grandfather, a boy, becomes the only one  
to escape the revolution.

### III.

Nai Nai is my age when she marries Yeye.  
She says he wore his raspberry heart on her sleeve,  
Went years without buying shoes so that they could pay for the wedding.  
In the photos, Yeye wears a suit and bushy eyebrows, and he is laughing with his  
jaw dancing, a boy dancing.  
My father learns to walk in a house with stovetops that don't stop burning,  
and all his first memories smell like food.  
He loses twenty pounds when he goes to college.

#### IV.

In college, my father meets my mother. He falls in love with  
the cactus barbs on her tongue, the hot chili oil in her spit.  
They bicker all the way through college, through my father's first two jobs,  
Through the green card applications and the first apartment in San Jose.

By the time I am five, I can spit international phone area codes like  
Lychee seeds. I make dumplings with my mom,  
chase the antelope behind our house,  
Grow up thinking family is meant to be far away.

#### V.

After my grandfather passes, no one goes near the kitchen.  
Mama brings home take out, we keep the wooden cupboards closed.  
We sit around, feed each other with stories,  
Let them migrate from mouth to mind.

#### VI.

My first memory of love goes like this:  
my grandparents visit from Taiwan,  
and Yeye makes my favorite garlic chicken.  
I am four, and no one is taking any chicken but me,  
and everyone says yes when I ask for more.  
I wonder out loud why they cook chicken  
if none of them like it,  
and my grandfather tugs on my ear,  
says *we all like it, we just like you more.*  
That same year, China allows visitors from Taiwan  
for the first time in sixty years, and a boy  
returns home.

# SURABHI BALACHANDER

## incurrigible disturbers of the peace\*

Back then we cut our own heads  
out of Polaroid pictures  
and glued them to Popsicle sticks.  
Made sweaters stamped with snowflakes,  
and blue paper that fell apart  
under our oily fingers.  
We were given the alphabet  
block-lettered on white paper,  
and told to fill it in.  
With any color we liked,  
as long as it stayed inside the lines.  
Later we cut away the extra paper,  
threw our mistakes in the recycling  
and threaded twenty-six letters  
onto long strands of yarn.  
All these crafts to occupy  
our tiny hands, to keep them  
from poking into anything  
we might disturb.  
Years later I had to remember,  
teach my hands again to pry  
where they were told they didn't belong.

\* "... all societies have battled with the incurrigible disturber of the peace — the artist."  
-- James Baldwin, "The Creative Process"

# ARIEL BOBBETT

## *Ariel*

*Is a name beautiful for the way it sounds  
or for how well it describes you?*

I.

I'm named for my mother's favorite cousin.  
His name came from the Philippines  
by way of Spain—the colonizer.  
Do I take the Spanish pronunciation?  
or, wait, is that the Filipino one?

II.

my mother tells me proudly  
*your ancestors were from Barcelona*  
but aren't they also from the Philippines?  
*you have a Spanish name like your sister*

III.

Maria wishes she had our mother's maiden name  
not for the history Urgena carries around its neck  
not for the culture it signifies—  
(adobo, and ube staining your dreams purple  
bare feet kissing the floor as you dance)

IV.

she wants a new name  
not because our mother raised us  
but because it flows  
Maria Elena Urgena has rhythm  
a river running over smooth stones

but I think we should accept the gifts we are given.

# JACQUELINE RAMOS

## Bits and Pieces

### XI. In Manila,

The air is thick here  
With the humidity  
With the smog  
That fills my lungs with the words I can't speak  
But understand

### XII. I try to re-member to speak Tagalog.

the words are spread out like puzzle pieces on the rug  
i haphazardly grab each piece  
attempting to piece it together  
they almost fit  
they sorta stick  
i hold up a lump of glued-together gibberish  
sheepishly  
but  
this is how my heart wishes to express itself

### XIII. I realize that though whitening is more than skin-deep,

I've never had the urge to scrub away the brown from my skin.  
But when I open my mouth  
People find that my country of birth  
Has already done it for me.

### XIV. I re-member that I am a bridge,

From Tennessee, American but Filipina  
To California, Asian-American but Southern  
To the Philippines, Filipina but American  
One part of me will always be  
Other.  
With me,  
There is always a  
"but"  
But I re-member I have  
A hyphen

Pilipinx “hyphen” American  
A bridge  
Between identities  
A bridge  
Building one identity  
My identity  
A identity where there are  
No “but”s  
And where  
I finally belong

## XV. and I can remember my people.

2,000 miles of land and 7,000 more miles of ocean separated me and the Philippines. Even more years of the Amerikkkan experience cut me off from my her-story.

And so I forgot.

I became lost in the US, for within its structure of diversity, there seemed to be no place for me. Me, a Filipina whose history has been erased from the Amerikkkan textbooks. I looked from the other side of the pages, reading about slavery, NIMBY, internment camps, never able to claim my own history or relate with the histories of others. Always learning about the Western game-changers, but I, we the Filipinos, were seemingly never a part of it. We were erased. *American Colony. Filipino Repatriation Act of 1935. San Francisco Evictions. The Delano Manongs.*

If not erased, then trivialized. *White Man’s Burden. Little Brown Brothers. Imperialism. “Upstart” Aguinaldo. Philippine-American War.*

There was no place for my brown skin that seemed to be misplaced. Asians are yellow. Mexicans are brown. Who are you? *Chinese? Japanese? Korean? TAG-a-log? Other.*

This is who I am here in Amerikkka.

My short stature means I’m a child.

My brown skin means my community and even other communities with skin darker than mine have been marginalized on the land that I stand on.

My voice is stolen from me, as I listen to Tagalog at home, yet am taught to have command over English at school

My heart feels lost.

My history, instead lived solely on through the food I ate, the ‘Filipino’ parties, the stereotypes, but it was diluted by the distance, the land and ocean, by cultur-

al silence. My history became other, obsolete. What my parents and what other parents remembered and regaled us with were stories of the Philippines of the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, full of conflict and strife, martial law, revolution, and chaos; they fled with the Filipino diaspora and took with them that impression of the Philippines. *Danger. Third World. Developing country.*

But as I lived together with 10 Filipinas of the diaspora for 3 months in the Philippines, finally walking again on the earth where my ancestors lie. I re-remembered the story that was buried thousands of miles away. I re-remembered where I came from, what the Philippines is to me.

It's learning that my mother fled from war as a child of Mindanao, almost 50 years ago. "You would never survive in a war, you need to be grateful for whatever you have." My brother and I simply dismissed it as a moral lesson, but now for me, the Philippines is my mama, terrified at 8 years old, squished between 2 sisters in the front of the truck because there was no place for 3 daughters in the back with the people of Marawi, fleeing from the town they called home. It's the family balancing a mattress on the door to protect themselves from the rebels' bullets, my mother in the corner. It's me thinking of my mama after the war, *astig*, holding the taxi driver by the collar, demanding the right amount of change back. I also re-remembered my Lola yearned for adventure, another place other than Zamboanga, much like my people who sailed the seas and adventure to trade with other island nations, pre-colonization. After that, I re-remembered 3 generations of war: Philippine-Spanish and the Philippine-American War, World War II, and the war in Mindanao. To have survived continued violence and attempted eradication, the womxn in my family, in my nation must have immense strength, and then I re-remembered that strength lies within myself too.

I re-remembered forestry and artistry and joy for the land. I re-remembered that my uncle still tends to the culture today, ensuring that our people honor our land today while my Lolo tended to the earth through his rigorous academic and professional study of the trees and his fight to save our beautiful forests. I re-remembered beauty in tending for the land as I climbed the rich green mountains with only tsinelas, flip-flops in the Cordillera mountains. Cutting out a banana with a knife, tossing the peel back to the soil. Walking beside the Ibaloi village healer as she came back from another village hours away, a chicken in hand. A gift. I re-remembered healing and gift-giving. I witnessed my people before our country was coined as a land to conquer and before it was titled "*a developing country*".

The land has lived and weathered through thousands of years of history, of story. And the Philippines is still here. Now. Continuing its long, complex history. From the datos and babaylans, the sultanates, to the Spanish colonial riod, to the American colonial period, to the Japanese occupation, American colonial-

ism again, to independence, to now. It is continuing with the people here in the Philippines and with the Filipino diaspora spread throughout the whole world. It is the motherland, and it is a place with opportunity.

I came back to re-member our connection to the land. Experience the Philippines in all of its beautiful diversity from the city, to the mountains, to the caves, to the beaches. Meet people who identify as Aeta, Maranao, Bisaya, Ilokano, Tagalog. I came back to know what was erased, to know what happened, to dream about what could happen and where my people and I stand in all of this history.

I stand knowing this:

My short stature lets me fit inside the jeepney, to sit alongside my kababayan. To walk eye-to-eye.

My brown skin lets me honor both the lands that I stand on, the herstory that has taken place, and the resilience it has taken to survive.

My voice quickly embraces my native tongue and learns the English words I need to speak our truths and our herstories.

Most importantly, my heart remembers that our strength lies in living with kapwa, our shared humanity, our shared celebrations, our shared pain.

Whether we live in the motherland or on stolen land, I re-member it is time not only to re-claim our kapwa, but to collectively act with our kapwa – in sharing stories, in healing, in fighting to reclaim our rights, in celebrating.

Our mothers did not survive for nothing. Our future daughters are counting on us.

# ETHAN CHUA

## To *kong-kong*, at the coffin:

grandfather, there is no such thing as empty space.  
the stone cavity is filled with fields and  
burning candle wax on cold Novembers; smoke  
rising to a heaven filled with vectors – chrysanthemum  
uncertainties. from Sanctuary, the week after  
the wake, incense still ripples; gospel words suffuse into the lid and  
leave a lingering smell of rosewood. with a microscope  
you'd see ten thousand photons bouncing off  
the epitaph, shaping the wrinkles of  
grandmother's fingers – light is in there,  
tracing out the borders of her cheekbones,  
the crack on the right lens of  
her spectacles – remember buying the pair in Taiwan,  
dropping them as the boat rocked, shards  
lodging in the hull? seven years  
with calloused hands at the abaca mill for those  
bejeweled glasses, and afterwards she wore them in the bath  
and at the office and curling up into a V in bed even  
though they were half shattered. today, tomorrow  
photons rush through the cracks in the right lens.  
today, tomorrow some atom of the coffin lid  
echoes with the vows she made to you in broken Mandarin,  
the fabric of the dress, the whisper of your name.

# DIANA ZHAO

## Anxiety Symptoms

Unmoving against the solid wall  
I sit still.  
Grounded legs folded inside a rooted frame.  
My heart  
pounds  
until my intestines twist sharply, painfully against each other  
I am ill.

Sweep the sky with stars  
from our view in the dried-out never-ending grass  
The plains of inner Mongolia run deep inside my mother  
like a memory.

Claw through the gray, odorless gas  
cursing as we push our brothers and sisters off the bed.  
“Shit, get out, get out,” my father tries to say.  
Monoxide leaks gently into the room after his swollen hand fell asleep  
scribbling homework for the future  
A tiny piece of farm among all the other farms in China’s rural villages.

America, my baby, America in my baby  
And yet she looks so like the homeland.  
Birth, remarkable  
And then two more.  
What’s remarkable is that we are all here and alive and safe.

Phoenixes and dragons are  
emblems of female and male royalty  
They swirl on the ceilings of palaces folded in gold  
found in the heart of China and the heart of Chinatowns.

Was it you or me? - when my father jumped in front of a train  
Was it us? - when my father tried to set the cops on my brother  
Did it mean anything? - my brother breathing into a bag in a shrink’s office  
Does it matter, in the present, on repeat, over and over, my brother crying I want  
to die.

A metal cage must tie the inside of my skull together  
I cannot think around it  
Except to hear the thud  
of a frantically running heart.

I am alone.  
All else remains in silence.

# EMILY KING

## Calligraphy

the ink cake, inert in its  
plain coffin box  
a cylinder of soot  
and animal glue  
ground upon a stone  
the water I add  
in beads clouds  
with the smoke and  
stink of memory  
I ladle with a soup spoon  
onto a saucer so  
my brushes can drink  
the milk sharp  
like pennies and  
dull like chalk  
I have my grandfather's hands  
those same long fingers  
but I don't comprehend  
the precise flick and smear  
the gravity  
of the long black  
tongue a laden brush  
making copies of itself  
in time  
here now it rains and  
watery globes form when  
a drop hits  
the line of his writing  
color shoots through its round  
cling and blooms  
my grandfather's writing is  
a matrix of knit words  
while my characters  
unmoored, unwound, drift  
from an unknown core.  
bone without cartilage.  
so cold, a kneecap.

# KIMIKO HIROTA

## “Why Are You So Angry?”

Because they will assume so much about me.

Like any form of acknowledgement, speculation, or curiosity is a compliment.  
Like introducing themselves and immediately asking what I am  
is more crucial than my smile and presence.

Because when I was in the first grade,  
Mulan was the only princess my friends told me I could dress up as.  
Meanwhile, I watched them pick and choose  
between Snow White, Cinderella, Aurora, Ariel and Belle.

Because they say I'm Asian,  
it's why I'm so damn smart.  
I rip scholarships out of their hands  
since my eyes are a little squintier,  
my hair a little thicker.

Because history teachers ask me about Pearl Harbor,  
west coast internment camps, and my “homeland.”  
Of course I'll be happy to emphasize the only time I see myself  
in a textbook — portrayed as the victim and the bad guy simultaneously.

Because when I ask them what their ethnicity is,  
they tell me American  
as if I am not.

Because I don't understand why a hyphen is necessary  
or why checkboxes without Select All That Apply options exist.

Because Kimiko always autocorrects to kimono.

Because it's 2017 and we have one show with Asians in leading roles,  
but it still has to be called *Fresh Off the Boat*.

Because I cannot say something for you  
in Japanese, Chinese, Vietnamese  
or any other language branded native  
on my tongue.

Because my grandparents moved to Portland  
for their education and never made it back home to Hilo.

Because I've been told too many times,  
"well, you know what I mean,"  
when racism falls out of mouths in front of me.

Because I've spent the last 18 years trying to be everything  
they want me to be,  
convincing myself that I was no different.  
It was easier that way.

Because I am growing tired of my own skin  
rotting in my white city  
under kawaii schoolgirl fetishes,  
pieces of me left drowning overseas  
after decades of proving patriotism.

So watch me nosedive deep into the Pacific Ocean.  
Watch as I pretend to be Ariel while finding the coast of Hawaii again.  
The sand will seep into my skin,  
the waves will soften my edges.  
I will touch ancestry  
and sing.

# MADDIE KIM

## Harvest

We drive through the underbelly of Los Angeles  
as if tremored surface streets could lead us  
back to Seoul. I learn the new language

of dented bumpers, of crushing parched cigarettes  
with a rubber sole: *kenchana*, *mogo*, this sunless  
K-town afternoon. Mother slices green onions to forget

what lingers in the air: her perched daughter, letters  
from her husband across the ocean, her branching  
fingertips. The scent of kimchi roams our block

like the fever of boiled ginger to ease the sting  
of unpaid rent. Some days I walk down 6th Street  
where women carry paper bags with dying crabs

from the market. Mother inhales, exhales smooth  
as the egg yolk above the stove, the cyclic nature  
of harvest season inside her mouth. I set the table

with wooden chopsticks and pour soy sauce  
into ceramic bowls. We listen for the barking dogs,  
the evening prayers. Mother hums along, blesses

the meal with her palm. Tonight the sky doesn't  
slur, and she savors the sharpness of ginseng  
under her tongue—the taste of a familiar city.

# MANISHA RATTU

## haiku

brown and beautiful  
aren't often found together  
you're proof that's a lie

# AUGUSTE SEONG

## adornment

Swatting away the flies  
She ate persimmons beneath

The evergreens. They were  
Exactly what snow ought

To be. So soft. So sweet.

Nothing like the the pills  
Paid every day that made

The sky and clouds taste the  
Same as cheap restaurant mints.

Who'd have guessed that they grew  
From the same burning tree?

# AUGUSTE SEONG

## The New Year of March

The child squats by the river  
A thousand whispered words  
Unheard unspoken  
Beneath the dancing glass  
The minnows flit and dart

In eleven years she will learn  
The principles of lens and broken sight  
The images unbeheld

For now she is the child  
Crying by the river bank

The fish will not come to  
The fingers  
She can find  
No longer

Forgive her  
She did not know  
The river was made  
Of mint

# AUGUSTE SEONG

## Gutter Loudness

The carving tool laughed  
Against the wood as you  
Joked it took the body  
Athlete to make a carving  
Make the art.

Will the paper laugh  
Again when the wood  
Says the same in  
Two tone tongues?

## Chalk Lanterns

My father tries to prune/  
The green buds of blue  
Roses to leave/ a growth  
Of thorns and leaves/ wants  
This so badly/ he doesn't  
Care about the way/ his  
Hands and bramble stems

## Haunting

If you must know  
Then understand  
The way the river wears  
At the muddy banks  
And shapes itself in the image  
Of the shell that comes to fill  
Its ghost

# EDITOR BIOS

## **Stephen Murphy Shigematsu (Executive Editor and Faculty Advisor)**

is founding director of the Stanford Heartfulness Lab and teaches in Asian American Studies, Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity, and Health and Human Performance. He is the author of numerous books, including *When Half is Whole: Multiethnic Asian American Identities*, and *From Mindfulness to Heartfulness: Transforming Self and Society with Compassion*. He received a doctorate in psychology from Harvard University, was professor at the University of Tokyo and a Fulbright scholar.

**Chester Thai (Co-Editor-in-Chief, Layout and Design)** (any pronouns) is a 5th year undergraduate and cotermin student completing their major in Asian American Studies. Chester is a member of the Stanford Asian American Activism Committee (SAAAC) and has organized with CAAAV: Organizing Asian Communities and the Chinese Progressive Association SF. Chester occasionally writes poetry and dreams of building grassroots power to challenge and create alternatives to capitalism.

**Huanvy Phan (Co-Editor-in-Chief)** (they/them) has too many identities to list, including being a third year at Stanford studying Asian American Studies. They are passionate about racial justice, astrology, community organizing, and cutting off all their hair. Outside of SJAAS, Huanvy is an Ethnic Theme Associate in Okada House, the co-chair of the Stanford Vietnamese Student Association, and a volunteer with API Equality - Northern California. They dream of a liberated and interdependent world where QTPOC are safe and happy.

**Syd Westley (Editor, 2019)** (they/them) is a sophomore majoring in Comparative Literature and minoring in Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity and Creative Writing. They are a queer, non-binary, and mixed poet, and, in their free time, they enjoy clouds, California poppies, and their recently passed and formerly incarcerated grandmother, Edna Mashihara.

**Regina Kong (Editor, 2019)** (she/her) is originally from Berkeley, California. As the daughter of a single immigrant mother, Regina grew up fascinated by intergenerational trauma, loss, and memory—themes that she explores through her paintings and writing. Regina is currently undeclared and considering majoring in English and Asian American Studies, possibly with a minor in Art Practice.

**Ngoc Vo (Editor, 2019)** (she/her) is from Vietnam, currently a sophomore studying Economics and focuses on studying development economics within East Asia. She is passionate about art, especially Asian representation in art and the fashion industry. Apart from SJAAS, she is part of the MUN team and BASES integrating this more global and importantly exploring Asian representation and significant in the arts and in economics in all aspects of her academic and non-academic journey.

**Surabhi Balachander (Editor, 2017)** grew up in Indiana, graduated from Stanford University in 2017, and is currently a PhD student in English Language and Literature at the University of Michigan, where she studies rurality and race in American literature. Her poems have appeared in *jmww* and *The Wanderer*, among other places. Her poems featured in this publication were also previously published in *Yes Poetry*.

**Juliana Chang (Editor, 2017)** is a senior at Stanford studying Linguistics and Sociology. Her work has been featured in RABBIT, Rufous City Review, deComp magazine, and others. At Stanford, she performs with the Stanford Spoken Word Collective.

**Jason Li (Editor, 2017)** is a first generation Chinese American interested in public health and writing. Growing up in an immigrant suburb near Los Angeles, he's concerned with the invisibility, complexity, and joy in Asian American history and community, and he hopes to continue sharing in stories that disrupt power structures.

**Nikki Tran (Editor, 2017)** majored in English and currently is coterminating in biology. She will miss running and reading at Lake Lag when she graduates.

**Diana Zhao (Editor, 2017)** graduated from Stanford with a B.S. in Biology and Honors in CSRE in 2018, completing a first draft of a novel about mental illness in the Asian American community. She is currently working towards her M.P.P. with a concentration in health policy. In her free time she continues to read a lot of novels and write, and is endlessly curious about other people.

**Jacqueline Ramos (Editor, 2017)** is an alumna of the Urban Studies class of 2018 and is currently living in New York - writing, dancing, healing, making coffee, and re-learning that happiness lies in the little things.

**Savannah Pham (Editor, 2017)** '18 double majored in Asian American Studies and Psychology. She is currently a clinical psychology Ph.D. student at Southern Methodist University. Her research focuses on understanding the impact of culture, ethnicity, and race on psychopathology and addictive behaviors to ultimately inform clinical interventions that are most effective in alleviating distress and improving psychological functioning among people from diverse ethnocultural backgrounds.

# CONTRIBUTOR BIOS

**Aline Thiengmany** is a junior from Mount Pleasant, Iowa majoring in Biology with a concentration in Molecular Cell and Developmental Biology. As a Laotian American, she is interested in minority health and spreading awareness about issues faced within the API community. On campus, Aline is involved with SHAR(ED), Bedsider, Cardinal Free Clinics, and Stanford Pre-Med APAMSA. In her free time, you can catch her making music, baking, or trying out the newest food trends.

**Anna Le** graduated in 2017 in Bioengineering and is now a first year medical student in the CDU/UCLA program. Despite her upbringing in San Jose's Vietnamese community, she realized how unexplored her Vietnamese American identity was only after entering Stanford. Still trying to reconcile her cultural identity, she hopes to, one day, give back to this community in a way that feels right for her. Currently, Anna uses cooking as a conduit to connect with her roots and feed her loved ones. Her family takes pride in having high spice tolerances, and she happens to rank #2 in her family of 5.

**Ariel Bobbett** graduated with her B.S. and M.S. in Earth Systems in 2018. For her senior capstone project she wrote a feminist environmental poetry collection. Poems from her collection have also been published in the Stanford Activist (STATIC) zine and the Earth Systems Literary Magazine.

**Auguste Won Gyeong Seong** is, for better or for worse, a non-binary trans femme Korean immigrant and queer dyke. They are extremely fond of humblebees and sunflowers and hopes you'll come to this next punk concert with her.

**Bella Miranda** is a senior studying Theater and Performance Studies and Communication. Bella is a DJ and event producer, and is currently working on her first full-length play. She loves to write as a form of reflection and connection with her ancestors.

**Emily King** is a senior undergraduate at Stanford studying English literature. She is currently writing an honors thesis on T.S. Eliot, Simone Weil, and via negativa.

**Ethan Chua** is a Chinese-Filipino spoken word poet and scholar-activist. His work has been nominated for a Pushcart prize and published in *The Journal*, *Strange Horizons* and *Hobart*. His graphic novel, *Doorkeeper*, is available in Philippine bookstores. He is happily part of the Stanford Spoken Word Collective.

**Ian Macato** (he/him/his) is a 4th year double majoring in Symbolic Systems and CSRE. He is passionate about community organizing, social good technology and self care. As a community organizer and activist, he is committed to making this campus and this world more equitable.

**James Huynh** is the son of Vietnamese refugees. At UCLA, he is completing an MPH in Community Health Sciences and an MA in Asian American Studies. His primary research project takes an ethnographic approach to understand how intergenerational LGBTQ Vietnamese American community organizing impacts individual well-being and quality of life. More broadly, James' research interests include health equity, mental health, Southeast Asian/American communities, Vietnamese diaspora, queer of color critique, and affect theory. Prior to graduate school, James was a Fulbright Fellow in Quảng Bình, Việt Nam, where he taught English to high school students. Previously, James earned his BA in Human Biology from Stanford University. Outside of academia, James is also involved with several community organizations such as Viet Rainbow of Orange County, the Hai Ba Trung School of Organizing, and CollegeSpring.

**Joshua De Leon** (MA, Modern Thought and Literature '18; BA, International Relations '17) was born in Long Beach, California and is the proud son of Filipino immigrants. He completed Interdisciplinary Honors in the Arts at Stanford with a poetry collection exploring trauma, identity, and loss in the Filipinx American diaspora. Josh is a Stanford Community Impact Fellow and works at an NGO in Washington, DC.

**Julie Fukunaga** (she/her) is a junior majoring in Sociology and Data Science at Stanford, with interests in everything from urban studies to video game ethics. Hailing from Lodi, California, she is passionate about environmental storytelling and recounting generational narratives through food, music, and the visual arts, particularly as it pertains to her various identities. In her free time, she drinks a lot of coffee.

**Kimiko Hirota** is a 20 year old from Spokane, Washington. Her work has been published in Voicemail Poems, Raintown Almanac, and other anthologies. Her first chapbook, *Mirrors for Mannequins*, was released in 2016. She studies Sociology and Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity at Stanford University.

**Kinjal Vasavada** is a medical student at Tufts University School of Medicine and a recent graduate of Stanford University's Program in Human Biology. Her passion lies at the intersection of healthcare and design, where she believes some of the world's most wicked, complex, yet interesting problems lie. As a design researcher and strategy consultant in her past life, Kinjal views her medical training as an extensive need finding exercise, and aspires to become a surgeon-designer. Kinjal is also freelance photographer/photojournalist who enjoys photography as a way of getting to know people and telling the lesser-known stories of those affected by issues like access to healthcare. View her work on: instagram - kinjal vasavada <http://kinjaldvasavada.wordpress.com>

**Kristel Bugayong** ('18) is a Filipina illustrator and cartoonist based in the Bay Area. She graduated from Stanford University with a bachelor's in communication, emphasis on visual communication. She has worked on books, cartoons, videos, educational material, and marketing material for The Nib, UCSF Medicine for Migration, the Cantor Arts Center, Bing Concert Hall, the Stanford Storytelling Project, among others. Her Instagram is @kristelbugayong.

**Maddie Kim** is a junior majoring in English. Her poetry and prose can be found in *The Adroit Journal*, *The Asian American Writers Workshop's The Margins*, and *The Journal*, among others. In her free time, she dances with Stanford TapTh@t and reads poetry.

**Manisha Rattu** is a senior studying Earth Systems and minoring CSRE. She identifies as Punjabi, Sikh, and South Asian. Her passion for poetry was ignited by reading the works of poets like Salvin Chahal, Shailja Patel, Rupi Kaur, Damneet Kaur, and Rumi. This submission is part of her own path towards crafting poetry.

**Mini Racker** graduated in June 2018 with a degree in mechanical engineering and a minor in creative writing. Originally from Philadelphia, she frequently went to the beach to study for exams. She spent one quarter with the Wrigley Field Program in Hawaii and another at Stanford in Washington, in addition to working as a peer counselor and a section leader at the Bridge. In her senior year, she also wrote for *The Stanford Daily*. She now lives in Washington, D.C., where she works as a political reporter at *National Journal*.

**Momo Hoshi** (they/she) graduated in 2018 with a B.A. in Music and a B.A. with Honors in Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity. They are now a Health Educator working with young people in schools all over the Bay Area. Outside of teaching, they continue to actively pursue their love for vocal and instrumental music.

**Olivia Popp** is a junior majoring in Film and Media Studies and Science, Technology, and Society. She has served as the Managing Editor of Arts & Life for the Stanford Daily for two years and is the Artistic Director of the Asian American Theater Project. Olivia enjoys telling stories that queer science fiction and Asian American narratives. In her free time, she likes consuming absurdist television and barbecue sauce.

**Terence Zhao** is a senior and was born and raised in Beijing before immigrating to the US when he was nine years old. In his spare time, he likes to explore cities and contemplate a future without empire and oppression.

**Victor “Viv” Liu** is an undergraduate at Stanford University double majoring in art history and comparative studies in race and ethnicity. Liu focuses on the art and visual culture of the United States, especially the art of the 20th century, with respect to the cultural politics of race and ethnicity; histories of migration and diaspora; and the signaling and deferral of “identity.” They are currently working on a thesis on the queer, Chinese-American painter Martin Wong (1946-1999) and his relationship to historical memory. Outside of Stanford, Liu has held internship positions focusing on curatorial research at the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art. Their writing can be found in the accompanying catalogue for MoMA’s exhibition *Judson Dance Theater: The Work is Never Done*.

**Vrinda Vasavada** is a junior majoring in Computer Science with a minor in Economics. She is extremely interested in applications of computer science in education and healthcare policy. On campus, she is a proud staff member in Norcliffe, her home from freshman year, a CS106 Section Leader, and the co-director of SHE++, a Stanford-based non-profit seeking to empower women in leadership roles in technology. In her free time, she loves to paint, hike, and spend time with her friends and family!

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