In the United States, racism’s “traveling eye” has created and cordoned off race-based communities, affixing meaning to them according to the degree of threat they are thought to pose to the dominant culture at particular points in time. Asian-origin communities were called “Oriental” east of and peripheral to an unnamed center. Historically, Asian Americans, as we renamed ourselves, have had

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no place in the discourse on race and culture in the United States except as "model minorities" on the one hand or as unassimilable aliens on the other, as statements about the ultimate goodness of the dominant culture and the ultimate badness of those who refuse to go along with the program. Faced with sets of mutually exclusive binaries between "East" and "West," between Asia and America, and between suspect alien and patriot, those seeking a third place as "both/and" instead of "either/or" are usually considered racist, un-American, even anti-American. Within the context of these silencing systems of domination, Asian Americans are supposed to deny their cultural heritages, accept positions as sojourning "exotic aliens," or "go back" to "Asia." Within the context of these silencing systems of domination, Asian Americans are supposed to deny their cultural heritages, accept positions as sojourning "exotic aliens," or "go back" to "Asia."1

A generation ago, I attempted to define Asian American literature as work in English by writers of Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, and Korean descent about U.S. American experiences.2 I admitted at the time that this definition was arbitrary, prompted by my own inability to read Asian languages and my own lack of access to South and Southeast Asian communities. But for these shortcomings, I wrote, I would have included in my introductory study works written in Asian languages and works by writers from Vietnamese American, Indian American, and other communities.

Nonetheless, it is true that I wanted to delineate and draw boundaries around whatever I thought of as Asian American identity and literature. Clearly, Asian American experiences and creative visions had been excluded from or distorted in the established texts: although I had majored in English and American literature in the 1960s at Ivy League universities and at Berkeley, I was never assigned the work of a single writer of color, not even Ralph Ellison or Richard Wright, whose books I had to read on my own, together with the work of many other "Third World" and Asian American writers of color. A century and a

1. In "Home Is Where the Han Is: A Korean American Perspective on the Los Angeles Uprisings" (in Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising, ed. Robert Gooding-Williams, New York: Routledge, 1993), I quote from the scores of hate letters I have received in response to an essay I wrote for Newsweek magazine in May, 1992 from Americans living in all parts of the country. These letters provide concrete examples of U.S. American nativist thinking about Asian Americans in the 1990s.

2. Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982), half of persistent and deeply rooted racist inscriptions in both official and mass literary culture in the United States perpetuated grotesque representations of Asian Americans as alien Others, whether as sinister villains, dragon ladies, brute hordes, helpless heathens, comical servants, loyal sidekicks, Suzy Wongs, or wily asexual detectives. Like many other Asian Americans, I felt an urgent need to insist that these were not "our realities." Our strategy was to assert a self-determined Asian American identity in direct opposition to these dehumanizing characterizations, even if it was limited by being contained within the exclusive binary system that occasioned it.

For the most part, I read Asian American literature as a literature of protest and exile, a literature about place and displacement, a literature concerned with psychic and physical "home"—searching for and claiming a "home" or longing for a final "homecoming." I looked for unifying thematic threads and tidy resolutions that might ease the pain of displacement and heal the exile, heedless of what might be missing from this homogenizing approach and oblivious to the parallels between what I was doing and dominant culture attempts to reduce Asian American experiences to developmental narratives about the movement from "primitive." "Eastern," and foreign immigrant to "civilized," "Western," and "Americanized" loyal citizen.

The cultural nationalist defenses we constructed were anti-assimilationist. But while they opposed official nationalism, the Asian American identity they allowed for was fixed, closed, and narrowly defined, dividing "Asian American" from "Asian" as sharply as possible, privileging race over gender and class, accepting compulsory heterosexuality as "natural," and constructing a hierarchy of authenticity to separate the "real" from the "fake." According to this definition, there were not many ways of being Asian American. The ideal was male, heterosexual, Chinese or Japanese American, and English-speaking. The center of Chinese America was San Francisco or New York Chinatown, and the heart of Japanese America was in Hawaii or along Highway 99, which cut through the agricultural fields the nisei and nisei had lost during World War II. Asian American history was about railroads, "bachelor societies," and internment. The sacred Asian American texts—such as Carlos Bulosan's "America in the
Heart, John Okada’s No-No Boy, and Louis Chu’s Eat a Bowl of Tea—were by “dead yellow men” instead of “dead white men.” Asian American literary studies usually did not question the concept of canonization but simply posited an alternative canon. It seemed that every film, every article, and even many novels had to be a unidimensional documentary filled with literal and solemnly delivered history lessons. Given the magnitude of general ignorance about Asian Americans, it was difficult to do anything but play a dead straight part. Dealing with subtleties, hybridities, paradoxes, and layers seemed almost out of the question when so much effort had to be expended simply justifying Asian Americans as discursive subjects in the first place.

Cultural nationalist agendas have the potential to contest and disrupt the logic of domination, its exploitation and exclusions. Certainly it was possible for me as a Korean American female to accept the fixed masculinist Asian American identity posited in Asian American cultural nationalism, even when it rendered invisible or at least muted women’s oppression, anger, and ways of loving and interpreted Korean Americans as imperfect imitations of Chinese Americans; because I could see in everyday life that not all material and psychic violence to women of color comes from men. And because, as my friends used to say, “No Chinese [American] ever called me ‘gook.’” No matter what, some cultural nationalist approaches have the power to render visible what David Lloyd has called “the history of the possible.”

While I was preoccupied with defining Asian American identity and culture in the 1970s and with uncovering buried stories from “early” Asian America, changes in U.S. immigration quotas in 1965 were already resulting in massive and highly visible transformations in Asian American communities. Indeed, it might be said that until recent years, Asian American communities and cultures were shaped by legal exclusion and containment, while contemporary experiences are being shaped by the internationalization of the world’s political economies and cultures. Yesterday’s young Asian immigrant might have worked beside his parents on a pineapple plantation in Hawai‘i or in a fruit orchard on the Pacific Coast, segregated from the mainstream of American life. Today’s Asian immigrant teenager might have only Asian friends, but she probably deals daily with a not necessarily anguishing confusion of divergent influences, a collision of elements she needs to negotiate in her search to define herself. In this regard, she is not unlike other Americans; as Trinh T. Minh-ha has pointed out, “There is a Third World in every First World and vice versa.” Her collisions, however, are probably tied to the particularities of her cultural background at a particular point in time. Thus, she might rent Korean language video melodramas from a shopping center in Southern California today, after having watched “MacGyver” and “Entertainment Tonight” on television in Seoul as a child.

During the past two decades, some Asian and Pacific American populations have increased by 500 to 1,000 percent. New Asian American communities have taken root all over the country, as Vietnamese refugees settle in Westminster, California, and Korean immigrants gather in Flushing, New York. Newcomers are diverse in terms of origin and ethnicity, language, social class, political situations, educational backgrounds, and patterns of settlement. They have moved to cities and towns where few Asian Americans had lived before and are doing things to earn their livelihoods that they could not have imagined when they were in their homelands: Cambodians are making doughnuts, Koreans are making burritos, South Asians are operating motels, Filipinos are driving airport shuttle buses. The lines between Asian and Asian American, so crucial to identity formations in the past, are increasingly blurred; transportation to and communication with Asia is no longer daunting, resulting in new crossovers and intersections and different kinds of material and cultural distances today.

Asian American identities are fluid and migratory: the Minnesota social worker who clings to the idea of Hmong as limited English-speaking refugees from a pre-literate society may be surprised to encounter a Hmong teenager who composes rap music, plays hockey, and dates Chicano boys or girls. Cultures, whether Asian origin cul-


tutes or the "majority culture," which is no more monolithic and unitary than "Asian" or "Asian American culture," have never been fixed, continuous, or discrete. The notion of an absolute American past, a single source for American people, a founding identity or wholeness in America, is rooted in the racist fiction of primordial white American universality, as is the fear that "American culture" is now being broken down by rowdy brown and yellow immigrants and other people of color who refuse to melt into the final identity of "just Americans."

I often hear people lament that things are getting worse all the time, that Americans are more divided, that there is less tolerance and more racial violence than ever before. But according to my own experience of the Wonder Bread days before the Civil Rights Movement, there was much more racial violence and much less racial tolerance then than now. Maybe some people remember the "good old days" of the Ozzie and Harriet 1950s as peaceful and harmonious; I don't. The races were more divided in the past, when segregation was the rule and racial hierarchies were accepted as natural and permanent. In Maryland, where I grew up, interracial marriages were illegal, and job announcements routinely stipulated "whites only" as well as "men only." It is true that hate crimes against Asian Americans are more and more frequently in the news. But if anyone thinks that racial violence is a 1990s phenomenon, maybe that's because racial violence in the "good old days" was not documented except in the lived experiences of Americans of color. In my view, the "good old days" were not so good for women and people of color.

The America that is ever "becoming" has always been a polyglot nation of immigrants, but this has never been all; it is also the site of Native America, of African slavery and resistances to it, of the war between the United States and Mexico and the yet to be fully honored Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Knowing that there never has been a unified Mayflower and Plymouth Rock beginning to "return to" makes me feel hopeful about the future.

No matter what we wish for, things do not necessarily come to a harmonious resolution. Perhaps after all there is no "home," except for a place of contestation that negates as well as affirms. And identity, like "home," is ever in process, less a refuge than the site of contend:ing, multiple meanings. Inevitably, the Asian American identity offered by cultural nationalism could not but produce conflicts that portended its own undoing: what was excluded and rendered invisible—the unruly, the transgressive, and the disruptive—began to seep out from under the grids and appear from between the cracks. Eventually the seams burst and were exposed. In the case of Asian America, this unruliness has come from women who never stop being both Asian and female, as well as from others rendered marginal by the essentializing aspects of Asian American cultural nationalism.

This book shows us what is now possible as well as what is in store, for without a doubt, there is much more where these stories came from. Charlie Chan is indeed dead, never to be revived. Gone for good his yellowface asexual bulk, his fortune-cookie English, his stereotypical Orientalist version of the [Confucian] Chinese family, challenged by an array of characters, some hip and articulate, some brooding and sexy, some insolent and others innocent, but all as unexpected as a Korean American who writes in French, a Chinese-Panamanian-German who longs too late to know her father, a mean Japanese American grandmother, a Chinese American flamboyant clown, or a teenage Filipino American male prostitute. Instead of "model minorities," we find human beings with rich and complex pasts and brave, often法兰克梦想的未来。有磨合不成功的家庭，为那些不予尊重的Chinese family values, tragic stories of suicide, incest, and child abuse, as well as lullabies about aging, love, and death. The locales span the world, and the writers are old, young, established, and new, reflecting the amazing diversity of Asian American national origins and a wide variety of subject positions. To read them, we will need to go beyond cultural nationalist approaches to employ mixed strategies and critical practices.

For me, this collection celebrates many ways of being Asian American today, when the question need no longer be "either/or." This anthology gives us both Asian American literature and world literature: Asian American literary work may be about Asian American experiences, but this is never all it is about. The writers here are magicians who transform "facts" into meanings, reaching across pain and
silences to shape legacies and create new cultures as they open spaces for the historically banished. "One day I going to write/about you," writes Lois-Ann Yamanaka in "Empty Heart," and she has kept her promise.

Elaine Kim
Oakland, California
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Introduction

"Role of Dead Man Require Very Little Acting"

from Charlie Chan's Secret (1936; 20th Century-Fox), starring Warner Oland as Charlie Chan.

Charlie Chan is our most famous fake "Asian" pop icon—known for his obsequious manner, fractured English, and dainty walk. Absurdly cryptic, pseudo-Confucian sayings rolled off his tongue:

"Observe."
"When weaving nets, all threads counted."
"Woman's intuition like feather on arrow. May help flight to truth."
"Necessity mother of invention, but sometimes stepmother of deception."
"Boy scout knife. Like ladies' hairpin. Have many uses."
"Best place for skeleton is in family closet."
"Chinese people interested in all things psychic."
"If strength were all, tiger would not fear scorpion."
"Observe."

The character of Charlie Chan was created by a white man named Earl Derr Biggers in 1925. Ingrained in American popular culture, Charlie Chan is as much a part of the demeaning legacy of stereotypes that includes Fu Manchu, Stepin' Fetchit, Sambo, Aunt Jemima.
Amos N’Andy, Speedy Gonzalez, Tonto, and Little Brown Brother. I grew up in the Philippines watching Hollywood movies featuring yellowface, blackface, and redface actors giving me their versions of myself. It was so easy to succumb to the seductive, insidious power of these skewed, wide-screen images. Better than books, movies were immediate and reached more people—both literate and illiterate. Movies were instantly gratifying. Bigger than life. I was a child. The movies these skewed, title-street images. Better than books, movies were immediate and reached more people—both literate and illiterate. Movies were Cod. And therefore, true.


The images have now evolved into subtler stereotypes. There’s the greedy, clever Japanese Businessman, ready to buy up New York City and all the Van Goughs in the world. There’s the Ultimate Nerd, the model minority Asian American student, excelling in math and computer science, obsessed with work, work, work. There’s Miss Saigon, the contemporary version of Madame Butterfly—tragic victim/whore of war-torn Vietnam, eternally longing for the white boy soldier who has abandoned her and her son. There’s The Lover, the pathetic Chinese millionaire hoy-toy completely dominated by his impoverished, adolescent, blondie waif dominatrix in both Marguerite Duras’ popular novel and the recent film version. Often portrayed as loyal servants and children, we are humorless, non-assertive, impotent—yet we are eroticized as exotic playthings in both Western film and literature. In our perceived American character—we are completely non-threatening. We don’t complain. We endure humiliation. We are almost inhuman in our patience. We never get angry.

I grew up in the Philippines reading the literature of the Western World—Hawthorne, Poe, Cervantes, to name a few. Of course there was also the Old and New Testament of the Bible which we were expected to study and deconstruct in loving detail: we were a majority Catholic country, after all, legendary for our faith and zeal. My reading books in English came from the United States—Fun with Dick and Jane, I thought all Americans were blond and freckled, ate apples, and all fair-haired children had dogs like Spot. Everyone lived in modern homes, with mowed lawns and picket fences. It was a David Lynch movie cliche without the perverse undertones. Even though we also studied Tagalog, one of our native languages (now known as Filipino), and read some of the native literature (I remember Jose Rizal in particular, and an epic, romantic poem by Francisco Balagtas), it was pretty clear to most of us growing up in the fifties and early sixties that what was really important, what was inevitably preferred, was the aping of our mythologized Hollywood universe. The colonization of our imagination was relentless and hard to shake off. Everywhere we turned, the images held up did not match our own. In order to be acknowledged, we had to strive to be as American as possible.

And then I came to the United States of America. We settled in San Francisco, California—a city we probably felt most comfortable in because of its closeness to water (we could leave anytime and go back “home”), and because there was a growing and already visible Asian community (we had easy access to our culture, whether we wanted it or not). The irony was lost on us, back then. We were also confronted by the new and unfamiliar, Chicanos, African Americans (still called “Negroes”), and an incredible variety of white people of various ethnic origins.

I was ignorant of the difficult history and contributions of Asian Americans in this country. I had no idea Filipinos were exploited as cheap farm labor in California places like Watsonville, Salinas, and Stockton; they were firebombed and run out of town by angry mobs threatened by loss of jobs throughout the Western states; they were forbidden to marry white women, harassed openly, and even lynched.
for being involved with them. Filipino women were outnumbered by Filipino men one to a hundred in the 1920s and '30s, according to Fred Cordova’s remarkable book, *Filipinos: Forgotten Asian Americans*. I was unaware of the signs in California public establishments that were a common sight in the 1930s: “Positively No Filipinos Allowed.” This had never been taught to us back in Manila, and was certainly not part of my high school social studies in San Francisco in the sixties. Americans were the good guys. For Filipinos, especially, America was generally perceived as our savior, our benefactor, our protector; as Carlos Bulosan wrote so sincerely and poignantly, and as I imagine he believed to the bitter end: “America Is in the Heart.”

In my American high school classes, I was again reading Hawthorne, Poe, Melville, Dostoevski, Dickens, the occasional Emily Dickinson or Brontë sisters, Sui Sin Far, Richard Wright, John Okada, Lawson Inada, Gwendolyn Brooks, James Baldwin, Tosio Mori, and Carlos Bulosan did not exist in our curriculum. I graduated from high school in 1967, unable to pinpoint the source of my unease. I had been in America exactly four years. There were sit-ins going on, downtown on Van Ness Avenue. A strike at San Francisco State University a few blocks away from my high school. John F. Kennedy and Malcolm X had been assassinated. The Black Panther Party was born. How did I fit in? Chicanos, African Americans, and even militant Asian Americans were forming alliances. Could Asian Americans, in fact, be “militant”? Were we really a part of the Third World? *The Third World*. Not exactly a term my family would take pride in. Where I came from, “Third World” lacked glamour. It was synonymous with phones that didn’t work, roads that were badly in need of repair, corrupt politicians, and naked children with rickety bones and bellies bloated from hunger. Who was I?

*Shake syntax, smash the myths, and if you lose, slide on, unearth some new linguistic paths. Do you surprise? Do you shock? Do you have a choice?*

—Trinh T. Minh-ha,
*Woman, Native, Other*
Mariano, Al Robles, Janice Minkitani, Kitty Tsui, Geraldine Kudaka, Oscar Peñaranda, Lou Syquia, Nellie Wong, Russell Leong, Genny Lim, Presco Tabios, Norman Jayo, George Leong... all those who volunteered to work with the ‘manongs’ and other senior citizens living at the legendary I-Hotel, all those who passed through the open doors of the Kearny Street Writers Workshop, sharing food, drink, gossip, poems, stories, and first attempts at scripts. We collaborated on many literary projects with other Bay Area writers and artists of color like Ishmael Reed, Roberto Vargas, Thulani Davis, Avotcja Miltonero, the late Buriel Clay, Alejandro Murguia, Jim Dong, Janet Campbell Hale, Ntozake Shange, and Rupert Garcia, to name a few. Some of us were part of an artistic and media collective known as Third World Communications. We no longer wanted to sit around waiting for the publishing industry to notice us; we raised money, edited, designed, and published our own books, knowing all along that there was a growing readership out there.

The first *Aii tweecee* anthology, published in hardback in 1974 and in paperback in 1975, was an absolute breakthrough for Asian Americans. The brash, refreshingly outspoken editors of this landmark collection were Frank Chin, Jeffery Paul Chan, Lawson Fusaro Inada, and Shawn Wong. Receiving my copy as a gift from Frank Chin (who declined to be included in this anthology) proved a joyous revelation. I was not alone, pure and simple. There were other writers—poets, essayists, novelists, playwrights—like me, and yet not like me at all. We may share the same yearnings for *adobo* and *pinakbete*, but some of us had worked in Alaskan canneries or as migrant workers in California, and wrote from that brutal experience; others wrote sophisticated existential fiction reeking with black humor; still others wrote of the conflicts and tensions within Asian American families, and the surreal displacement felt by many immigrants. Others owed their anarchic allegiances purely to rock ‘n’ roll. Some were my contemporaries, immigrants like me. Others had been in America two or three generations. There were many who had experienced firsthand the indignities and harsh realities of incarceration in the so-called “relocation camps” like Manzanar, Tule Lake, or Poston, Arizona. Our histories are often painfully entangled, and yes—we quarrel amongst ourselves. But we are definitely “not new here.”

Besides presenting the individual literary work of the editors, the first *Aii tweecee* gave us a sampling of the poems, plays, and stories of: Carlos Bulosan, Louis Chu, Hisaye Yamamoto DeSoto, Wakako Yamamura, Diana Chang, Tosho Nori, Oscar Peñaranda, Sam Tagatac, John Okada, Momoko Iko, Russell Leong, a.k.a. Wallace Lin. My writer’s education owes a big debt to this first *Aii tweecee*. The sound was, and is “more than a white shout or scream. This is fifty years of our whole voice.”

The energy and interest sparked by *Aii tweecee* in the Seventies was essential to Asian American writers because it gave us visibility and credibility as creators of our own specific literature. We could not be ignored; suddenly, we were no longer silent. Like other writers of color in America, we were beginning to challenge the long-cherished concepts of a xenophobic literary canon dominated by white heterosexual males. Obviously, there was room for more than one voice and one vision in this ever-expanding arena.

There were fourteen writers included in the first *Aii tweecee* anthology. Since then, there has been more cause for celebration. A number of notable novels, memoirs, essays and collections of Asian American poetry, plays, critical theory, social history and fiction have been published by big and small presses to critical and commercial acclaim in the brief, seventeen-year period spanning 1976 to 1993. (See my suggested reading list.)

And then of course, came The Big *AiiIEEEEO,*, this time billed solely as “An Anthology of Chinese American and Japanese American Literature” and again edited by Chan, Chin, Inada, and Wong and published in 1991. This second volume boasts 619 pages and features twenty-eight writers of fiction, poetry, and essays. Three *Filipino Women*—three novellas by one of the Philippines’ most distinguished writers, F. Sionil Jose—were published in one volume in America in 1992. That same year, Trevor Carmel’s *The Colors of Heaven*, a collection of Pacific Rim writers from China, Japan, Taiwan, the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, Korea, Australia, Indonesia, and New...
Zealand, was published. Nineteen ninety-three has already brought us Garrett Hongo’s anthology of Asian American poetry, The Open Boat; Lawson Fusao Inada’s Legends from Camp; Luis Francia’s anthology of Philippine literature in English, Brown River, White Ocean; and Fae Myenne Ng’s long-awaited first novel, Bone.

Hmmmm. We’ve come a long way, Charlie baby.

In the thirty years I have lived in America, I never really thought I would see the literary landscape change, splitting off into so many challenging and liberating directions. As the first anthology of Asian American fiction by a commercial publisher in this country, Charlie Chan Is Dead proudly presents forty-eight writers. Almost half are being published in a major collection for the first time.

The writers selected for this anthology are exhilarating in their differences: there is an array of cultural backgrounds, age range, and literary styles gathered here. No “theme” was imposed on the writers when they were invited to submit. I let it be known that I was definitely more interested in “riskier” work, and that I was eager to subvert the very definition of what was considered “fiction.” Unless I had a specific work of theirs in mind, the choice of what to send me was left up to the writer. Even the notion of what is “Asian American” is expanded to include the writer Joy Kogawa, a resident of Canada. The resulting range is enormous, and one almost has to read through these marvelous stories as if one were watching a movie, shifting back and forth in time: Jose Garcia Villa’s minimalist “Untitled Story” (first published in 1933) bumps heads with Carlos Bulosan’s harrowing “I Would Remember.” Meena Alexander’s “Manhattan Music” offers an insightful look at the multiethnic, trendy New York downtown art scene of the troubled ’90s. Wakako Yamauchi evokes a young girl’s sexual awakening in the barren desert landscape of “That Was All.” Han Ong’s tough male hustler prowls the seedy landscape of modern Los Angeles in “The Stranded in the World.” R. Zamora Linmark creates playful, tragicomic vignettes of growing up gay and Filipino in Hawaii in “They Like You Because You Eat Dog, So What Are You Gonna Do About It?”

Bienvenido Santos’ classic “Immigration Blues” moves us with its unsparing yet tender characterizations of old-time Filipino bachelors seeking love in America. Marilyn Chin’s angry, sly voice in “Moon” shocks us and makes us laugh—indeed the quintessential Chinese American girl’s “Revenge Tale”—and Marianne Villanueva’s voice is elegiac in “Lenox Hill, December 1991.” Insolence and heat emanate from the bad boys of Lawrence Chua’s “No Sayang Lost.” There is a variety of rhythms and language in the genteeel madness of Hisaye Yamamoto DeSoto’s “Eucalyptus,” the streetwise rap of Walter Lew’s nerdy “Black Korea,” and the sophisticated repartee of Shawn Wong’s sexy, almost too-hip-for-their-own-good lovers in “Eye Contact.” The jagged fragments of poetic language slice through Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s complex “Melpomene Tragedy.” N. V. M. Gonzalez gives us earthly wisdom in “The Bread of Salt.” In the face of loss, stoicism and longing are exhibited by the protagonist of Russell Leong’s “Geography One.” The haunting junkie ecstasy of Kiana Davenport’s “Dragon Seed” is both abhorrent and beautiful. I was intrigued by the sinister psychosexual obsessions explored in both Kerri Sakamoto’s “Walk In Closet” and John Yau’s “Photographs for an Album (Third Version),” I was delighted by the sappiness and spark of Cherylene Lee’s “Safe.” The rich, funky rhythm and blues poetry of pidgin English is captured by both Lois-Ann Yamanaka’s “Empty Heart” and Darrell Lum’s hilarious “Fourscore and Seven Years Ago.” Postmodern conceits are fluidly adapted in the deadpan, contemporary portrait of Chairman Mao in Alex Kuo’s “The Connoisseur of Chaos.” John Song’s “Faith” examines the impact of incest on a family in lyrical yet restrained language that keeps the story from becoming sensational and obvious. Toshio Mori’s unforgettable “The Chauvinist” reminds us once again that he was one of our master storytellers.

And there’s more. Wonderful stories rich in craft and complex vision by writers such as: Maxine Hong Kingston, Amy Tan, Bharati Mukherjee, Diana Chang, Gish Jen, Fae Myenne Ng, David Wong Louie, David Mura, Cynthia Kangohata, Joy Kogawa, Jeffery Paul Chan, Ninotchka Rosca, Ruthanne Lum McCunn, Fiona Cheong, Kimiko Hahn, Ruxana Meer, Sigrid Nunez, Peter Bacho, Yoji Yamaguchi, Laureen Mar, Jocelyn Lieu, and Sylvia Watanabe.

Some of these writers were originally poets, some still are. Others only write fiction. Some were born in the Philippines, some in Seattle,


This is an anthology I created for selfish reasons; a book I wanted to read that had never been available to me. In many of these stories, cultures clash. We are confronted by characters in all their contradictions and complexities. They make love, worry about the future, hurt each other, endure hardships. They grease their hair, conk and lacquer it; dance slick like James Brown, shimmy across the floor, get loud and have fun. They get high. Sell their bodies. They audition for jobs as anchormen and women. They are lost in nostalgia, homesick for their country of origin. Exiled, Displaced. Assimilated. Rebellious. They lie and cheat; they betray themselves and others. They are tough and noble. They survive. They remind us that in our civilized anguish, we are still beautiful and amazing.

In this collection, some of us retell familial and cultural mythology, yet we also write out of more personal and perhaps more terrifying truths. For many of us, what is personal is also political, and vice versa. We are asserting and continually exploring who we are as Asians, Asian Americans, and artists and citizens of what Salman Rushdie calls “a shrinking universe.” The choice is more than whether to hyphenate or not. The choice is more than gender, race, or class. First generation, second, third, fourth. Who is authentic or fake. Dead or undead. Mainstream or marginal. Uncle Tom or Charlie Chan. And the language(s) we speak are not necessarily the language(s) in which we dream.

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