

Introduction to

CONTENTS: Volume II

Where the Past And Future become the Now

"We are at a moment in our history when the past and the future became the now."

Roshni Rustomji, *Amerasia Journal*

The second volume of *Global Identities, Local Voices* features Asian American scholars and writers who explore broad themes that cross national boundaries; case studies that analyze racial and ethnic divisions and convergences, and; contemporary research which transcends traditional notions of separated ethnic enclaves and cultures.

To explore such "linkages" and "boundaries" is especially germane in this second decade of the 21st century of increased ethnic and racial balkanization, anti-immigrant bashing in the West (the U.S. and Europe), and debates over the rights of minorities, including those who identify as gay and lesbian. Such issues may provide an indicator of future intellectual, cultural, and political scripts and debates in mainland China, Taiwan, and elsewhere in this time of accelerated societal change and movements for minority, religious, sexual, and indigenous rights. Thus, this second volume, which complements the first, provides specific examples of cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary scholarship that characterize the field of Asian American Studies today and relevant to globalized concerns.

These essays are grouped into four sections:

- A. Linkages & Boundaries
- B. Across Race and Ethnicity
- C. Pathways to Literature and Gender
- D. American Chinatowns and Cultures

A. Linkages & Boundaries

This section, "linkages and boundaries" draws its title and inspiration from the work of Lucie Cheng, the former director of UCLA's Asian American Studies Center. One of her significant research contributions to the field of Asian American Studies was her exploration of the relationship between the emigrant sending villages of the Toisan region in the Pearl River Delta, linking the immigration process to the settlement of Chinese women and men in the U.S. Here we include her co-authored article with Liu Yuzun and Zheng Dehua on the Sunning Railway (aka Xinning Railway Company) 新寧鐵路 (pinyin: Xinning Tielu), a standard gauge railway in the Pearl River Delta in Guangdong Province founded in 1906 by Chin Gee Hee 陳宜禧 (pinyin: Chen Yixi) and Yu Shek 余灼 (pinyin: Yu Zhuo). It was South China's second railway and one of only three railways in pre-1949 China built solely with private Chinese capital. Lucie Cheng and Liu Yuzun write that, while the railway did not play major economic or strategic role in the history of Chinese transportation, "its entire life reflects the interlocking but

conflicting pressures of Western imperialism, bureaucratic capitalism and feudalism which characterized early twentieth century China... Moreover [it] reflects the role of emigrant capital and nationalism on the development of enterprises in the emigrant motherland," reflecting especially the investment by overseas Chinese in a geographic area (Taishan) which had been the homeland for so many of them.

This essay is followed by a tribute to the pioneering scholarship and work of Cheng written by Dr. Tritia Toyota, herself an acclaimed writer, and scholar of Asian American Studies based also at UCLA.

September 11, 2001--the destruction of the World Trade Center in New York by terrorists, together with its political fall-out and aftermath--created the need for Asian Americans to re-examine their political status in a broader geo-political context. Subsequently, Amerasia Journal asked Marxist critic and scholar of modern Chinese history, Arif Dirlik, together with South Asian writer and editor Roshni Rustomji, to provide commentaries in a special volume published several months after the terrorist attacks. Dirlik places his political critique of the event squarely within the historical vortex of Western colonialism, globalism, and culture, a background which has continues to shape American relations with both Asia and the Middle East to this day. Rustomji, on the other hand, provides an intimate narrative of her growing up in Pakistan, Lebanon, and in the United States. Indeed, "After Words: Who Speaks on War, Justice, and Peace," the special issue of the journal edited by Don Nakanishi and Russell Leong, was re-published by UCLA Asian American Studies Center Press as *Asian Americans on War and Peace*, the first book to respond to the tragic world events of September 11, 2001 from diverse Asian American perspectives.

During its forty years of publication, the journal has made a concerted effort to develop thematic issues, which place Asian Americans within a comparative geopolitical context—with other Asians who have migrated and settled in Latin America, Australia, and in Canada. Henry Yu, of the University of British Columbia and formerly a professor of history at UCLA, developed a special issue on "Pacific North America" and we include his compelling introduction to this 2007 volume here.

B. Across Race and Ethnicity

A premise of our publishing Asian American scholarship is that its ideas, theories, and practices can be useful for other racial and minority groups. Thus we include here a seminal essay by one of America's leading civil rights legal scholars, Eric Yamamoto, of the William Richardson School of Law in Honolulu, Hawaii. "What's Next?: Japanese American Redress and African American Reparations" (1999) looks at questions of civil liberties vs. national security, and explores the legal, ethical, and social ramifications of the illegal internment of Japanese American during World War II and the successful redress and reparations movement of the 1980s. (The U.S. government formally apologized to the aging survivors of the illegal internment of Japanese Americans during World War II and paid monetary reparations.) Yamamoto also looks at the relationship and repercussions of Japanese American reparations for African American reparations claims.

Trinidadian Chinese scholar Christine Ho, in her research on "Hold the Chow Mein, Gimme Soca: Creolization of Chinese in Guyana, Trinidad, and Jamaica" provides a brief history of the Chinese in the British Caribbean. The title of this article is an adaptation of the lyrics of a popular calypso song and composed by a young Indian-Trinidadian calypsonian for the carnival season. The message of the song is clear: he wants nothing to do with East Indian culture because he is a "citizen of Trinidad." Similar sentiments are found among the Chinese in the Caribbean, according to Ho.

"Creole culture" is that which is forged locally in a new society from the encounter of two or more different cultures, producing a new and distinctive culture. In the Caribbean, what has evolved over the centuries since its "discovery" by Columbus is a local culture that combines primarily elements from Europe and Africa, the two cultures which have the longest history in the region" states Ho. The article provides a compelling example of how the Chinese outside of China adapt and create new cultural identities in oft-unique ways.

c. Pathways: To Literature and Gender

The path-breaking issue of *Amerasia Journal* "Dimensions of Desire" published in 1994, opened up the field of Asian American Studies to serious studies of diverse sexualities and helped to establish both scholars and classes in universities throughout the U.S.

This issue sought to forge linkages between questions and issues of sexual and racial identity among Asian and Pacific Americans. "Dimensions" here refers to a range of sexual identifications, e.g. straight, lesbian, gay, transgendered, and bisexual. "Desires" refers to the range and variation of sexual practice or sexual desire, including celibacy. While most of the articles in issue spoke to dimensions of lesbian and gay Desire, Dana Takagi's path-breaking article, "Maiden Voyage," included here, raises questions that relate more broadly to Asian American sexuality and to Asian American Studies. Sexuality and Desire and their potent, multivalent expressions-thus could be seen both as political and allegorical, speaking to variations in the conceptions of Asian Americans and Pacific peoples in general. These questions included, but were not limited, to the following:

- How do we include lesbian, gay, transgendered, and bisexual history within that of Asian American history?
- What is the relationship between ideas around sexual and gender differentiation and "racial origins, languages of gender, or class roots?"
- Do the dynamics of racial oppression differ or do they share similarities with oppression based upon gender?

Asian American women writers, including Hisaye Yamamoto, Maxine Hong Kingston, Jessica Hagedorn, and Karen Tei Yamashita, among others, have been at the forefront of deconstructing myths and masculinist assumptions round conventional notions of gender, sexuality, and culture and politics in Asian American life. Karen Tei Yamashita, whose recent book "I-Hotel", was a finalist for the National Book award in the U.S., is interviewed by Shan Te-Hsing in this volume. Shan, the Chinese editor of

these two volumes, has been a prodigious chronicler, interviewer and translator of Asian American writers during the past 15 years.

The above interview was included in a special issue, "AXISing Asian American Literature." In the same volume we also included "Rethinking Realisms through the Writings of Eileen Chang" by Christopher Lee. According to Lee:

Studies of Asian American writing during the Cold War are often guided by historical approaches that focus on the pressures of assimilation during the period. For Chinese Americans in particular, the tension between the United States and the People's Republic of China led to increased surveillance as the government cracked-down on 'illegal' immigrants as well as those with progressive sympathies. At the same time, a number of prominent writers and thinkers immigrated to the United States in the aftermath of the Communist victory in China.

Lee focuses on one such figure, Eileen Chang (Zhang Ailing, 1920-1995, widely recognized today as one of the most important modern Chinese writers today.

4. American Chinatowns and Cultures

For the average American and overseas Chinese visitor alike, stereotypes of U.S. Chinatowns filled with restaurants, trinket shops, docile Chinese men and women waiting on tables or ironing laundry, and crowded housing and shops—prevail. Without knowing the history and contributions of Chinese Americans to the U.S. labor movement, to culture, literature, politics and the society-at-large, these narrow and superficial impressions create a limiting and distorted picture of a vital minority group. Scholars, some included in volumes one and two of *Global Identities, Local Voices*, through both their research and activist political endeavors have helped to set the record straight and to provide both depth and breadth to the complexity of the Chinese American experience. These scholars include: Him Mark Lai, L. Ling-chi Wang, Gordon Chang, Marlon Hom, Sauling C. Wong, Arif Dirlik, Lucie Cheng, Christine Ho, and many, many others.

"In June 1982, more than 20,000 immigrant women garment workers went on strike in New York Chinatown to demand a good contract. Their employers demanded deep cutbacks in wages and benefits, and threatened to withdraw from the union altogether if their demands weren't met. However at the sight of thousands of immigrant women workers marching through the streets of Chinatown, the employers quickly withdrew their demands, and within hours the workers and their union had won the strike." Thus begins the moving, first-person account, "Chinese Women Garment Workers in New York Chinatown," by Katie Quan, now associate chair of the Labor Center at the University of California, included here as part of a special Amerasia issue on Asian American women, published in 2009.

While the essay by Quan above chronicles the pro-active activities of ordinary Chinese women seeking a good union contract and fair labor conditions, yet other scholars have delved into the lesser known literary contributions of early Chinese American writers. Their study of surviving literary works—be they stories, poems, novels, or essays—

provide a glimpse into the inner lives and aspirations of those Chinese who visited, settled, struggled, or made permanent lives in the U.S.

Marlon Hom's research, "Chinatown Literature during the Last Ten Years (1939-1949) by Wenquan" explores the development of literary groups in Chinatowns through America during the 1930s and 40s. According to Hom:

Influenced by the Sino-Japanese War and new currents of American liberalism and Marxism, they aggressively pursued a new form of literary expression. By the mid- 1940s, these progressive literary activists launched a movement which called for reforms in both the form and content of Chinese American writing. They hoped that writers would create works relevant to the social and cultural reality of Chinatown life. Those who espoused the emerging Maoist ideology truly believed that literature and the arts should serve as a vehicle for social criticism and reform. Within their political orientation, however, they also professed strongly that Chinatown literature should be independent of, and separate from the literary tradition of China. Hence, for the first time, they recognized the local characteristics of a literature produced in America's Chinatown.

We conclude this section with Sau-ling Wong's essay: "Tales of Postwar Chinatown: Short Stories of *The Bud*, 1947-1948." According to Wong: "Of particular interest to the student of early immigrant literature is a body of short stories about post-World War II Chinatown life published in a short-lived literary magazine, *The Bud* (Xinmiao)." Between March 1947 and March 1948, a total of twenty short stories appeared in this New York monthly, while three more appeared in its irregular, undated sequel *The Bud Literature Series* (Xinmiao wencong).

Through reading such works, we know more how the Chinese thought and felt about both America and China in times of crisis—from the Great Depression in the U.S. to the anti-Japanese movement in China, all the way to the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 and beyond. These writings written in English or in Chinese open a window into Sino-American relations, and, perhaps most importantly, document the independent intellectual and political positions Chinese Americans have taken, and continue to take, in the global arena. *Amerasia Journal* has played and thus continues to play, a vital role in forging and publishing independent thought that crosses and transcends nationalisms and national boundaries on both sides of the Pacific.

Russell C. Leong
New York City, 2012