IKON 9

WITHOUT CEREMONY

ASIAN WOMEN UNITED

Asian Women United is a New York based women's organization committed to the development of Asian Sisterhood. Established in 1978 our membership includes women of diverse Asian/Pacific heritages, ages and life experiences. Through our activities we seek to affirm our identities as Asians and as women and examine the effects of racism and sexism on our lives and our communities.

This anthology focuses primarily on East Coast and community women and includes poetry, essays, fiction, artwork and round table discussions. The Journal Project is part of our effort to provide a tangible resource to further our network of support, growth, and development of independent women.

The Asian Women United Journal Committee thanks everyone connected with this ambitious project, including the women who participated in the beginning and subsequent stages of work. Tomie Arai-Wong, Laura Chan, Angela Chan, Becky Hom, Sharon Hom, Gerri Igarashi Yashida, Debbie Lee, Lily Lee, Vernon Liang, Susan Louie, Mary Quan, and Liz Young.

Special thanks to the participants in the Roundtables, contributing poets, artists and writers, as well as calligraphers Richard Chinn and Walter Hahn.

And our heartfelt appreciation to Kimiko Hahn and Penny Fujiko Willgerodt, who came to our rescue as part-time editors, bringing much needed enthusiasm, energy and editorial expertise.

And, to Susan Sherman, our deepest gratitude for her vision, guidance and direction for finally moving this project to completion and publication.

IKON SECOND SERIES, #9

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Thanks for their help on this issue to Valerie Buxton, Mia Hansford, Barbara Mahoney, Colleen McKay.

This publication made possible, in part, with public funds from the NEW YORK STATE COUNCIL ON THE ARTS and a grant from the NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS.

IKON is published by IKON Inc., a non-profit corporation. P.O. Box 1355, Stuyvesant Station, New York, N.Y. 10009. Subscription rates: $10.00 for two issues; Institutions $15.00. Single copy $6. All manuscripts must be accompanied by a self-addressed stamped envelope.

ISSN #0579-4315.

Printed in the United States by Wickersham Printers, 2959 Old Tree Drive, Lancaster, Pennsylvania 17603-4080. Typesetting by Michael Sykes/Archetype West, P.O. Box 516, Point Reyes Station, California 94956.

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Huong Giang Nguyen: "A Vietnamese Lesbian Speaks" was first published in a slightly different form in *WOMANEWS.* Reprinted by permission of the author.

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THE AWU COLLECTIVE

SHARON HOM
for the AWU Collective

Several years ago, we began to collectively dream, plan and shape this AWU Anthology. I think of one special AWU retreat a few summers ago . . . we came in our separate carloads leaving family, friends, concrete streets and subways behind. Along highways bound by rising walls of stone, we drove towards the mountains in the distance. There were blue wild flowers, giant yellow black-eyed daisies, and long bushes of magenta thistleweeds. We arrived at Lynn's house which was beautiful, constructed of white walls bouncing sunlight, filling the space. Amidst greetings and shouting from the earlier arrivals, we unloaded our sleeping bags and overnight gear.

Later we hiked through a forest, the sound of water distant as we silently searched for the hidden creek. My son Jamie got tired and I had to carry him. I soon became tired and without much discussion each of the women took turns carrying him piggyback. I could see him happily hanging onto one of his many AWU "aunties" disappearing and reappearing among the trees ahead. We began calling out to each other, to hear the echoes of our many voices in the hush of the forest. We were laughing, getting lost, but always finding each other again—the sunlight dancing green shadows on the laughing, raucous, weaving line of women passing Jamie from one to another, like a precious bundle.

Later, sprawled out on the grass resting, we massaged each other, laughing at the pleasure of touching and being touched. We swatted the gnats which kept buzzing annoyingly around our faces as we summarized and evaluated the past year and planned the next year's work. Throughout all of this, we ate and ate and then ate some more—fruit, potato chips, spaghetti, corn on the cob, chicken, jok, and Fran's devastating carrot cake. Late at night everyone was still talking, voices hoarse from exhaustion as we brainstormed names for a fundraiser for an Asian women's anthology: "one night only" and "multiple orgasms: more to come" almost winning amidst the laughter. The rain poured outside, its rhythmic beating filling the night as we finally fell asleep.

Last year when I was living in China, two AWU women, Susan and Becky, came through and visited me. Seeing them in our Beijing home, hearing about the progress of this anthology project, hearing about all of our AWU friends in New York, how close New York seemed—my different worlds tied together by long talks late into the night, shared visions of individual and collective journeys, the coming together of travelers in spirit and in the world. As I saw them off, watching them walk off in the dark, feeling enormous homesickness for New York, yelling final "goodbyes" and "see-you-soons," one of our "fu yuans" (hotel attendants) asked if they were "chin chi" (family). Yes, I answered,

they're sisters.

Friends, comrades, sisters and collective midwives sharing an outer and inner journey which seems at times to have taken only a moment, at other times several lifetimes, we have each carried part of the responsibility for this anthology. For us, this anthology is in some ways an ending of one part of a long journey together. Its beginning took shape several years ago through intense group-study, reading and discussion, and in our collective willingness and commitment to engage in the risky, vulnerable process of looking at ourselves, at how others had shaped our lives, and at our own responsibility for claiming our lives.

In the years which followed, through the process of developing and distributing a call letter; after the initial excitement as poetry came pouring into our mailbox, hearing for the first time the many and diverse voices of unknown sisters from all over the country; after months and months of collective meetings and getting overwhelmed by the neverending tasks of editing such an ambitious anthology; after organizing and running the round table discussions; and after we were lucky enough to have Kimiko Hahn, Penny Willgerodgt and IKON editor Susan Sherman step in to help us in the final pushing of this long birthing process . . .

Finally, we have arrived at this moment—holding this "child" in our arms. Ultimately, she is not "ours," but a gift from the poets, writers, artists, and activists who have shared their work and a part of their lives—a reaffirmation of our ability to discover our own paths, of our need to share our burdens and laughter, calling out to each other along the way, our voices echoing and creating new collective visions out of these moments of our journey.

September, 1988

INTRODUCTION

KIMIKO HAHN

No, I said to a man in a bar. I'm not from Saigon. Not only are Asian Americans still regarded as alien, but the women are compared to and often treated like the prostitutes "our boys" left behind in Vietnam, Korea, and Japan. Furthermore, the way U.S. society regards us is linked to each and every new wave of immigrants: then heavily Chinese and Japanese, now more Korean, Filipino, Southeast Asian. We are the "model minority" on the one hand and "dogeater" on the other: exotic and second class. We are "forever foreign."

I also notice a resurgence of Asian picture brides. In this transaction marriage becomes a transfer of citizenship and is no longer a vow of love. Yet in their flight the brides-to-be trade an Asian strain of male supremacy for its Western counterpart. Ironically, many of the women attempt to escape a poverty abetted by U.S. economic policies abroad, as our Government seeks to control international currencies or as U.S. companies build their profits off foreign workers.

This view is against a backdrop of concessions. Indeed we could call "take-backs" a metaphor for this decade as we see stolen hard-won laws and policies in the trade-union movement, civil rights, women's and gay movements, and burgeoning movements for housing, food, and medical care. Amidst these struggles the main task is still to organize ourselves. Just when the list of political activities seems overwhelming something like the work in this anthology can revive our outrage, passion and will to fight.

Where does this anthology fit in? In hindsight it is not surprising that when AWU called for material poetry came in first and most often. These women had already written on themes of immigration, work, organizing, relationships with men, mothers and one another. Poetry had for them been a natural way to express the most difficult emotions simply and privately. The task for AWU, and the challenge for me, was to assemble the poems into a vision of ourselves.

The collection is not "nonpartisan" in the sense of including any and all Asian American views. The anthology reflects AWU's political concerns; it also reflects concern for aesthetic strength and variety. *Without Ceremony* refers to the ceremonies Asian American women unconsciously fold into their lives and consciously work against. More importantly this title is a phrase that connotes abandonment, exhilaration, and liberation. Although our grandmothers spoke different languages and dialects and although they followed different traditions, our heritage is a progress toward personal and social liberation. In essence each contribution is, as each woman, part of a process of that liberation. Our defense and our passion begin in the heart.

Manhattan, 1988

BREAKING TRADITION

for my Daughter

JANICE MIRIKITANI

My daughter denies she is like me,
Her secretive eyes avoid mine.
She reveals the hatreds of womanhood
already veiled behind music and smoke and telephones.
I want to tell her about the empty room
of myself.
This room we lock ourselves in
where whispers live like fungus,
giggles about small breasts and cellulite,
where we confine ourselves to jealousies,
bedridden by menstruation.
This waiting room where we feel our hands
are useless, dead speechless clamps
that need hospitals and forceps and kitchens
and plugs and ironing boards to make them useful.
I deny I am like my mother. I remember why:
She kept her room neat with silence,
defiance smothered in requirements to be otonashii,
passion and loudness wrapped in an obi,
her steps confined to ceremony,
the weight of her sacrifice she carried like
a foetus. Guilt passed on in our bones.
I want to break tradition—unlock this room
where women dress in the dark.
Discover the lies my mother told me.
The lies that we are small and powerless
that our possibilities must be compressed
to the size of pearls, displayed only as
passive chokers, charms around our neck.
Break Tradition.
I want to tell my daughter of this room
of myself
filled with tears of shakuhatchi,
the light in my hands,
poems about madness,
the music of yellow guitars—

sounds shaken from barbed wire and
goodbyes and miracles of survival.
This room of open window where daring ones escape.
My daughter denies she is like me
her secretive eyes are walls of smoke
and music and telephones,
her pouting ruby lips, her skirts
swaying to salsa, teena marie and the stones,
her thighs displayed in carnivals of color.
I do not know the contents of her room.
She mirrors my aging.
She is breaking tradition.

JESSICA HAGEDORN

i read your poem
over and over
in this landscape
of women

women purring
on balconies
overlooking
the indigo sea

my mother's
blue taffeta dress
is black as the sea

she glides
out my door
to the beach
where sleek white boats
are anchored
under a full,
luscious moon

still
i am still
the wind
outside my window
my mother's ghost
evaporates
in the long
atlantic night

i listen to the radio
every chance i get
for news
of your city's
latest disaster

everything *here*
the color of honey and sand
everything *there*
verges on catastrophe
a constant preoccupation
with real estate

everything *here*
a calm horizon
taut bodies
carefully nurtured
oiled & gleaming
hair & skin

i read your poem
over and over
turning my head
from prying eyes
the low hum
of women singing
in another room

i switch stations
on the radio
turn up the volume
i almost touch
the air
buzzing electricity

james brown "live at the apollo"
the smooth female d.j.
interrupts bo diddley
groaning "i'm a man"

it is a joke here
in this baby blue resort
where art
is a full-time hobby
art
is what everyone
claims to do

women sprawl
like cats
on each other's laps
licking the salt
off each other's skin

and i walk
in search
of the portuguese fishermen
who hide
in the scorched trees
the bleak, blond dunes
that line the highway

i imagine
you asleep
in another city
i take your poem
apart
line by line

it is a love letter
we wrote each other
sometime ago
trying in vain to pinpoint
that first, easy
thrill.

SAND ISLAND PEOPLE

AIKO FURUMOTO

Today I heard Sand Island people were evicted,
One hundred thirty families
Not so many days ago I ate rice and maninis with Sand Island people
Fresh fish they caught themselves just off the shore there,
Old Hawaiian style
Except for the Coleman stoves and motors on the boats.

Not so many days ago I crossed over the bridge to Sand Island
And saw ten, twenty or more Hawaiian flags flying on the kona wind
Declaration of claim to a heritage denied
"Ua mau ke ea o ka aina i ka pono."

"The life of the land is perpetuated in righteousness"
Not so long ago this is what Kamehameha said,
One sentence in Hawaiian
British troops made to return stolen sovereignty of Hawaii to its people
And American planters applauded British embarassment,
While their generals secretly surveyed Pearl Harbor.

Not so many years ago American planters seized Hawaii's sovereignty,
A bloodless revolution they called it
With American gunboats in Pearl Harbor
Their cannons aimed at Hawaii's heart
To spare her nation, Liliokalani abdicated, hoping that, in Washington,
Reason and justice would prevail.

And the Chinese of the islands founded a political organization,
First for them in Hawaii, against annexation
Before the Kuo Min Tang was born, before the Republic was declared
For the Nation of Hawaii had made Chinese citizens,
Gave them a new homeland
But Dole's pineapple republic threatened union with America
And America promised only exclusion.

Not so long ago my grandparents came to Hawaii
From Hiroshima ken, contract laborers to cut cane,
Like so many others who lost their land

And it was the Japanese in the heat of the fields,
Remembering the luna's whip
Who made Hawaii's first labor unions
Built its first communist organization.

So the planters declared Japanese to be ungrateful,
Even subversive
And brought in Filipinos to break the unions,
Disharmony they thought
Japanese and Filipinos countered with greater union
And the planters were afraid they might lose Hawaii.

But World War II came and Hawaii fell under martial law
Saying "strike" meant courtmartial, military justice
And Hawaiian boys made a living shining shoes for American soldiers,
Waiting in lines on Hotel Street
Open 24 hours a day, R and R, Rape and Run, legalized prostitution.

Not so many years ago I remember Hawaii moved up the ladder
From "territory" to "state"
While schoolchildren practiced nuclear war, evacuation to military shelter
Because everyone knew Hawaii was high on the list
Of America's national sacrifice areas
So the generals told our mothers and fathers that buses would come
To take us to their shelters
And at least the children of Hawaii had a chance.

But later we found out there never was enough room in the generals' shelter
We would have waited on those street corners forever,
The life of the land seared away in holocaust.

Only a few years ago the Pacific Ocean shrank,
In the strategies of the men in Washington
Indochina's shores almost touch Hawaii's,
Only a flight away
And the soldiers came back to Hawaii
Convoys on the highways, Jolly Green Giants over the palis,
Soldiers on Hotel Street

Korea caught Pueblo spyship
And Hawaii's National Guard was press ganged into standing alert
Men sent piecemeal to mauled up units in Vietnam
One half percent of America's population,
Seventeen percent of its call up.
We listened when the Black soldiers said,
The real war is at home.

Just ten years ago Elladine Lee stood up,
Long black hair shining in the sun
Called on the sons and daughters of Hawaii, kamaaina, children of the land
To stand against the unjust war and spoke these words,
"Ua mau ke ea o ka aina i ka pono"
The life of the land is perpetuated in righteousness
But while the generals hold so much of our land,
Righteousness is prostituted.
And she began to name the names of the land taken.

Kaneohe, Kahuku
Hickam, Wheeler, Bellows and Dillingham
Kolekole, Kunia
Fort Kamehameha
Makalapa, Kapalama
Schofield, Shafter, Ruger and DeRussy
Barking Sands
Kipapa, Puuloa
Red Hill and the Koolaus
Kahoolawe, a whole island, just for bombing practice

And as the names grew, kamaaina, aloha aina,
Those who love the land
All rose to their feet, moved by her call
Our duty to release our land from their grasp
Kū'e, Kū'e

Today Sand Island people were evicted
Yet they say "we have only begun to fight"
And I remembered all those times past
The meles and the hulas coming back to Hawaii,
Songs of the land and the people
Words like half-forgotten heirlooms
Now remembered in all their meaning,
Hawaii Pono'e
Sand Island's people will return
As the Life of the Land will be restored.

Honolulu 1980
Cambridge 1983

WORKING MOTHER'S ROUNDTABLE

This is a roundtable about women who are mothers and also work outside of the home.

N: I'm taking a class at Chinatown Planning Council right now, and I have a daughter who is six. I also work part-time at Bloomingdales. I study 9 to 5 at CPC, and afterwards, on Monday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday, I work part-time. My husband watches my daughter and helps me a lot. After kindergarten, a babysitter looks after my daughter; and after six o'clock, my husband picks her up. When I'm working, sometimes my husband takes her out for dinner or sometimes he has to cook. If he didn't support me, I couldn't study at CPC. In the beginning, my husband didn't want me to go to CPC. He said, "You can work right away, why do you want to study another subject?" But I said, "It's because I like it. I want to change my career." Finally he agreed.

A: I have a little girl named Karen who is going to kindergarten. It's a full-day kindergarten, but I can pick her up anytime between three and six. Then she comes to my workplace until I finish. Afterwards, I either bring her home or take her to dinner. Before she started nursery school, I had a more difficult time. Then I had to have a babysitter to look after her so I could work.

J: I have a two-and-a-half year old boy named Tony. A babysitter watches him during the weekdays and he spends two days of the week with his father—he and I are separated. I usually pick Tony up and I bring him everywhere, even to meetings! Especially on weekends. Mothering and juggling. We juggle a lot of things. It is difficult to have your own career outside the home and give your child enough attention.

A: When I first got pregnant, I would wonder when I saw women in the street or on the subway if they were pregnant. Then when I had the baby, my parents came to spend two weeks. But somehow the experience of having the baby was so overwhelming I really couldn't relate to them during that time. They were peripheral. I didn't really talk to my mother. I was so tired from taking care of the baby.

J: Was your mother supportive?

A: She was pretty supportive overall. She would give me suggestions and hints, but not insist on her way of doing things. When I explained to her my thoughts on infant care, she would listen and say, "Yeah, okay, do it that way, your way." Later, when my baby was growing up, I started to feel closer to my mother. I began to understand what she went through.

There is a birthday custom where you eat no meat, only vegetables, as a "day of remembrance" of your mother's labor to bear you. In my family, some did

remember the day their mother labored and gave birth by not eating meat for that day—a kind of sacrifice in remembrance of what happened during your birthing. That idea has stayed with me all this time. A different way of remembering your birthday.

N: You're lucky, at least you had your mother help you. My first pregnancy was accidental. At the time, I wasn't prepared to have a child. I was really upset because I didn't want to quit my job. I was working as an accountant and had just gotten married and all of a sudden, a child comes into our life. My sister was here in New York at the time, but because my brother-in-law had a job in Taiwan they had to move back there. So I was here all by myself. My husband did help me a lot, but it was very hard because I'm not that close to my mother-in-law.

When my baby was six weeks old, I had to send her to an American babysitter. During the daytime I had to work, and when I came home, exhausted, my husband would have to help wash bottles and make meals and everything. I never had time to even communicate with him and our social life became nonexistent. Before we could go out for weekends, go to parties, but not anymore. I felt so bad, but as my daughter grew, she pleased me a lot. Then I found out it is worth it. But my daughter is not that close to me. I haven't spent that much time with her. My husband likes kids a lot. In my family we were closer to my mother. We respected my father but he is very strict and we're not that close to him. But my daughter, this generation, is different. Little by little, I have realized how hard it is to be a mother.

J: Besides the lack of sleep and working so hard, what do you think makes motherhood so difficult?

N: A lot of responsibility. I think about whether my daughter's school is good or bad. We try to teach her some Chinese because we don't want her to forget it. We think about American society. Is it too open, too liberal? She's a daughter so we worry about her. Besides that I've always wanted a boy. My husband doesn't care, but I've a very old-fashioned mind. I wanted a boy, but what can I do.

J: Do you think you'll have another child?

N: Yes, I do. I plan to. But I'm afraid another girl will come out. I don't know about the U.S., I don't know if a girl or boy is better, but in Taiwan, we like boys better than girls, us old-fashioned minds.

L: I have two daughters, one is eight; the other, twelve. I was a single parent for about five years, and now I'm about to remarry. I work full time. Both girls went to day-care. The younger one had a babysitter before she was day-care age.

J: Who picks them up?

L: The younger one is in an after-school program, and the older one has been taking the bus home since the sixth grade.

J: How did having a baby change your lifestyle?

L: I kept waiting for my life to go back to normal. It took me a year to realize that it wouldn't. As the kids grew older

my relationship with my mother changed. As more complex questions came up, my mother became more of a friend, more of an advisor. I see myself as a young person in my daughters.

J: N. was saying that because she is from Taiwan, she was really disappointed at having a girl. She isn't sure how we viewed having boys or girls here. It is not a simple answer. We're Chinese American or Japanese American or some form of Asian American with values from both cultures.

Personally, when I was pregnant with Tony, I didn't care, but thinking back, I probably wanted a little girl more. I wanted the chance to raise her and make her very strong and give her all the chances I didn't have. I wanted to be a supportive mother, a supportive woman. But I hated being pregnant so much. I didn't get along with my in-laws, and I knew I had to have a boy. I remember saying to myself, "My god, I hope it's a boy because I can't go through this again." I felt so relieved when it was a boy because the pregnancy was terrible, I was sick for a long time. I don't feel the pressure to have another child I would have if I had had a girl. Tony's father is the only son and so the pressure was tremendous. We've been separated for a year and a half now, and we were married seven years before we had time to have a child. His parents used to say, "You're so selfish, you just want to wait for us to die before you have our grandson. What are you waiting for?" So when we had Tony, they were very happy. I still think even if you were brought up here boy babies are valued more.

J: Do you view yourself as someone trying to be superwoman, or do you just see yourself as a harried, exhausted woman?

N: Not superwoman. Right now I am constantly exhausted. The whole house is a mess—sometimes I don't even have time to do the laundry. Then I have to rush to Bloomingdales to work. And when I come home, I haven't even eaten dinner, so I just buy something to eat. It's really hard. I have a lot of piecework I do at home. I have to struggle with the sewing machine and sewing all those clothes. Sometimes my husband yells at me "Look what time it is, you should cook now." My husband and daughter always seem to be hungry.

J: You said before he's very helpful.

N: Sometimes he runs out of patience. When he gets tired, he wants to come home and have dinner ready and waiting for him. Sometimes the house is cold and nothing is done.

J: Do you think when men help with housework, they think they're doing you a favor, instead of thinking that there's a lot of work that has to get done and we both should do some of it—that's just fair.

N: My husband never cleans the house, never washes the dishes, he only helps me in taking care of our daughter. Sometimes he cooks, but that's it. So our house is always a mess. I just don't have time to clean.

A: These days my husband's helping a little more but he still feels, "it's not his work." Sometimes I say, "You have to wash the dishes." Then if he doesn't wash the dishes, I just let them pile up higher and higher, and we eat out.

When he gets tired of eating out, then he washes the dishes. I just have to put up with it, the dirty dishes, roaches, everything or else he just won't do things.

J: My boyfriend and I are both out all day doing things, going to meetings, so when we get home—I always cook—I say to him, "Could you help me and give Tony a bath," and he says to me, "And who was your waiter last year?" The other day, I just blew up. I said, "Wait a minute, that's not being a waiter. If we both get home around nine, and if I'm cooking, I think you should help. If you want to cook, I'll give Tony a bath." And then he said, "No, no, I'll give him a bath."

I think in many ways men just want mother figures, and then, when you're really a mother, they still expect you to mother them. They want to be cared for and if they help you, they're just being a good boy. They're helping Mom.

My boyfriend brings his dirty laundry to my house and we're not even married! I tell him, "Wait a minute here, I have all the disadvantages and none of the advantages of being married. There's no contract here. I'm not getting any financial support. What am I doing your dirty underwear for?" And he says, "Oh, come on, just help me, just put it in." Then I'll say, "Come down and I'll show you how to use the machine," because he always messes up the machine. A sort of a subtle tactic. I always have to go down and fix the machine, so often I think I might as well give in.

N: When my husband helps with the laundry, he'll throw so much detergent in that sometimes when the clothes come out of the dryer there's still detergent on them.

L: I do my own laundry, my husband-to-be does his own, and the kids do their own. They are old enough to use the machines in the laundry. When they were younger, I did everything myself, but about two years ago, I told them they could do their own laundry.

The funny thing is that he helps out a lot, but I still look at it as "helping." When I'm really busy and out a lot, he ends up cooking and cleaning more, and then I feel guilty!

J: You've probably internalized the traditional notion that care of the house and the child are your responsibility and if you want or need to do something else, you have to pay the price—which means you have both responsibilities. That's where guilt comes in. You shouldn't feel guilty, forget about it.

Another thought I have: How do you find time just for yourself, doing something just for you? And if you don't, do you miss it?

N: Sometimes when I want to be all by myself doing something I want to do without interruption, I'll go shopping. But now days, I don't even have time to sleep. Studying is the only thing I do for myself now. After my marriage, I lost contact with my friends little by little. I would like having those relationships again.

L: Friendship with other women is important. It's important not to lose your individuality.

A: I spend lots of time with my child, so when I have free time, I'm lost. I don't know what to do.

J: It's very easy to make a man the center of your life. It's scary to claim your

own freedom.

N: Sometimes I feel like a bad mother. I feel guilty not having enough time to spend with my daughter and still wanting to do something for myself.

L: You need to do things for yourself for your own growth.

J: What does being a good mother mean? No present structure supports women at work. Only some very large conservative companies have child-care because they realize they need you.

A: You need to set priorities. Kids or work, which is more important? Sure, kids are more important. I always worry about my child, but I have to face reality and structure my life as needs arise. Like taking your children to your workplace if that works for you. My parents are very supportive but far away.

J: Are there any compensations in being a working mother?

A: It's good for the child. It's a more creative environment, not just one-dimensional.

L: It's a challenge. Kids gain a lot by being exposed to my work situation and on the other hand, they help me keep my feet on the ground.

A: Being a mother is like a new stage in your life. It means having another person in your life other than your husband.

J: When you're a mother you have this incredible person who is a part of you, but also very different. You have to depend on yourself, whether there is someone else to help you or not. By responding to their need for you, children help you learn more about yourself.

L: I might even like to have another one!

VETERAN POLITICAL ACTIVISTS' ROUNDTABLE

PARTICIPANTS:

KAZU IIJIMA is with the Organization of Asian Women. She's been active politically since college (around 1935). She was active in the struggle to free Chol Soo Lee, a Korean immigrant unjustly imprisoned in a case of mistaken identity who was freed from prison as a result of the struggle. She was also active with the Third World Women's Coalition to Celebrate International Women's Day, and with a city-wide coalition also for IWD.

VIRGINIA KEE is one of the founders and past presidents of the Chinatown Planning Council, a major service and planning agency for Asian Americans, and has served on Community Board #3 as a board member, Vice-Chair and Chair of the Committee on Public Safety. She was past president and is a present board member of CPC Housing Development Fund which built 157 units of subsidized senior housing. She initiated, directed, and produced the "Asian Pacific Report," a radio program on WBAI, and has received numerous awards for her work in the community—including awards from former Manhattan Borough President, Percy Sutton, the National Conference of Christians and Jews, and induction into Hunter College's Hall of Fame at Hunter College.

YURI KOCHIYAMA is from San Pedro, California but has been living in New York since 1946. She's recently been with the Asian American Caucus for Disarmament and Concerned Japanese Americans but began with Kazu Iijima and Min Matsuda in Asian Americans for Action around 1969.

MIN MATSUDA has been active politically from the beginning of her high school days. One of her major focuses has been on peace and disarmament. On the community level she was on the board of HIRE (Health Is a Right for Everybody), a Brooklyn health clinic situated in an area populated mainly by Blacks and Latinos. Currently she is concentrating on her painting into which she will some day, hopefully, be able to integrate her political experience.

ON BECOMING POLITICAL

Virginia Kee: My students have always been an inspiration for me. I trace my activism back to the '60s. As the faculty advisor to the Student Govern-

ment I encouraged the students to be involved with the Civil Rights Movement. We supported the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. Much of what I have done and will do has been my response to my students' needs. Because of my students, I brought the first Youth Program to Chinatown in 1965.

When I look back, even though I didn't realize it at the time, perhaps my political education really started in the 1940s. I grew up in New York's Chinatown in a traditional Chinese family. Others grew up in the back of a laundry, I grew up living above a restaurant. When my parents moved to Charlotte, North Carolina, I learned for the first time what America was like in the days of segregation. Public facilities were labeled: COLORED, WHITE. On the busses, whites sat in front, Blacks in the back. As a thirteen-year-old I always sat in the middle, afraid to sit in the front, refusing to sit in the back. This taught me this country cannot be democratic unless all are represented. Years later, as a member of the Hunt Commission setting the rules and regulations for the procedures of the Democratic National Convention and for nomination of presidential candidates, I was able to insert Asian Pacific Americans as a group which the Democratic Party had to include in its affirmative action goals.

When I came back to New York, I worked during the day and got my education totally at night. It took me twelve years to get my B.A. and my M.A. When I first started teaching it was like "Ching Chong, Ching Chong" because I was the Chinese teacher in school. When I got my regular teaching license I was sent to the same school in Chinatown I went to. When I was there I was the only Chinese girl in the class and had been very lonely. Today that student body is eighty percent Chinese so there's a community strength there.

I am proud of my pioneering work in electoral politics. In 1976 I was the first Asian American elected to public office when I was elected as a judicial delegate. In 1978 I defeated a "regular machine" Democrat and was elected as the Democratic State Committeewoman. I held that post for four terms. I am the founder of the United Democratic Organization which does grassroots organizing for political participation, and today I continue to work for political equality for Asian Americans. We have a long way to go in mainstream politics, nevertheless I feel we have made a beginning, and I am glad to have helped plant the seeds so that future generations can and will be elected because of the work we have done in voters' registration and education.

Kazu Iijima: One of my sisters, Nori, was really the political mentor for me and my other sister. She was a senior at the time, president of the YWCA and a Phi Beta Kappa. She steered me into the YWCA where I learned about racism and that I could do something about it. We picketed the YMCA because of their racist policies and the YWCA sponsored many forums on fascism and other political issues. In the meantime my sister became active in the Communist Party and my eldest sister and I were just horrified. The three of us would argue until the early hours of the morning, but Nori did make us recognize a pattern to racial discrimination and all the other injustices that were going on—things we were very familiar with because we were very poor when we were growing up. She convinced us that the

political and economic system has to change before you could really do anything about racial discrimination or poverty. So she really influenced me and finally I got involved in the Young Communist League. This was about 1935. I must say at this point that the YCL was the first place where there were whites and I didn't feel any racism. I had a good time in college. I went to dances and all the football games. I was also very active in the YWCA and the Japanese American Women's Student Club.

There was also an organization in our community—Nisei (Second Generation Japanese American) Democrats we called ourselves—a very unique group of Niseis who were really involved in the democratic process. When World War II was declared and we were to be interned, the Nisei Democrats issued a statement saying that we are going into the camps under protest. We thought they would hurt the war against fascism because the act of making Japanese enter camps was a fascist act. We were red-baited by our community and nobody listened. We wrote a statement, and we sent it to all the newspapers including Japanese papers, but nobody printed it because everybody was in such a panic. It was a terrible time. We really were very angry, very helpless. There wasn't much we could do. Our community, Oakland, was sent to Topaz, near Salt Lake City, Utah. Tak, my husband, was in the army at that time. He had been drafted about a month before Pearl Harbor and so when they formed the 442, he was part of the cadre. When the 442 went to Mississippi I was able to leave the camp to join him because we had been married in camp. The South was an experience that I will never forget. It was like jumping from the frying pan into the fire. By that time I was political so it was really very upsetting to see the terrible conditions of Black people, and how they had to step into the street if a white person walked on the sidewalk.

We were in the heart of Dixieland and the only place we could find housing was with a minister and his wife. We argued about segregation all the time. When I went on a bus I always sat near the back so I could identify with Black people—the last row was left open for them and I sat one row in front of it. One time a Black woman came in. She was pregnant, so I got up to give her my seat. The bus driver just stopped the bus and glared at me in his mirror. Everybody stared as us, and the woman was too afraid to sit down. There was complete silence. Finally one of the white women said, "Look, if you sit with me, then she can sit down." I sat there, but the whole experience was really unnerving. I must say, I will never forget my experience in Mississippi. We thought since racism on the West Coast was a twenty-four hour thing it was really terrible, but in Mississippi we saw racism at its worst.

When the men were sent overseas, I went to New York to be with Nori who was active in the Japanese American Committee for Democracy, an anti-fascist group comprised of both Issei (First Generation Japanese American) and Nisei. It was quite large and very political, but when the war ended it dissolved. (Let me add that during the Sino-Japanese War, we wouldn't wear silk and we did whatever we could to demonstrate our opposition to the Japanese invasion of Manchuria and the terrible things that the Japanese soldiers were doing.) Anyway, in New York the JACD have dances for soldiers on leave and a newsletter which I edited. We also participated in huge May Day obser-

vances where people would be marching for hours—the unions were at their peak at that time. Also during that time I decided to leave the Communist Party because of "democratic centralism." Some of us felt there was much too much emphasis on the centralization and not enough on the democratic! I also had some disagreements with their policies: the last straw was when some of us wrote a long analysis about how we thought the Party made a tremendous mistake going along with the camps and they wouldn't accept it.

Leaving the party was so traumatic, I was inactive for quite awhile. During the Cuban Missile Crisis, I was so upset even my eight-year-old son Chris said, "Mommy, if you feel so bad about it, why don't you do something?" So I said, "You're right, Chris!" and I went to a demonstration the very next day.

During the Vietnam War, Min and I worked at the same office and we went to every demonstration protesting the war. We were very inspired by the Black movement. We said, "Gee, it'd be great if there was a movement like that for our kids too, so they could find their identity." So we said, "Okay, let's start something." If we saw an Asian at a demonstration, we'd immediately ask if she'd be interested and take her name and address. Finally we set the date for a meeting. By that time we had talked with our children and both our sons said the only way they would join was if it were an Asian group, not just Japanese. We said, "Great, that's even better." About fifteen people attended the first meeting and it was just wonderful. We had felt it would be a cultural gathering—we'd just get young people together and talk about identity and so forth. But these young people said they wanted it to be a political organization. So it became Asian Americans for Action and from that came the Asian movement. That was around 1969.

Min Matsuda: When still in Junior High I attended a meeting of Communists who were raising money for the Scottsboro Boys. I saw Blacks and whites in overalls and worn working clothes giving hard-earned money to help young men they didn't even know in their fight for justice. This was the first concrete example of social action I saw and it remains with me even today. I think it's very hard for young people today to understand the '30s and '40s, the depression, the great surge of militancy then. Unions were forming and along with a lot of fascist organizations, there was a great deal of anti-fascist activity. It's difficult to convey the kind of atmosphere that pervaded that time when people talked openly about Communism, and the party itself was very powerful and took many correct stands. For example, it was one of the prime movers for social security and for making the unions represent not only craft, but unskilled workers. It wasn't until Truman and the "Cold War" and McCarthyism that a lot of that history was suppressed. The Communist party also made many mistakes during that era.

During the war, my mother-in-law had a stroke, and the family felt that she wouldn't survive in the camps, so we relocated on our own to Salt Lake City where I had lived as a child. Salt Lake City was the nucleus of the Mormon community and in the center of the city the Mormon Tabernacle, the Zion National Bank, the Mormon-owned department store and hotel converge. I was able to get a job illustrating fashion ads in the department store. In the

course of numerous debates with people in the art department who generally were very supportive of me and were trying to covert me, I learned that according to the Mormon Bible Blacks were considered cursed by God to always serve others. During the war when many outsiders started to pour into the city in search of defense jobs, the elders of the church used that as their justification in segregating Blacks. It really upset me and because at that time I was still in the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL)—a group into mainstream politics which had moved their headquarters temporarily to Salt Lake—I went to them. But they wouldn't take a stand. They said, "We have friends in Washington who are helping our situation, and we don't want to rock the boat." So they refused to sign any petition or make any move that would prevent segregation. As far as I was concerned that was the end of the JACL for me, because I felt if they couldn't take a stand on racism, what was the point? Then I came to New York and I started working in the Japanese American Committee for Democracy.

Yuri Kochiyama: I feel political development has several components: events, conditions, experiences, people that come into your life, political people and literature one encounters. These are different for different groups, different individuals. Japanese Americans experienced concentration camps, but if one doesn't have any political orientation, one has no political understanding of why things happen to them. However, even though you may not understand the "whys" of it then, later on things sometimes start to fall into place.

I became political in the '60s, so until I was about forty years old, unfortunately, political understanding escaped me. But in 1960 we were having open houses and members of the Progressive Labor Party started coming in on Saturday nights and told us they were testing the travel ban to Cuba and gave us our first information about the Cuban Revolution. Also, around that same time the Freedom Riders were coming back and one of the people we asked to come over and speak was James Peck, a white man who was brutally beaten in 1961 in Alabama. Also in '61 the Blacks were up in arms over the death of Patrice Lamumba—just walking the streets you could pick up the leaflets on him. When May Mallory, a Harlem activist, was in trouble, there were picket lines, and even though I didn't know her then, I joined the picketing and very soon heard about Malcolm X.

In 1963, it seemed like just everything happened. Right after we moved to Harlem, we had joined the Harlem Parents Committee and our whole family became part of the Harlem Freedom School. Every one of the kids went to classes. Bill, my husband, and I went to the adult class and in '63 and '64 the whole family became active in the school boycotts. That summer we all went down to the Downstate Medical Center where large demonstrations were daily happenings. There were several hundred people every single day. Bill, the kids, and I went about three days a week. At the end of the summer, 670 people were arrested. The issue at Downstate was getting construction jobs for Blacks and Puerto Ricans. Exactly ten years later Confucius Plaza would be going through the same thing. This time for Asian workers.

Attending the Harlem Freedom Schools gave me my first opportunity in years to really take time to read

books. One we had to read was *Negroes with Guns* by Rob Williams and strangely, or coincidentally, the one person in that book that stood out for me was a white schoolteacher by the name of Richard Griswold who was nearly beaten to death in a jail in '61 in Monroe, North Carolina. Well, it so happened that in '63 our son, Billy, was arrested during a demonstration and who should be the one to give him moral support by getting arrested and going to jail with him but this same man—Richard Griswold. He was found dead several months later in his apartment. The police called it a suicide. My husband and I were sorry we never got to know Griswold ourselves, but Billy was deeply impressed with him in the hours they shared together in jail.

That was also the year we met Malcolm X, so we consider '63 very important. September 16 was the day I met him. It was in the Brooklyn court foyer. Malcolm came to the courthouse to support the people who were arrested at Downstate Medical Center that summer of '63. It would take too long to explain that fantastic feeling of meeting this charismatic, phenomenal Black leader who was making headlines. I will only say that it was unforgettable. He was nothing like the demagogue that the newspapers made of him. He exuded warmth, humility, earthiness, and spiritual strength.

1964 was important because it brought the Hiroshima Nagasaki Peace Study Mission Hibakushas ("survivors") and Malcolm together. We had a reception at our place that was mostly attended by Black Harlem leaders and white civil rights activists. We also invited Japanese Americans to help as hosts and hostesses. The four Japanese writers wanted to meet Malcolm more than any other Black leader. Some of the things Malcolm stated were really historical. He brought up the Chinese Revolution and Mao and the Vietnam War—which wasn't that well-known then. He made the statement that evening which often appeared years later in posters: "The Vietnamese struggle is the struggle of all Third World people." Though he was killed by the time the anti-war struggle gained momentum in '65, he is part of history. For me, he symbolizes the Black liberation struggle in America.

TALKING ABOUT WOMEN

Min Matsuda: I remember in Salt Lake City the movies were segregated. White people sat downstairs and the Indians and everybody else colored sat upstairs. One night our whole family went to the movies and the ticket teller gave my father an upstairs ticket. He said, "No, I want a downstairs ticket." And she said, "Well, we don't sell downstairs tickets to Japs"—which made my father furious. He yelled and cursed, and we were so embarrassed. But I realized that he was the one who asserted himself and I thought, well, who wants to be like my mother? I wanted to assert myself. I was more or less a tomboy in school. If I felt the subject was dull, especially in kindergarten or first grade, I'd just get up and go home.

Growing up, I gradually came to realize that my father was not typical of my Japanese friends' fathers. He was democratic in his relations with my sister,

mother and myself. We were allowed to disagree and argue on individual problems and political issues. He helped my mother with household chores and encouraged me to go to art school when others felt it was not practical, especially for Nisei girls. In the homes of my friends I saw their fathers were stern, aloft and very much the patriarch. I also heard abusive language towards wives from normally polite, pleasant men. I even saw physical abuse of wives displayed openly before children. Although our home was different, I became aware that certain cultural mores did prevail. For example, my mother wasn't allowed to go out unless my father took her out or I accompanied her. She was the helpless female who had to be taken care of. It was a more subtle kind of sexism.

If my mother felt frustrated by her passivity, it wasn't something she talked to me about. I remember when I said I was going to college, she told me to take a subject that would make me independent so I could do the things I wanted to do. Issei women, especially those who couldn't speak English, were tied economically to their husbands. Many couldn't leave even if they wanted to because so few felt they could survive. Strangely enough it was the other Japanese girls, not the teachers, who resented my being outspoken. I was really surprised. I know I had the reputation of being, as my mother said, a Yankee—not very Japanese, like a Japanese woman. My mother was brought up with servants to be very efficient, quiet, to stay behind the scenes. So I think unconsciously I related to my father who was very outspoken.

Kazu Iijima: In our family, my mother was a strong woman, and my father was a gentle, scholarly person. I was very active in elementary school and high school. When I became political the fellows I really got serious about were political too. Even on our dates we'd be reading Marx. So sexism wasn't an issue for me until the women's movement started. I said, "Oh, my God, burning bras, what is this all about!" But Rita Mae Brown, a well-known lesbian writer, worked in my office and I got a chance to know her and I liked her very much. One evening we had dinner together and we talked for four hours. I came out of there with my head spinning because she explained women's oppression to me and the potential of women getting together and doing something to change the world. There were a lot of problems organizing an Asian women's movement, but eventually the Organization of Asian Women started in '76. I think that if women had more power, many wars wouldn't have happened, so the women's movement has meant a lot to me. I really feel it's a very important issue even today the socialist movements still haven't resolved. I feel that for any social change to happen in this country both racism and sexism must be a major focus.

During the early years of our marriage, my husband Tak's work involved his having to attend many dinners, and I always had to go with him. I began to question why—after all, I was just considered "Tak's wife." So finally I revolted and told him if I felt like going I'd go, "but they're really inviting you." It was only after I got into the women's movement I realized I had become used to taking second place when it came to issues like having to go where he went or taking care of the children. Although Tak is wonderful and we really raised

the children together, we've had and still have many struggles. I don't think most Asian women really know how to struggle. Struggle is a very difficult thing for us. My mother used to always tell me not to talk too much, to keep quiet and not act smart because otherwise men wouldn't be attracted to me. So for me the women's movement is a whole new world.

Virginia Kee: I had a very traditional childhood. I was really quiet, never saying a word in class. When I read Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Warrior Woman*, I said, "That's me!" But my mother was always very strong. She was a tower of strength. We grew up during the depression. My parents ran a restaurant and my role model was my mother who worked in the kitchen. And yet there must have been a fighting spirit in me, even though I was very quiet. During the depression years we could never pay our bills and this big, white man would come in and argue with my father. My father would argue fiercely, "Give me another week and I'll get it together." And even though I was a toddler, I would just pound on that man's leg.

My involvement was always expressed through the civil rights movement until younger women sensitized me to sexism. I think it took longer for me because in my family my mother really had the final word. And then in my own marriage, I didn't have children, so I didn't fit into that role. I did feel that somehow I had missed something. I didn't fit in as a proper daughter-in-law and wife, but when I became a teacher I had umpteen children and young people year after year. I supported my husband through medical school, but he was also really supportive. Since he was so busy, I had time to do my own thing. I was involved in founding the Chinatown Planning Council and I kept getting more and more involved. The women's movement was an education for me. I look at the young people at I.S. 131—the Dr. Sun Yat Sen Intermediate School—and how our girls are now in metal shop and ceramic shop when formerly they were only given cooking and dressmaking classes. That change is only ten years old.

It was always difficult for me because I ran for office from Chinatown which is a very conservative community, so I had to play the role of being a proper Chinese woman and addressing our community formally using proper Chinese language. Liz saw me get up to make speeches in Chinese when they all were written out in English. Recently I attended a Chinese New Year's Party for one of the Associations. They introduced all the men and then they finally introduced me. So at least now I get introduced!

I think we are making progress and that the younger women will have it much better than we did because their training will prepare them in a way we were never prepared. For example, we didn't have leadership training. I see myself playing that role with younger women who want to go into management.

Kazu Iijima: I just want to say my daughter was quite an influence on me. Younger women move so much faster because they understand sexism better than we did.

Virginia Kee: By 1965 I realized that my fight would have to be in the inner, "smoke-filled" rooms of public office. The regular Democratic club we tried to join didn't want us, so we formed our

own Club with the Chinese American Voters League and a group of young people who were involved in City College sit-ins for open admissions who were very politicized. So we had a very good core to start the United Democratic Organization. We did voter registration and education on the issues and finally they urged me to run for state committee. None of us wanted to. There was so much harassment from the "regular" Democrats. There was so much ugliness and bullying from the opposition. But in the end I decided it was worth the struggle. Whatever the result, we as Asian Americans would still have made progress.

Min Matsuda: I think right now something very exciting is happening. I think that Jessie Jackson is opening up electoral questions of the democratic process with his Rainbow Coalition—like proportional representation which we don't have in this country. In Europe and in Japan if you get two percent of the vote, you get two percent representation in Parliament or the Diet, but here you can poll forty-nine percent and get no representation at all.

I feel I have chosen a more radical route because I believe that we must have socialism. Everything is related—economics, racism, sexism. The push has to be for a new system because this system is not about women, about minorities, about the elderly.

Yuri Kochiyama: I think of so many things when I think about women's issues, the women's movement, sexism. There was a Harlem women's group led by May Mallory who has always been an inspiration to me, a mentor. I feel though that if it weren't for Kazu continuously bringing up the need for Asian women to become involved in these issues there would have been a huge gap in my political growth. She stayed on all of us.

I think of people like Annie Upsher who passed away a few years ago at the age of ninety-five. She was a white woman who lived in a Harlem project right across from us. She had been active at least seventy years and it was something to see the way she lived—not just as a political person, but as a very sympathetic human being. In her eighties she started a day care center right in her apartment, just so she could help young mothers, mostly Puerto Rican and Black, who needed someone to take care of their kids while they went to work. And this at the age of eighty! I mean someone like that just makes you understand what greatness is about—greatness through love. It's not just what you do or where you do it—but *why* you do it!

QUITTING TIME

LYDIA LOWE

The long bell blared,
and then the lo-ban
made me search all your bags
before you could leave.

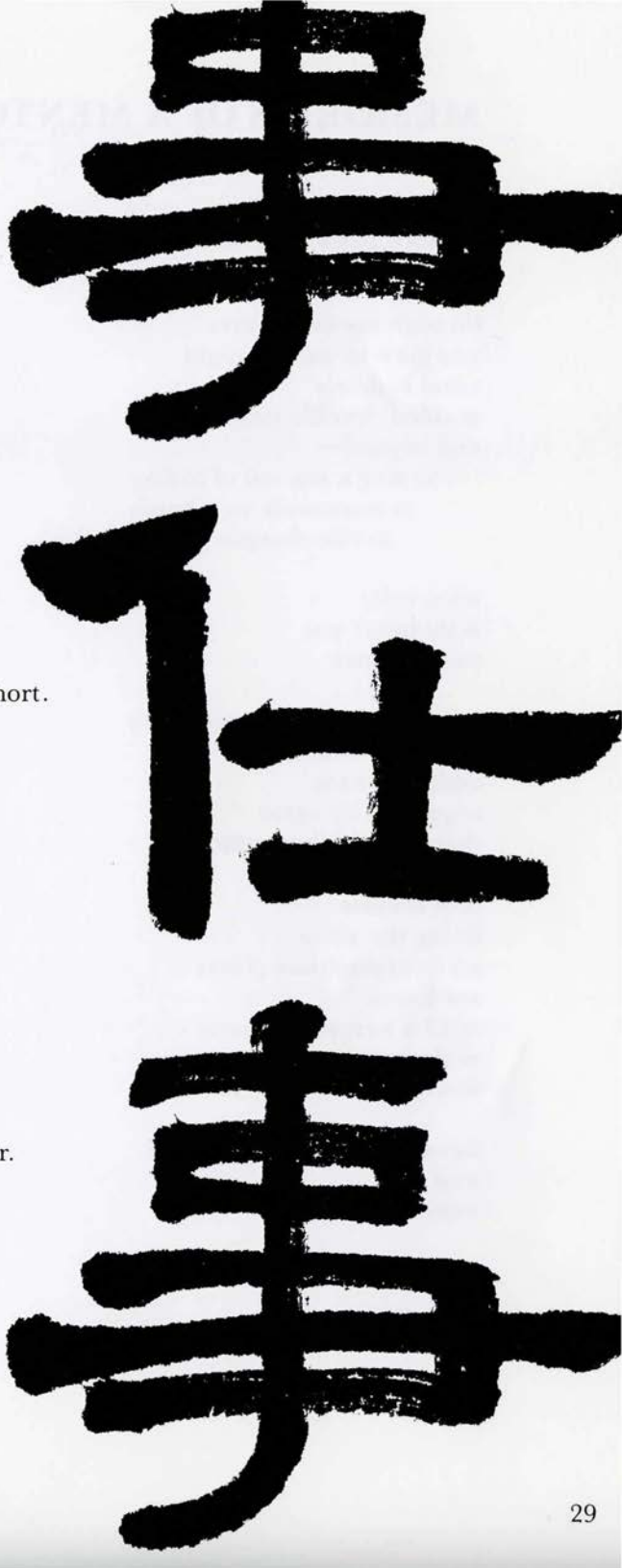
Inside he sighed
about slow work, fast hands,
missing spools of thread—
and I said nothing.

I remember that day
you came in to show me
I added your tickets six zippers short.
It was just a mistake.

You squinted down
at the check in your hands
like an old village woman peers
at some magician's trick.

That afternoon
when you thrust me your bags
I couldn't look or raise my face.
Doi m-jyu.

Eyes on the ground,
I could only see
one shoe kicking against the other.



MEMORIES OF A MENTOR

DIANE MEI LIN MARK

through my closed eyes
you glow in darkest night
silent cymbals
muffled, terrible timpani
and beyond—
    to sing a sun out of hiding
      to moonwalk on a beach
        to ride shotgun to the Rockies

what color
is thought? you
told me once

laughed about the mind being
a bargain basement
odds and ends
organized by value
thread-bare ideas somehow
good for the price
new notions
lining the aisles
while appropriate places
are found
at 10 it's crowded, noisy
at closing time
footsteps echo

the need to store winter food
now
more than ever

walking on without you

so much ground to cover

how do you
move mountains?
you showed
me once

OUR SELVES

DIANE MEI LIN MARK

Suzy Wong
doesn't live here anymore
yeah, and
Madame Butterfly
and the geisha ladies have all
gone
to
lunch(hey, they might
        be gone a very
        long
        time)

no one here
but
our selves

                steppin' on,
                without downcast eyes,
                without calculating dragon power
                without tight red cheongsams
                    embroidered with peonies
                without the
                silence
                that you've come to
                expect
                and we've grown
                to feel so alien with

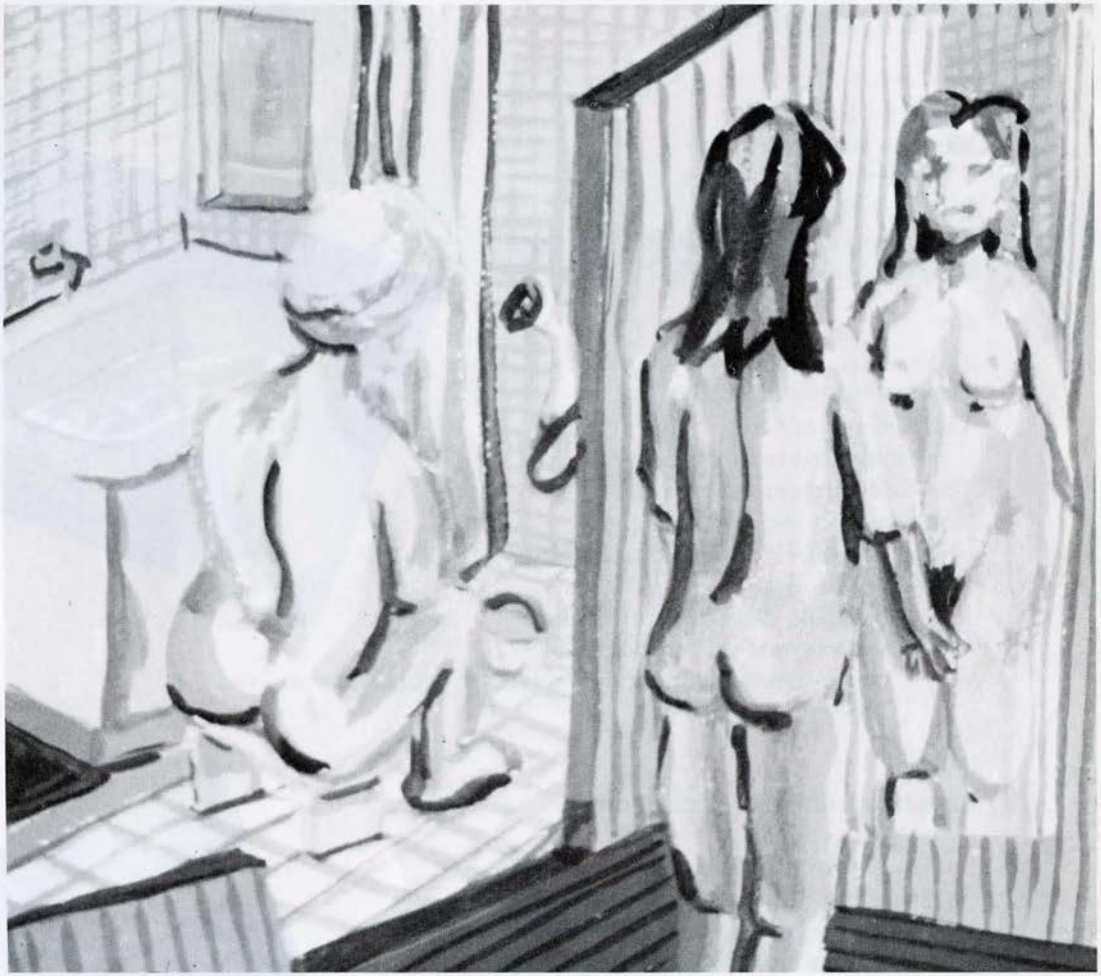
seeing each other at last
so little needs to be explained

there is this strength

born female in Asian America
our dreams stored years
in the backrooms
of our minds

no happening—
like sounds of flowers
bathed in noontime light
reaching righteously skyward!

"Listening to You" MARI OSHIMA



"At the Bathroom, Mother and Daughter" MARI OSHIMA

SNAPSHOTS

SASHA HOHRI

Grammy I called her
Ba-chan would be more
  culturally appropriate
But I am Sansei
  third generation Japanese American.
Snapshots chronicle a life . . .

one

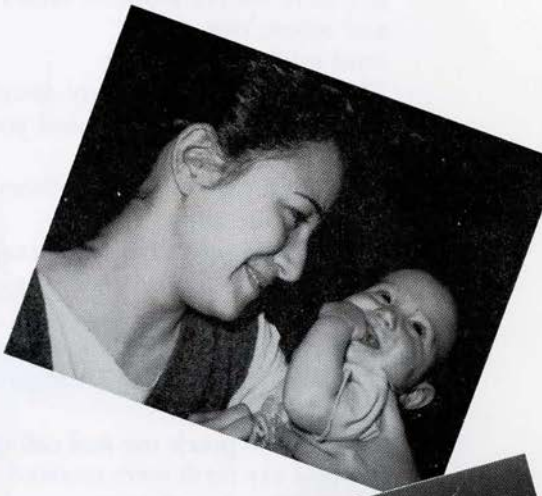
She looks at me over her shoulder
  out of the sepia photo,
The twelve year old
  formally dressed in kimono,
The eldest daughter sent back
  to live with the maiden aunt,
  who eventually returned to America,
    who ran away to the YWCA
      bringing disgrace on the family
      because she refused to do all
      the housework for six brothers, her father, mother, and
      one younger sister.

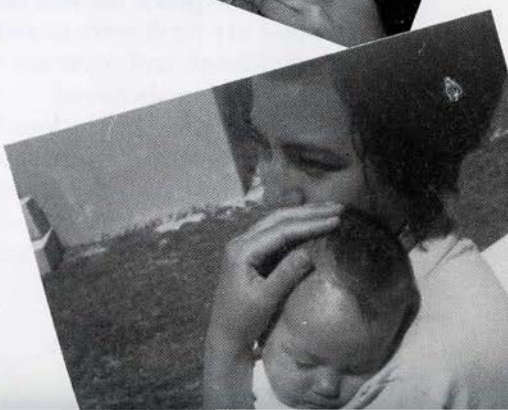
two

Laughing out of the back of the pick-up truck
  delight and joy
    in the midst of concentration camps'
    barbed wire
    And Grandpa's separate imprisonment
    And four children's dusty
    tar paper shack life
      Laughter and joy.
        a caught moment
        in an illegal
            photograph.

three

Sharing four generations of women, we
the sharing
caught momentarily . . .
my daughter pushes the hair
out of her eyes,
my younger daughter sits on my lap,
Grammy explains and teaches.
Ma looks on.
We pass the tradition.
So my younger daughter asks on her passing:
"But who will cook New Year's?"
I promise her
We all will.





MY MOTHER'S DAUGHTER

NANCY HOM

Ma, you used to tell me
how hard life was in China
in a house full of women
while the men ran off to
find dreams on Gold Mountain
And when I was born
your first and only daughter
you cried to see another female
suffer the same fate
I in my child's innocence
unknowingly added to your burden

You carried me on your back
till I was three
and gave me the sweetest meats
and softest rice
until my brothers came
Then I your first and only daughter
took my proper place behind your two sons
You used to say
Take good care of your brothers
They will be kings
You wanted me to be a secretary
And when I went my own way
you shook your head and said
I would never amount to anything
I was only my mother's daughter

You used to pinch me and call me ugly monkey
because my teeth were crooked
I would laugh and cover my mouth in embarrassment
And when I misbehaved
you hit me with the chicken feather duster
and locked me in dark closets
as if to shut out your own frustrations
Only night heard my muffled cries
as I searched for ways to earn your love

Ma, what must I do to make it all worthwhile?
Those years sweating in sewing factories
sewing blouse after blouse after blouse
Those thousands of beads you patiently strung
into necklaces for white throats
for the sake of your children
And I your first and only daughter
must forever bear that guilt
What can this ugly monkey do to make it up to you?

Ma, let me stretch my fingers across the miles
and touch you
Let our arms intertwine
like roses growing side by side
Let us be as two women of the same blood
Not ashamed to face each other
Not ashamed to say
I am my mother's daughter
I am!

GOING INSIDE TO WRITE

KIMIKO HAHN

She finds the only place to write
is the *te arai.*
So she takes her little notebook
and retells the story of the peach boy:
when the old man and woman
broke open the peach
a dazzlingly handsome baby
with pink cheeks and penis
stepped out and said
chichiue hahaue domo arigato gozaimashita
(thank you).
He was a baby
but he could speak.

In the halflight
she finishes her version.

Here the mind deregulates language.
Outside
causes
are not confined but often conditioned
by an infant's bowel movements,
stacks of dishes,
international economies or classical literature.
Myths and store coupons bear philosophy.

To know the body
from the inside—

the lining of the uterus, the muscles
that squeeze blood out,

the Braxton-Hicks contractions

labor

crisis

c-section—

to know the body from the inside

is warranty against fear

("baby look what you've done to me")—

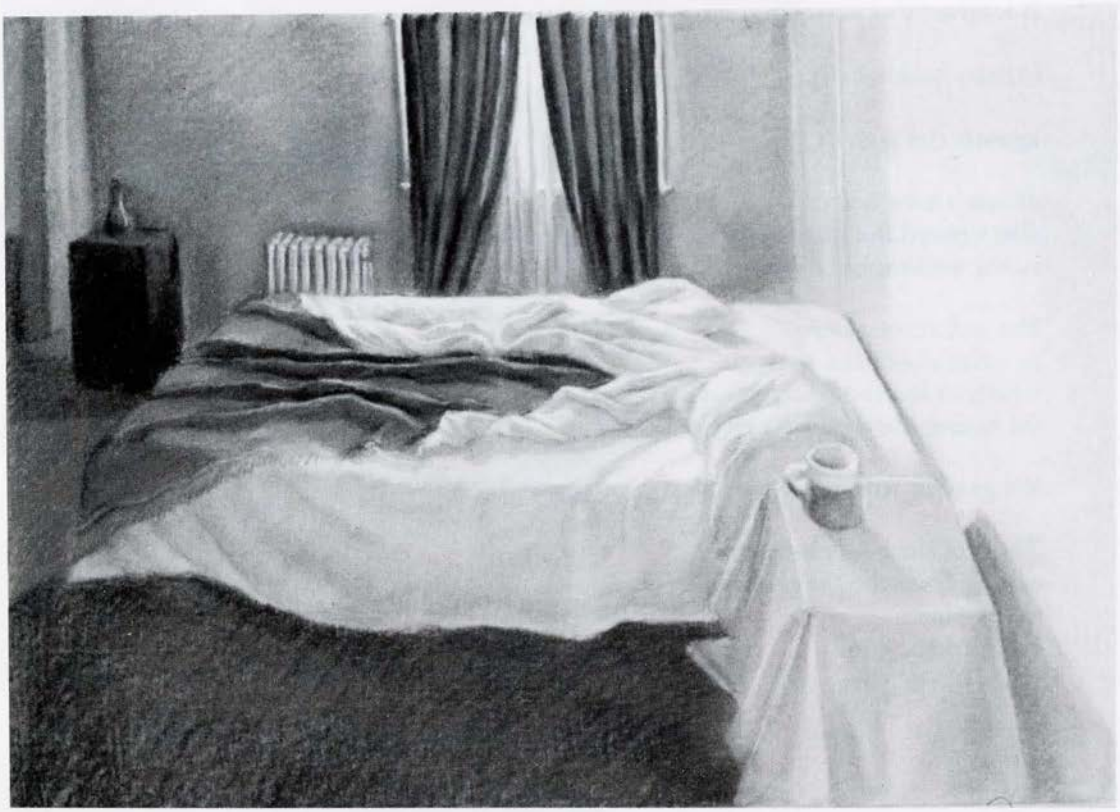
against the fear

of one's own body,
also toward the possibility of tending oneself
in the onslaught of others.

She will return later
to write about the sparrow
who had her tongue clipped off
for eating the woman's rice starch.

We garden with the knowledge of our bodies.

Though she hears her father
calling from the far room
she shouts:
I can't hear you.
I can't hear you.



"Bedroom in the Morning" **VIVIAN TSAO**

"The Mirror" VIVIAN TSAO

CHINESE AMERICAN WORKING WOMEN: OUT OF THE KITCHEN

MAY YING CHEN

Rosy, youthful complexion, quick strong hands, friendly eyes, smiling face — Shui Mak Ka recalls one of the countless wonderful stories of her youth in mainland China. A cousin was getting married and the traditional bounty of banquet foods was prepared. Boys and girls were seated at separate tables. The boys had better food than the girls. Boldly, young Shui confronted her father in front of all the elders. "It's unfair for the girls to get inferior food. We should have the same food as everyone else, or we won't eat!" Her father was amused, and perhaps a little angry, but he gave in. In household parties from then on, girls and boys had the same food.

A few years later, Shui Mak Ka would follow her uncle into the hills to escape the invading Japanese armies, recalling the "bullets shooting her footprints" as she scampered up the riverbank to safety.

Even later as a grown woman she would deliver babies for poor women in Henan Province. In one home she remembers: "The housing was so poor and small that my backside was sticking out the door as I bent down to receive the newborn baby." After she had her own baby daughter and twin sons in less than two years, she and her husband changed, washed, and hung out cloth diapers to dry day in and day out, in rotation around the clock. China was a vast, poor country, but the status of women was changing step by step.

Then Mrs. Ka came to America—a new immigrant woman with three young children. Sponsored by her brother in Chicago. Her husband remained in Hong Kong for two years before joining the family in the United States. "It was really hard for us as new immigrants. We had no home, no furniture. I worked in Chicago at two jobs, getting up at 5:00 a.m. to go to the sewing factory. At 3:00 p.m. I went to my brother's restaurant to work until 11:00 p.m. My daughter was only eight years old, and my twin sons were less than two years younger. "She kept in touch with her children at home by telephone—checking up on their homework, meals, household chores, baths and bedtime. They each had assignments—to mop the floor, wash dishes, etc. Late at night, she cooked food which they could heat up for dinner the next day. With the restaurant work schedule, the family had only one evening each week to sit down together for dinner.

Ying Ya Tsai hopes to retire with a small union pension soon. Sitting in her kitchen, watching her prepare a nutritious soup, I marvel at her knowledge of the Chinese herbs and ingredients for various aspects of good health. She says she's slowing down a lot, but her curiosity and interest in current issues from union meetings to Jesse Jackson animate her face as she speaks. Her granddaughters join me to partake in the warmth and aroma of those delicious bowls of soup. "My daughter came in 1983 with her family. Now she has a job in a Brooklyn garment factory packing and hanging the finished garments," she explains. "She never worked at a sewing machine before and couldn't earn a living at sewing. She does pretty well as a hanger, but she has to work so late. That's why her two youngest daughters stay with me. I take them to school in the morning, and they call me in the afternoon when they get home."

My two children are about the same age as Ying Ya's granddaughters. We go on union trips together, and we all live in the same building. Ying Ya makes us soup and dumplings, and we bake cookies and brownies for her. The kids are very different in language and culture, but they see their parent similarly engulfed by a busy schedule and not too much time at home.

American-born community activist Lorraine Leong is a product of an immigrant home. "I grew up in a pretty typical Chinese immigrant family, with both parents working hard. I only saw my father once each week and my mother mainly on weekends and evenings. My grandfather lived with us, and he picked us up from school and took us to Chinese school. Our household was really disciplined—everyone had chores, and my mom even refused to buy a TV until we were in our teens. That's why I'm such a TV nut now!" Lori has three TV sets and two VCR machines in a small two-bedroom apartment!

Lori is 100% New Yorker—sharp and savvy, intelligent and effective, gutsy and hip. She's been a dedicated community worker in Chinatown for 20 years while working and raising a family today. "Dealing with work, family and community is a juggling act. I had strong support from a network of parents and close friends who were willing to take turns at babysitting each others' kids. Without such support, I would never have been able to remain as active as I have been in the community. As I see my children grow and face the problems, conflicts, and challenges of the world, I know there's no way to shield them. I have to keep on fighting injustices and build a better world for my family and community." Lori's household is comfortable and caring. Devoted to her family as she is to community activism, she cooks countless pans of noodles for school potlucks as well as for community fundraisers. She attends PTA meetings and school activities, as well as tenant meetings, demonstrations, and community forums.

Connie Ling is another active working mother in Chinatown. It's a steep climb up five flights of narrow stairs to her tenement apartment. The bathroom is in the hallway. Her aged mother-in-law stays home all day, as she's not fit enough to go out without help. Connie was born in the Philippines and lived in Hong Kong before immigrating to the U.S. in 1967. Her three children were born in New York. She declares very emphatically, "My mother-in-law helped me so much — with babysitting and cooking. Without her help, how could I manage

with three kids, going to the sewing factory to work, and getting involved in so many community activities?" Dedicated, honest, and direct, Connie continues excitedly, "The school is a very important part of my children's life. Since I spoke some English, the parents at I.S. 131 elected me the PTA President for four years. With the hard work and support of all the parents, we were able to select a good principal and improve the school's security and educational programs."

Lori Leong also feels that active parents must make time to be involved in the public schools. "It's very important for parents to show concern about their child's progress in school. A kid spends most of his time there. Whenever there's a student show or parent-teacher conference, I make time to attend. Finding group programs and peer activities also helps kids with busy parents. Sports programs like Little League and tennis lessons have been great for my 11-year-old son."

Lori's determination and family organization are echoes of the experiences of many Asian immigrant mothers. The struggles of Asian women for freedom from old-fashioned rules and restrictions have challenged them to seek broader horizons. This sentiment is common in recent generations of Asian immigrant women as well as Asian Americans. Shui Mak Ka points out, "Chinese women have had a hard time 'coming out of the kitchen.' When I was in China, I already learned the importance of arranging your family life so that you can get involved in work and social causes." Her husband has played a supportive role — from the time he helped with three babies in China. Now in the U.S. a large extended family of aunts, uncles, and cousins has also provided a warm and supportive environment.

Without a doubt, love and marital relations have changed with the changing roles of women and men in China and in the US. These sewing women are an independent group and I have rarely seen their husbands, even though we have been a close-knit, almost matriarchal, group of friends. Mrs. Ka boasts and laughs about the many boyfriends and suitors of her youth. When she was only fifteen, the village women arranged a match for her and set up a meeting with the young man in a local teahouse. In her village you were considered an "old maid" at sixteen! Shui purposely wore ugly makeup and clothing to the meeting and embarrassed the village matchmakers. Shui's father disapproved of an arranged marriage for his daughter, since he had been to the US and accepted the modern idea that young people should have the freedom to choose a spouse they liked. "I had so many suitors with fancy titles and positions. But when my father saw the photo of Mr. Ka, it reminded him of his favorite Chinese opera star and he took an immediate liking to him. Although I was living on my own, I respected my father's opinion when it came to marriage." Sun Fook Ka and Shui Mak were both doctors and had the same basic interests, hobbies, and thinking. After four years of marriage, Mrs. Ka left China with three kids. During eight or nine years of separation, friends thought the marriage would never survive. But the love, mutual respect and companionship of their relationship has lasted for more than twenty-seven years. Mrs. Ka says, "I have been very lucky. There are so many meetings and activities that take me out of the house. When I'm out, Mr. Ka picks up groceries and takes care of the house. Too many other husbands scold their wives or simply won't let

them out of the house." Relationships have not been easy for independent-minded women whether immigrant or American-born. In "coming out of the kitchen," Asian women have faced new challenges and new difficulties.

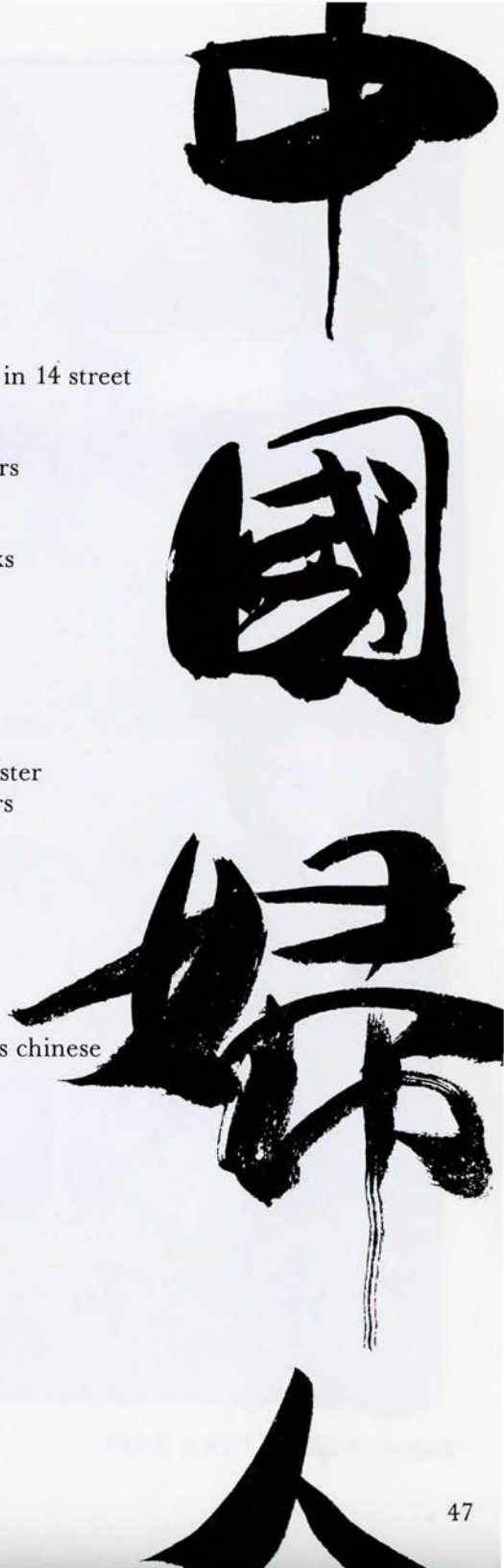
Although I was born and raised in the suburbs outside of Boston, my own parents were immigrant students from China and Hong Kong. Working in the garment workers' union, I have been immersed in the lives, problems, and joys of immigrant working women for several years. This has been quite a contrast to my own student days, dealing mainly with Asian American issues. In those days I might have felt terribly restricted and conservative to be working so closely with women who reminded me of my mother! But today with a family of my own, I find much to learn and admire about these lively women—from practical tips on cooking and health care to attitudes of being well-organized, training kids to take responsibility for themselves and coping with stresses and problems in a positive way. My children and husband do not speak Chinese and sometimes feel like outsiders to my work environment, but even they have learned to appreciate both the immigrant and Asian American experience more deeply.

CHINESE POEM

FRANCES CHUNG

since we last saw one another
the number of white strands in my hair has grown
one for each spring we've been apart
when will you again come to Chinatown
to feast on a bowl of noodles

CHINESE WOMEN



FRANCES CHUNG

old woman at a window
sitting to the side like a cat sunning herself
seeing life in all its tawdriness and splendor in 14 street
the lights shine on you
an icon
jade and yellow gold on your fingers and ears
while behind you there is only dark space

today it has been raining cats dogs pitchforks
your place by the window is empty
I am missing you
a stranger

I sing to myself a child's song
we used to chant on days like this about
big rains flooding the streets and younger sister
hiding under the bed in her flowered slippers

lok dai yu
ser jum gai
mui mui nay mai
chong ha di
jerk fa hai

one out of every four persons on this earth is chinese
still there are times when you feel alone
I hope your reverie and view
do not leave you unhappy

"Babies Beijing" NINA KUO

"Self-portrait" NINA KUO

BEIJING HOMECOMING REFLECTIONS MARCH 1988

SHARON HOM

Chasing the sun, we fly into the night becoming day and arrive at Narita Airport. We leisurely go through our usual routine of washing up, stretching our legs, checking out the streams of travellers. You can always spot the Americans. Running and laughing, we almost miss our connecting flight to Beijing. Arriving in the misty evening darkness, we reach the gates of the old Friendship Hotel, the double circles of the Hotel logo outlined in neon red and green. As we pass the main central gardens and the dark trees in the courtyards, our building, number 8 comes into view. An incredible sense of relief, of homecoming fills us and we are both so happy, laughing out loud that we startle our driver, old Zhang from my work unit. Our tiny two rooms crammed with books and Jamie's toys seem to welcome us back, ready to absorb our New York loot—new books, Duncan Hines brownie mixes, presents for our Beijing friends, all stuffed into the suitcases waiting to be unpacked. The floors are clean, the rugs neatly brushed, a pile of mail waits for us on the diningroom table, and the lights have been left on by our hotel attendants.

Today, after almost a week back, the disorientation of traveling between worlds has begun to dissolve against the slowly returning rhythms of our lives in China. A windstorm is blowing the sand and cold from the Gobi desert. I watch the trees waving their still naked branches wildly in the wind outside, the bicyclists hunched over, riding against the wind. And I think of New York so far away, struggling amidst concrete and streets filled with cars, the rumble of the subways underneath. Almost a lifetime ago it seems, my mother left Hong Kong, her home, her family behind to join my father in America. I was five, two front teeth missing, face surrounded by a mass of frizzy hair (my mother's effort to make me look more American). Now I sit more than 30 years later, returning to China with Jamie. Dressed in his new red Chinese sweatsuit, his hair in a short punk crewcut, he plays happily with his little friends in the fading sunlight in his room.

Sometimes, the circles go on without our intentions, without our designs. We traveled to unknown places, foreign yet strangely in the end to feel like home, but a piece of us forever here and there, never completely at rest, belonging neither to the Gold Mountain nor able to find a real space in the midst of the Great Dragon's waking. We will always be foreign there . . . here. The here and there

keeps shifting. So the problem will always be living somewhere, missing somewhere else, always not quite all here nor there . . . perhaps the classic historical experience of our people. To have powerful roots yet not be completely rooted . . . to look towards the water's edge on the horizon, knowing the edge keeps moving away from you, even as you reach for it. And yet . . .

What had I hoped from our time in China? Time . . . time for being in the present, time for sleeping, reading, thinking, for being with Jamie, time I had all along, but somehow lost in the frenzy of a schedule filled with monthly workplans, meetings, projects, and always more projects. I had hoped for a year of claiming. I wasn't sure what, but I thought vaguely of something precious I had lost, something I had forgotten the name of, of something that belonged to me. Preconceptions and imaginings of wished for future realities . . . but the future arriving and becoming the present never seems quite the same as the self constructions in isolated time. The future arriving and becoming the daily lived moments of our lives . . . full . . . complex . . . simple discoveries of the extraordinary in the ordinary.

Journal Entry: 10/6/86

An overcast misty day. . . . If one stays still long enough, you can see things which were there (here) all the time. The leaves on the trees framed by our window are beginning to turn yellow, so it will be time soon for us to make our autumn trip to the Great Wall. The trees and the outdoor meeting arena of the Agricultural college next to our compound are misty gray green in the distance. Always there is the murmuring of their loudspeakers, close by, but not quite comprehensible.

The last couple of days I've been overwhelmed by sudden goose-pimply feelings of something enormous approaching or swelling just under me, but before I can figure out the shapes, the feeling is gone. I read the China Daily News of the recent resolutions of the Congress meetings—the road towards democratic socialism which the country is exhorted to remain on—but I think of the enormous complexity and difficulty of the road China travels, and will travel, and I can't help almost crying silently alone in my apartment.

Riding around Tien An Men Square for National Day celebrations—the TENS of THOUSANDS of people, bicycles, and cameras set up in lines along the Avenue as people try to capture this moment of themselves and their children, smiling against the rows of hotels, the government buildings, the institutions of the city, all outlined with Christmas tree lights and lit up by the rows of lotus flower like clustered street lamps. The great huge dragon of flowers can be seen above the solid square of humanity. D-'s wife and I talk on and on about the potential and future of China as we make our way through the masses of people. Questions about the United States, my home, our lives underlie the conversation.

Last night an unexpected knock on our door by one of my students. He is excited, full of significance and an awareness of his own growing role in the great changes ahead. The developments over the weekend in Congress reported briefly in the People's Daily could have a major impact on all of our lives. I listen to Y- as I wash dinner dishes. . . . I think we should perhaps just sit down and drink tea in the midst of the importance of this news, but I finish washing the dishes and we go on talking excitedly at the same time. The pieces begin to fall in, but either the total picture is too huge to comprehend, or somehow the perspective has shifted. Somewhere, it seems a long time ago, back in the States, the significance of things hinged on where they were in relationship to me and my role. But although the experiential center seemed to be me, I always felt disoriented, frazzled, the pieces everywhere except HERE in this moment or centered within myself. Here, the effort to just be here shifts everything, and those moments of a sharp sense of the completeness or preciousness and significance of individual moments, of historical moments increase. It really feels as if I were in the eye of a tornado, the possible absolute stillness from which you can sense the immediacy and closeness of the powerful winds and forces sweeping through.

And yet, and yet . . . the daily details go on amidst the oppressive bureaucracy which pervades everything, and the frustration of things not working, washing machines which don't even move, bicycles which fall apart, telephones connecting only static. . . . It is this juxtaposed against or with the reality of a billion people moving forward, trying to imagine lives of non-arranged marriages, work freely negotiated and chosen, and participation which will again expose oneself to the dangers of the political winds of change, the visions of the next generation of leaders, the connections with my students and their individual and collective journeys, and my own personal path . . . and now there are no linear or clear bridges. The way here, the way back, all seem like preconceptions and plans for a life, but the reality of our lives no longer fit into nor can no longer be managed by neat monthly workplans.

Journal Entry

Outside, a street lamp glints out like
the North Star in the dark sky of tree leaves,
lighting up the night riders bicycling by.
Moments in life are like this . . .
Echoes and fullness of ancient gu chen music,
so beautiful that it squeezes the heart,
like a painful kiss.
Warm rosy light from the table lamp
gently and quietly caressing the edges of the bed
and the tips of the plant leaves.
My monkey child, Jamie, sleeping . . .
a ring of dried milk around his slightly open mouth . . .
Strangers longing for you at a distance,
sending messages and dreams in rainbow boxes.
Evenings of letting the silence surround me,
settling back into an inner centeredness,
cushioning the slow free fall into myself.
Finally, I am home.

10/10/87

REVELATION AND MASK: AUTOBIOGRAPHIES OF THE EATON SISTERS

AMY LING

The first Asian American writers, Edith (1867–1915) and Winnifred Eaton (1877?–1954), daughters of an English man and a Chinese woman, wrote under the pseudonyms Sui Sin Far and Onoto Watanna. Merely in the choice of a pseudonym, Edith revealed and embraced her Chinese identity while Winnifred assumed a Japanese mask. An intensive comparison of their autobiographical writings will not only bring their separate personalities into focus but will illuminate, from an Asian American perspective, what Roger Rosenblatt in writing of Black autobiography called "a special reality."

> Minority autobiography and minority fiction deserve their minority status not because of comparative numbers but because of the presence of a special reality, one provided for the minority by the majority, within which each member of the minority tries to reach an understanding both of himself and the reality into which he has been placed.[1]

The "special reality" of life for the Chinese in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was extreme hostility. It was worse then to be Chinese than to be any other racial group. "A Chinaman is, in my eyes, more repulsive than a nigger," said a town clerk in a midwestern American town in Edith Eaton's presence, and his view was representative, for during that same dinner party, Edith Eaton's new employer had expressed doubts that the Chinese were even human and her landlady, ironically, "wouldn't have one in my house." The Japanese, however, "are altogether different. There is something bright and likeable about those men."[2]

The Japanese were admired first because there were few Japanese in the U.S. in the late nineteenth century and therefore they posed no economic threat; secondly, Japan, an island empire, had defeated two large continental nations—China in 1895 and Russia in 1905, and Japanese militarism was seen as the noble result of the samurai tradition (until Pearl Harbor). Under these circumstances, it was a gratuitous and courageous act for Edith Eaton to identify herself as Chinese. Yet this she did.

Winnifred Eaton's reaction to the anti-Chinese sentiment was to assume a Japanese persona. According to her grandson,[3] she explained that her sister was already mining the Chinese vein, and she did not want to seem to be clinging to her older sister's skirts. Actually, Edith's first short story, "A Chinese Ishmael" and Winnifred's first novel, *Miss Nume of Japan* both appeared in the same year,

1899. Since novels generally take longer to write than short stories and since we do not know in which month each piece was published, we have reason to speculate that Winnifred's explanation was really a rationalization.

Though she names no names, Edith devotes a paragraph in her autobiographical essay to the phenomenon of Chinese Eurasians "thinking to advance themselves, both in a social and business sense, [who] pass as Japanese" because the Americans have "for many years manifested a much higher regard for the Japanese than for the Chinese." Though she does not advocate such deception, she asks a pointed question that turns the blame around and reveals her big sisterly compassion: "Are not those who compel them to thus cringe more to be blamed than they?"

The public history of the Chinese in America, a humiliating one for both Chinese and Caucasian, is documented in many studies of immigration[4] and recently by Maxine Hong Kingston in "The Laws," the central chapter of *Chinamen*. The personal story of what life was like for Chinese and Eurasians in America at the turn of the century is Edith Eaton's special contribution to American letters. She was the first person of Chinese background to write fiction and journalistic articles about this embattled group. Edith wielded her pen as a warrior wields a sword to fight injustice and to counteract anti-Chinese propaganda. That she saw her mission in this light is clear in her frequent use of the battle metaphor in her autobiographical essay—for example, she writes of her childhood in Montreal: "There are many pitched battles, of course, and we seldom leave the house without being armed for conflict." Later, as a journalist, she wrote: "I meet many Chinese persons, and when they get into trouble am often called upon to fight their battles in the papers. This I enjoy." She achieved recognition for her support from the Chinese, both in Canada where her parents lived and in the United States where she did most of her work. But from the larger audience, her recognition was probably slight, for though she published widely in the most popular magazines of her time, she has only one book, a collection of thirty-seven stories, *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* (1912), published by a much less prestigious press than her sister's.

Winnifred, on the other hand, used her pen (and imagination) in pursuit of fame and fortune and, to an extraordinary extent, achieved both. *Miss Nume of Japan* was the first of a series of seventeen books, many of them bestsellers. Fifteen of the seventeen were novels, twelve of these in the "Japanese" mode, most published by Harper's and nearly all receiving exquisite treatment, printed on delicately decorated paper with full-color illustrations. Her second novel, *A Japanese Nightingale* underwent numerous editions and translations and was adapted for a Broadway play, a film and an opera. In 1911, tiring of her Japanese fabrications, she wrote a novel in Irish-American dialect entitled, *The Diary of Delia*, also published under her then well-known name Onoto Watanna. (For the first time in history, an "Irish-American" novel written by a Chinese-Eurasian was published under a Japanese name.)

The choice of a pseudonym, thus, was not only a response to the "special reality" of the Chinese Eurasian in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century United States, but it set each writer's purpose, the outcome of her subse-

quent career, and the psychological state in which each found herself when she reached the moment ripe for what Elizabeth Bruss has called the "autobiographical act." That two sisters both wrote autobiographies would seem an unusual opportunity to arrive at a verifiable reality, and, to a limited extent, this is possible. But their autobiographies, as their personalities, are very different. Winnifred was the more prolific, producing a 356 page book, simply entitled *Me, A Book of Remembrance*, (1915) while Edith Eaton's essay with its flowery title, "Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian," published in 1909, is only seven-and-one-half pages long. In tone and style, Edith's essay is sincere, and earnest, straightforward and purposeful. She calls herself "a very serious and sober-minded spinster." In this essay as in all her writing, her mission was to right wrongs, particularly the wrong she was personally most familiar with—bigotry, which, as a Eurasian, she had experienced from Asians as well as Caucasians. *Me*, by contrast, is novelistic in style—filled with dialogue, vivid details, and artistically organized to produce a sense of unity and wholeness. The narrator calls herself "the ugly duckling of an otherwise astonishingly good looking family" and portrays herself as a bold, lively seventeen-year-old setting forth to conquer the world with ten dollars in her purse and a sheaf of poems. Naive and unworldly, she is armed with self-confidence, her dreams of success, an active imagination and a charming personality that draws to her many friends and numerous marriage proposals. *Me* begins with her departure from the parental nest and ends with her entrance into adulthood: the publication of her novel and the disillusioning realization that she has been toyed with by the man to whom she had proffered her first love: a playboy millionaire.

"Self-identity ('I' looking at 'me') is constituted not only by our looking at ourselves, but also by our looking at others looking at us and our reconstruction of and alteration of these views of others about us,"[5] as R. D. Laing has pointed out. This awareness of how others are looking at us is but another aspect of the "special reality" that minorities and women particularly experience. Both Eaton sisters' autobiographies reveal the consciousness of the gaze and judgment of others. Winnifred writes in *Me* that people look at her "as if I interested them or they were puzzled to know my nationality. I would have given anything to look less foreign. My darkness marked and crushed me, I who loved blondness like the sun." (p. 166) But she never reveals fully the origin of this "darkness."

Edith's autobiography, on the other hand, focuses directly and exclusively on ethnicity, chronicling the suffering she has endured from age four until forty simply for being Eurasian. At the same time, it is the story of her reaction to racism—the development of her racial consciousness and pride. Though her own initial reaction to the first Chinese she saw (apart from her mother) was "to recoil with a sense of shock," when taunted by other children and called "yellow-face, pig-tail, rat-eater," her fighting spirit is roused and she retorts, "I'd rather be Chinese than anything else in the world." She goes to the library to research China and the Chinese and becomes proud of her heritage though constantly faced with hostility: in dancing class one young man says "that he would rather marry a pig than a girl with Chinese blood in her veins." She attributes her life-long physical disability to the burden of being a Eurasian: "I am prostrated at

times with attacks of nervous sickness . . . in the light of the present I know that the cross of the Eurasian bore too heavily upon my childish shoulders." The battle against bigotry may have taken its toll on Edith Eaton physically, but she received a spiritual reward—acceptance into the Chinese community. The tombstone they erected on her grave in Montreal is inscribed with the words: "Yi bu wong hua," roughly translated, "The righteous one forgets not his country." As Sui Sin Far had not forgotten her Chinese origins, so the Chinese would not forget her.

In contrast, *Me*, like its author, is a curious and devious text. Purporting to belong to the self-revelatory genre of autobiography, it was published anonymously. Paradoxically, the author wanted to tell her life story, to explain herself, and yet she did not want to reveal her identity. *Me* is written in the first person, but the author calls herself Nora Ascough, yet another pseudonym. She plainly reveals that her father was a poor painter and "an English-Irishman" but is deliberately vague about her mother, saying only: "She was a native of a far-distant land, and I do not think she ever got over the feeling of being a stranger in Canada." If names are changed and facts are not forthcoming, how can the reader be certain that this is indeed an autobiography and not a novel? As if anticipating such doubts, the book begins with an introduction by a personal friend, who has "known her [the author] for a number of years." The introducer, herself a popular writer, Jean Webster, author of *Daddy Longlegs*, affirms that "the main outline of everything she says is true, though the names of people and places have *necessarily* [italics mine] been changed in order to hide their identity." After reading the book, one realizes that Jean Webster did not know the author during the time of the narrative; thus, the word of the guarantor is no guarantee. And why was it necessary to hide peoples' identities, including the author's? Webster replies: "The author has written a number of books that have had wide circulation." Because Onoto Watanna's novel are so well-known. Winnifred Eaton cannot tell the truth about herself.

The real reason for Winnifred's reluctance to reveal all was that she had already supplied no less august a publication than *Who's Who* with a fabricated biography to support her pseudonym. *Who Was Who in America*, Volume VI still publishes the following misinformation for Winnifred Eaton Babcock: born Nagasaki, Japan (when in fact it was Montreal, Canada) in 1879 (when it was more likely 1877; her grandson's explanation for the change in her birth year was that she did not wish to acknowledge being older than her second husband, Francis Fournier Reeves). For Edith's obituary in the April 9, 1914 issue of *The New York Times*, Winnifred further romanticized their mother's past calling her "a Japanese noblewoman who had been adopted by Sir Hugh Matheson as a child and educated in England." This obituary is another peculiar text, unbalanced in its emphasis, for most of the space is given to embellishments if not novelistic accounts of their father's life and career instead of Edith's. It only notes at the beginning that Edith Eaton was the "Author of Chinese Stories Under the name of Sui Sin Far," also known as the "Chinese Lily," but ends with Winnifred herself: "One of Miss Eaton's sisters, Mrs. Bertram W. Babcock of New York, is an author writing under the pen name of Onoto Watanna." By claiming a Japa-

nese mother, Winnifred neatly made herself the legitimate daughter and Edith the aberration.

Me fits well into what Jean Starobinski has called the "picaresque" tradition of autobiography, one in which the author, having "arrived at a certain stage of ease and 'respectability' . . . retraces, through an adventurous past, his humble beginnings at the fringes of society." Then, unworldly though not unclever, "he got by as best he could . . . encountering on the way all the abuse, all the oppressive power, all the insolence of those above him."[6] Indeed, about the poverty of their parents, both sisters' autobiographies agree. *Me* details the hardships and pitfalls "Nora" faced as an unprotected young woman alone in the cruel world attempting to make her fortune, relying on her wits and on the kindness of strangers. Though the tone of *Me* is predominantly positive, nonetheless, an elegaic note creeps in, for Winnifred Eaton is not only laughing at her former self from the height of her present position, but lets slip regret for the road she has taken. *Me* was written shortly after Edith's death and after her own surgery, during hospitalization. Thus reminded of mortality, facing the possibility of nonexistence, she pondered the meaning of her existence and expressed a fundamental doubt. Though her second novel, *A Japanese Nightingale*, was then being performed on Broadway, she confessed frankly:

> What I then ardently believed to be the divine sparks of genius, I now perceived to be nothing but a mediocre talent that could never carry me far. My success was founded upon a cheap and popular device, and that jumble of sentimental moonshine that they called my play seemed to me the pathetic stamp of my inefficiency. Oh, I had sold my birthright for a mess of potage. (sic) (p. 153–4.)

Identifying with Esau, the unfavored child, she acknowledges that she has betrayed her heritage. Perhaps the obituary she wrote for Edith was weighing heavily on her conscience. However, she was still business-conscious enough not to reveal everything. Only those already in the know would understand what she was alluding to when she wrote of selling her birthright. Further on, she explicitly writes about Edith and seems conscience-stricken:

> I thought of other sisters . . . the eldest, a girl with more real talent than I—who had been a pitiful invalid all her days. She is dead now, that dear big sister of mine, and a monument marks her grave in commemoration of work she did for my mother's country.
>
> It seemed our heritage had been all struggle. None of us had yet attained what the world calls success . . .
>
> It seemed a great pity that I was not, after all, to be the savior of my family, and that my dreams of the fame and fortune that not alone should lift me up, but all my people, were built upon a substance as shifting as sand and as shadowy as mist. (p. 194)

Scholars of autobiography are fond of reiterating that autobiography employs the techniques of fiction, and *Me* is certainly a case in point. As Georges Gusdorf forgives Lamartine's altering certain facts in his autobiography, by concluding, "The anecdote is symbolic; in autobiography the truth of facts is subordinate to the truth of the man."[7] So may we forgive Winnifred Eaton the liberties she took. Though we cannot read *Me* for facts we do get a sense, between the lines, of

Winnifred's more conventional but equally feisty character and of the hardship she faced as a young woman making her way alone in a hostile world. Indirectly, *Me* is Winnifred's way of fighting back by showing all the current prejudices to be wrong. "They say they'd rather marry a pig than a girl with Chinese blood in her veins? Look how many proposals I had my first year away from home! They say a woman cannot take care of herself? Look how well I've made out with no rich parents and little education behind me. They say Chinese are unassimilable into American society—Ha! just look at me!"

Edith's response to racism was a frontal assault, direct and confrontational. Winnifred's response, however, was indirect, covert, and subversive—like the Trojan Horse, an ambush from within the walls. Well aware of the prejudices and stereotypes both about Asians and about women, she exploited all these popularly held notions in her novels and in her personal dealings with the wielders of power—rich men and publishers. If they preferred Japanese, she would play the Japanese; if they enjoyed being charmed and seduced, she would be charming and seductive. What Edith in her writing asserted—the Chinese are human and assimilable—Winnifred in her life demonstrated.

1. Roger Rosenblatt, "Black Autobiography: Life as the Death Weapon" in James Olney, ed. *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980, p. 171.

2. See Sui Sin Far, "Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian," *The Independent*, January 21, 1909, p. 129.

3. I have been in correspondence with Winnifred Eaton's grandson, Professor Paul Rooney, Department of Mathematics, University of Toronto, who has graciously supplied me with much useful information.

4. See, for example, Roy Garis, *Immigration Restriction: A Study of the Opposition to and Regulation of Immigration into the U.S.*, New York: Macmillan Company, 1928.

5. H. Phillipson Laing and A. R. Lee, *Interpersonal Perception* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1966), pp. 5-6 quoted in Elizabeth W. Bruss, *Autobiographical Acts: the Changing Situation of a Literary Genre*, (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976) p. 13.

6. Jean Starobinski, "The Style of Autobiography" in Olney, *Autobiography*, p. 82.

7. Georges Gusdorf, "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography," in Olney, *Autobiography*, p. 43.

A VIETNAMESE LESBIAN SPEAKS

HUONG GIANG NGUYEN

I was born in a country wrought with wars, in a land gutted by B52s, in a nation still going through its adolescent stage of independence even though its people are as old as the earth itself. I was born in Hue, the central city of Vietnam that formed the background to the bloody Tet offensive where thousands of people were massacred, where in another city a reporter became famous with the photograph of a South Vietnamese general pointing a pistol to a Vietcong prisoner's temple, summarily executing him.

Yet nothing seemed to affect me too much. I went to a French convent school, had a lot of friends, was a pest and a teacher's pet at the same time. I remember sultry afternoons when the asphalt on the streets would literally steam up and envelop the quiet city in a lazy haze. The cicada would sing soulfully and the tamarind leaves would rustle gently, bringing a fresh breeze to the pregnant air.

I was fascinated by the United States and awed by all Americans. Partly because of their size, partly because of what I imagined of their originality, inventiveness, and wealth from my father's collection of Dale Carnegie's books. The functionalism of the 1950s held my father in thrall, and it led him to the conviction that all evils can be cured with efficiency. I was encouraged to read *Cheaper by The Dozen* and to apply discipline in all aspects of my teenage life. My mother, on the other hand, nurtured me and shielded me from my father's tyranny when she could.

From a very early stage in my life, I learned that power was desirable. Power allowed my father to take liberties with people's feelings and get away with it. It equipped him with first-strike capabilities so that he could never be hurt. Even as a child, I despaired to grow up to be like my mother, trapped in household duties, familial ties, forced to be the therapeutic one where my father, storming violence, got subsided and soothed.

My life took a sudden turn when Saigon fell in 1975. My family with its ties to the old regime would never survive the debacle and would surely be punished by the communist victors. My father tried his American connections and was promised evacuation when the time came. It turned out to be an empty promise. On the eve of the day when the communist tanks stormed the South Vietnamese presidential palace, I was huddling with my family under the staircase of our house trembling with fear through a night of unceasing rocket fire. My mother took out her rosary and made all of us pray to God to let this night pass. We all had our refugee bags ready and were just waiting for the morning in order to leave our house.

The incumbent regime mustered its last strength to impose a curfew over the city to give it a semblance of calm. My uncle came with his Red Cross band and we left with him.

Broken debris was strewn over the empty streets of Saigon and there were refugees on foot who had been driven from their homes because of the rockets of the night before. The women carried their family's possessions in baskets supported by a pole hanging from their shoulders. The children looked all unkempt and scared. As I passed them, I had the feeling that this would be the last time I would feel this close to my own people.

By some miracle, we managed to board a ship that was leaving Saigon for international waters. It drizzled slightly and the city looked desolate and small from the deck where I stood watching it disappear.

I shuffled through a succession of refugee camps where standing in line for food, for clothes, for a shower was the norm. It was what one did to pass the time. I have lived in tents at Fort Orote Point in Guam, have slept on a mattress with a hundred other sleeping bodies around me in a neon-lit hangar, have chased rabbits on a beautiful hill blooming with spring flowers at Fort Indiantown Gap in Pennsylvania.

I wanted to make new friends and was very curious about the nice volunteer women who served me food at the mess hall. They were very sweet and would give me such huge portions that I wanted to be able to express my gratitude in some deeper way than just two words—thank you. I wanted to tell them that I was very moved to be treated so kindly, that I got choked up when, on a bus going to yet another camp, I noticed a couple of Quaker farmers standing outside of their houses waving at us. I had complex feelings that would well up inside me but were snuffed out because of my limited vocabulary.

On a less sentimental note, the camps also taught me one very important lesson, that language was power, because in all situations I noticed that the translators, the ones who spoke English, were accorded much more respect than the ones who did not.

My parents, with the help of our sponsor, enrolled me in a public junior high school. I set out to learn English with a vengeance for all the months that I was forced to be silent in the camps, for the months that I felt like a shadow of an existence. Now I was with kids my same age and I was determined to make friends. It wasn't easy. The teenagers were cruel in their insensitivity that, if allowed to take its natural course, would develop into racism and classism. The boys called me "ching," made funny faces, and the girls snickered at my clothes, which I had gotten secondhand, and were obviously passé in style, from some rich, charitable family.

I did manage to make some friends and they helped me in my endeavor to be an assimilated refugee. I would stand in front of the mirror for hours twisting my mouth to say "little" correctly, would spend innumerable hours sweating over a one-page essay. I read compulsively, and in the summer before my SAT, I heroically set out to learn the entire Barron's word list alphabetically.

I was obsessed to eradicate any differences that would point to my inferior status, and I convinced myself that academic achievement would admit me to the ranks of the select where my past as a refugee would somehow be overlooked. In my eyes, all Americans were Amazon-like, articulate, intelligent, and full of

Dionysian force. If I could prove my intelligence and speak in complete sentences, perhaps people would change their perception of me and think me beautiful.

The magnanimity of a beautiful and privileged person is often unbounded, while an ugly duckling cannot afford to give away the few nice things that she has managed to glean from the garbage of society. I want to be magnanimous and full of Dionysian force, but in this racist world, I felt like an ugly duckling. Time and time again, I had to confront my spurious notions of assimilation when, once more, I was confronted with a brick wall of prejudices.

Even as a child, I had already been aware that there was something grossly unjust about how society viewed women. The way my father silenced my mother into submission, the way a male friend of the family told me that I would grow up to have beautiful babies and that my brother would grow up to be a doctor instilled in my young mind ample proof of women's inadequacies and powerlessness.

There was nothing sophisticated about the way men brainwashed women into accepting an inferior social status. Systematic repetitions of untruth, abuses, and age-old sanctions of sexist practices require a legitimacy that belies history but that has the momentum of the present to generate more power for the ruling sex by ensuring that the oppressed is even more oppressed.

My nascent formulation of sexism would continue in a void without a framework to analyze, and therefore break out of, my oppression as a woman. However, in retrospect, it almost seemed as if I needed to realize my own power before I could deal with my oppression. When I came out as a lesbian, I also came out as a feminist.

Feminism gave me a new perspective with which to look at the world around me. Many practices that I'd taken for granted assumed a very different color when examined with my new eyes. The media peppers its broadcast or printed material with a heavy dose of sexist innuendoes. The academic world is flagrantly tainted, for all its pretensions to liberalism. The advertising world leads the pack of misogynist contenders in portraying women in the most blatantly degrading circumstances.

Having a cognizance of the oppression of women, I've also come to understand its derivative forms. Silence is a quality imposed on an oppressed people by its ruler. I understand why the word *lesbian* as a noun doesn't exist in the Vietnamese vocabulary, but instead only an adjective that describes the state of loving one's own sex. Without a face, an identity, one can never mobilize in numbers to protest one's prescribed oppression.

During the Gay Pride March last year, my father was in the crowd of bystanders, greatly repulsed at what was happening and missing the fact that his daughter had just marched past him. He did not see my face. Feminism gives me the analytical tools to defend myself against such obliteration.

It is ironic that white male writers have had a hand in shaping my lesbianism. I fantasized about the women who appeared in Galsworthy's books, wondered why they were so gossamer in personality yet so intriguing. The women in O'Neill's plays were such sirens that I wanted to be their slave in order to experience just once the limit of my own passion. Mauriac's women were intellectuals dealing with their own conscience and getting into trouble with

society because their morality was not sanctioned by it while Zola's women were either lesbian prostitutes or victims of sadomasochism. I loved them all.

I identified myself with the men because of their power, their ability to categorize women into objects for worship, much the same way that I have always striven to be accepted in the white world. My intellectual and emotional curiosity fed itself on the psyche of women portrayed in literature. Male writers whom I liked ascribed to their fictional women an eluding otherness, much physical beauty, and the vague memory of a mother's tenderness. In my literary pursuit of women, I completely forgot about men, whom I found uninteresting.

Leaving the realm of fiction, women are much more fascinating, much more complicated, and much less accommodating. My experience of loving women defies description by an anguished male writer who wants to write about categories.

In order to be authentic, one has to be tested by confrontational situations and answer one's internal doubts with actions. Lesbian politics provides me with a means to deal with my own homophobia as well as other people's. It has been instrumental in opening my eyes to other injustices, to get me to think and question. With the knowledge that a community of lesbians exists, I am confident in my own power as a lesbian and can afford to speak out on other issues.

One of those issues is racism. I came out in college and was involved in a lesbian group that consisted mostly of white women. My experience as a budding lesbian was dismal and I felt misunderstood, uninteresting, and very frustrated in my own silence. My refugee symptoms returned once again.

I got involved in short flings with women who mistreated me and who wanted to use me as a guinea pig to explore their own sexuality. They did not make the effort to understand, and therefore did not feel comfortable with, my different background and culture. Yet, I only sought out white women. I pretended to ignore Asian women in bars while I was secretly checking them out. In the same way that I grew up identifying with men because they were more powerful, I only allowed myself to be attracted to white women. I unconsciously refused to be associated with the oppressed. But as is common in any power relationship, the oppressed is encouraged to identify with the oppressor up to a certain point, after which it would be licentious for too many liberties to be taken. After all, let's not forget who is the master and who is the slave.

As a result of some personal changes, I decided to find out about Asian Lesbians of the East Coast (ALOEC). It was a symbolic gesture because I was coming more and more to terms with who I was and felt stronger because of this self-realization. There are many other problems that I have not dealt with; for example, how I feel doubly exploited because both white men and Asian men insult me with their eyes while a white woman might not come under such lecherous scrutiny from an Asian man. As a social being, I am at a very low rung, being lesbian, female, and Asian. In the face of such oppression, it is a miracle that I can look into the eyes of my Asian lesbian friends and see that I love myself.

"Self Portrait as St. Sebastian" MARGO MACHIDA

"Night of Stone" MARGO MACHIDA

CYNTHIA WAS NO DISCO BUNNY

FLORENCE HOUN

she wore no disco dress nor sex shoes
she had no blow-dried fluffiness
no delicate bones
no sweetie voice
no inviting touch
no honey eyes
no rolling chest
no vanilla complexion
she wasn't mean
she wasn't mad
She was well respected for her principles.
when she spoke in public,
she would gesture in chopping motions
one hand crisply intersecting the other at 90 degrees
her words would hang in mid-air
immaculate
People were decerebrated.
The men said they loved her
she was the movement's secret nuclear weapon with quasi-strike potential
the guys were glad she was on their side.

SAXOPHONETYX

CYN. ZARCO

I've heard all about musicians
They take love, don't give love
'cause they're savin' it for the music

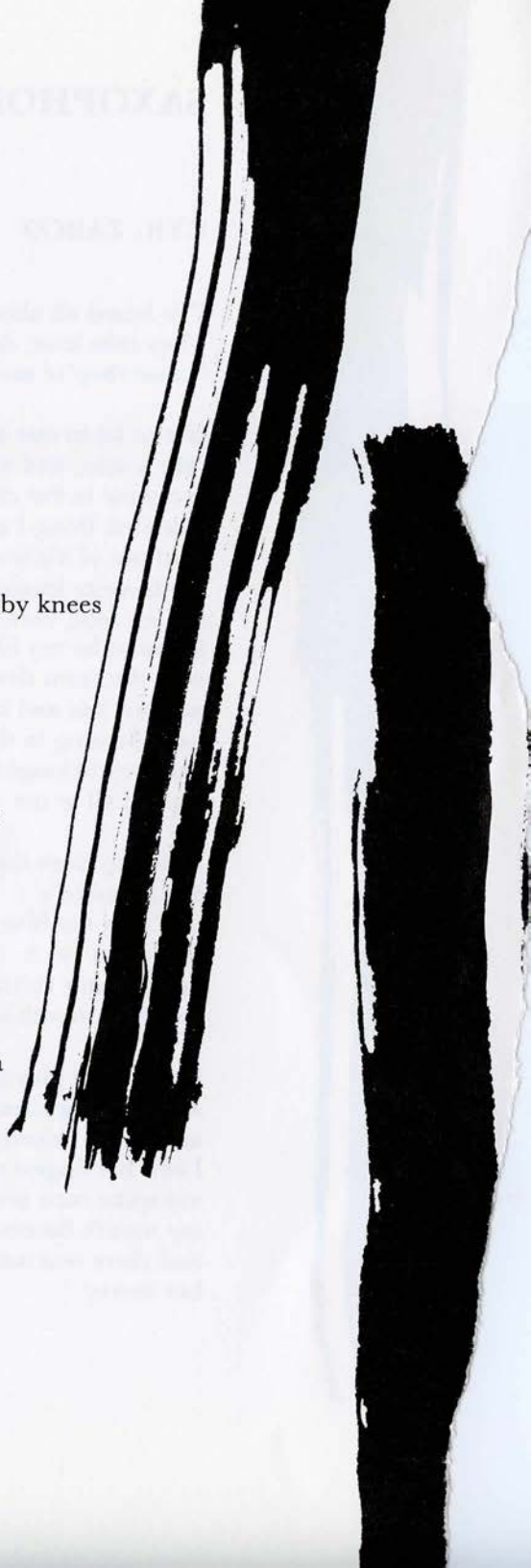
Got to be so one night I was watching him
take a solo, and when he closed his eyes
everyone in the club closed their eyes
The first thing I saw was my shoes
float out of his horn
my favorite leopard-skin high-heel shoes
the left foot, then the right one
followed by my black silk stockings
with the seam down the back
my best hat and all that
were floating in the air like half notes
like they belonged to no one
least of all to me

I tried to close my eyes
but I couldn't
Out flew my blue silk scarf
my alarm clock
my alligator suitcase
even last month's phone bill

He kept on playing that horn
as if nothing even happened
and when I slowly closed my eyes
I saw his fingers wrap around my waist
my spine turn into saxophone keys
my mouth become his mouthpiece
and there was nothing left in the room
but mercy

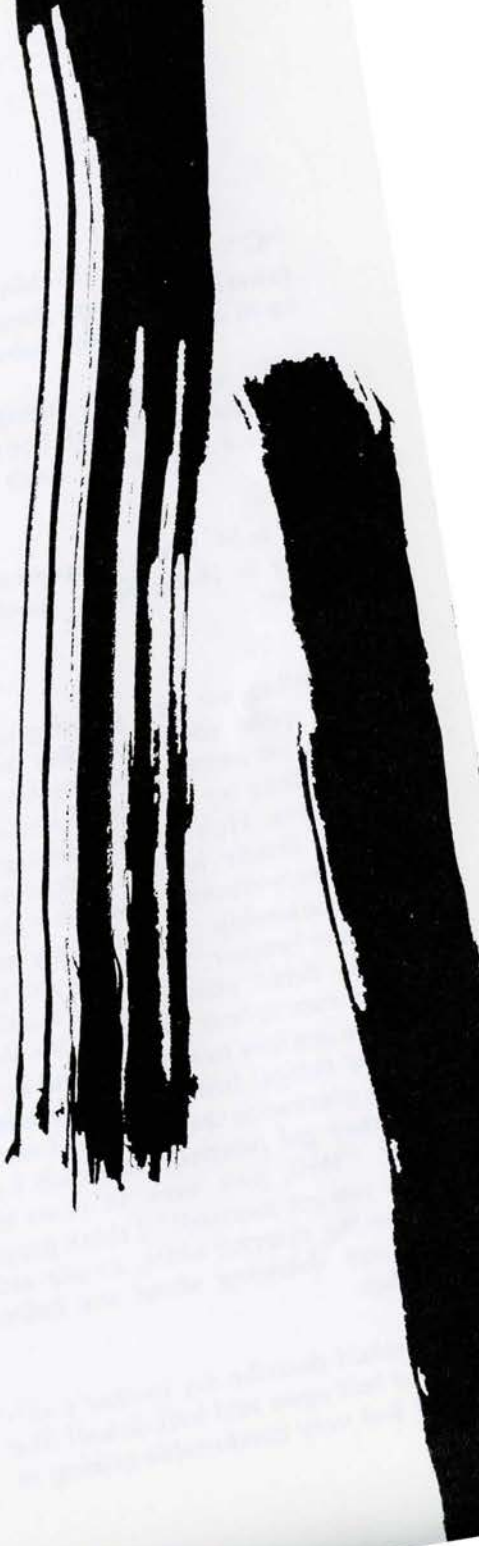
ONCE UPON A SEESAW WITH CHARLIE CHAN

CYN. ZARCO



i think i was three
beneath the guava tree
next to the doghouse in the front yard
with the crisscross bamboo fence
the seesaw was pastel
pink green and yellow and i
a nutbrown child with black hair
i had the up-and-down-of-it down pat
as i straddled the wooden plank with chubby knees
facing a boy nicknamed charlie chan
it was a slow afternoon
wives winning at mah-jongg
maids eavesdropping
i may have been daydreaming
of the other playground
the one with the swings and silver seesaws
the one that survived the tornado
or maybe my mind lingered
on the fingering of a piano
a blue dragonfly whizzing nearby
i soared above it all
above the red hibiscus flowers
and the sweet banana tree
above the bougainvillaea and the gardenia
charlie had beads for eyes
that was how he got his name
he was smaller than i
and i was the girl
i don't know what got into him
as evenly weighted we swung side-to-side
he jumped on his seat like satan
up smack between my legs
a wooden whack drew blood

i searched for the trickle's source
no wound or cut
no sign of origin
charlie ran home
i ran to mother
she swabbed me with alcohol and muttered
no explanation
the bleeding stopped
there was no pain
and i never seesawed with charlie chan again



SEXUALITY ROUNDTABLE

"C" is in her mid-thirties. She is fifth generation Chinese-American and grew up in a Long Island suburb.

"J" is Sansei (third generation Japanese-American). She is in her early 40s and is from the south side of Chicago.

"V" is 34. She is Eurasian and grew up partly in Hong Kong, partly in Westchester.

"L" is third generation Japanese in her mid-thirties. She is the mother of two.

"S" is thirty-three. Born in Hong Kong she came here when she was five. Her father ran a laundry in the suburbs.

"T" is a Piscean. She was born in Japan and raised in New York. Twenty-three years old at the time of this interview, she has been active with Asian Lesbians of the East Coast.

C: When we were growing up no one ever spoke about sex. But as we got older, for some reason my brother got into telling my mother all about his experiences. He's now twenty-eight. My whole family is very talkative, very open, very emotional; we have a beautiful relationship. But now my mother tells my brother, "Why are you telling me in detail about your sexuality? I don't want to hear about it!" It's almost like we just love to shock her and say the wildest things. Just recently she told us in her generation they never had sex before they got married. To which I replied, "Well, you were 18 years old when you got married!" I think people are getting married older, so our attitudes are changing about sex before marriage.

L: I would describe my mother's attitude as half open and half closed! She would feel very comfortable talking to me about preparing me to get my period, about babies; but things like masturbation or premarital sex were never discussed.

T: My mother and father never hid affection in front of me. When guests came over or my parents' friends came over, they would talk about sex pretty openly, and I think that my mother had a basically healthy attitude about sex. When I was in high school she realized the possibility of me having sex with boys, and I think the only thing that really concerned her was the fear of her daughter getting pregnant—at that time I hadn't come out yet as a lesbian. She didn't give me any sex education, like telling me explicitly this is what guys do, etc.—which probably was fortunate—but I don't think she really had the same kind of very repressed upbringing that a lot of Asian women have that results in them denying their sex-

uality and keeping all of those feelings inside.

When I started to "look like a woman," and my mother realized that my sexuality was blooming, her feelings were mixed. On the one hand I think she felt very anxious, very apprehensive because it wasn't something she could control, and yet, at the same time, I think she was very happy because here was a new way she could relate to me—on a one-to-one basis—not just as a mother and daughter, but woman to woman. So, I think she was, to a certain degree, very delighted.

J: I first learned about sex from a book, probably when I was ten or eleven. It was confusing because I didn't know what the book was about. It came with a box of Kotex. It and your period came together . . . a package deal.

C: My mother was a Girl Scout leader and she showed a movie about menstruation and everybody had their own little kits . . . the whole troop. When it happened though, I let out the biggest scream because I thought I was dying. The most embarrassing thing about it, I think, was that my mother told my father. I couldn't believe she did that.

T: I wasn't surprised when I got my period. I knew what it was all about from hanging out in school and talking to other girls. My father found out about it because there's a Japanese custom when a girl gets her period to serve her "Seikehan" rice, which is rose-colored rice. You use a certain kind of dye or you can also put in red beans. I felt really uncomfortable for the first half hour, but it passed by pretty uneventfully.

L: My mother and I were reminiscing the other night about how she went into my closet one day and found boxes of used sanitary pads. I didn't know you were supposed to throw them away! So here again there's the hesitation about feeling free to ask about certain things as opposed to other areas where some explanation was offered.

Like when we were growing up in the '50s, we were unconsciously being bombarded by mainstream society's images of what a woman should look like. We were so affected by the media and by what society was saying was the sexiest type of body to have. Even today, I think that Asian women in this country have cultural concepts of ourselves as women at the same time we're bombarded by American mainstream society which is predominantly white. Consequently, I think most Asian women either repress their sexuality or don't think of themselves as sexual beings at all.

T: It's even more complex because, at the same time, white society at large also unrealistically perceives Asian women as glamorous, seductive playthings. It's really hard to live up to that kind of duality: on the one hand, we're supposed to be totally repressed, asexual, and, on the other, we're supposed to be these great Asian bombshells. I also think it's been very destructive in terms of our self-image, how we perceive our bodies.

J: I did a lot of necking in high school when I was sixteen or seventeen and had a great time and all that, but I didn't feel comfortable talking about my body until the last ten years or so.

L: I think a lot has to do with the time period. That was in the '50s. It was before women's liberation and the hippie movement with free love. So there was a

very different atmosphere in society in general.

As a kid I'd constantly play around with myself, feeling good. But I don't think it was anything conscious that I knew why it felt so good. I remember, at a young age, being very curious about my vagina, looking at it in the mirror and playing doctor with my girlfriends. But I didn't connect it with sex.

C: My first sexual experience happened when I was in college but still living at home, so when I didn't come home at night my parents knew what was going on. About six months after that I moved out so they didn't have any control over what I did. I didn't want to go through so many confrontations with them.

T: I consider my sexual awakening to have taken place in two stages. I only came out as a lesbian a couple of years ago. I thought when I had my first sexual experience that I was straight. At that time, I didn't acknowledge my feelings toward other women. Then I went through a transitional phase of trying to label myself as bisexual, that, yes, I was interested in women, but I also kept that sphere open for men as a sort of escape valve, a space of heterosexual privilege. My parents haven't said, "We think you're disgusting, you're terrible, you're a freak." They accept it if it's my choice. But I think that at the bottom of her heart my mother's hoping that it's some kind of phase I'm going through, that at some point I'll get married and have children. She's always saying, "If you stay a lesbian, you're going to turn forty and be by yourself. You won't have children. You'll be totally alone in the world."

V: Being alone after forty is certainly a fear that heterosexuals have too!

C: The strangest thing is that you can be married or be with someone and have children and still be alone!

V: I go through stages of just not wanting to have sex at all, through months of not feeling anything because, for me, just being with someone sexually as a friend is a very empty type of relationship. But then you get to the point where you get really horny and you separate love and the physical and you just do it. Then you wake up the next morning and, ok, now I'm satisfied physically, now I can go back to my normal state. Now that I'm thirty though, I realize that sex isn't as casual as society has made it. Society has made sex boring.

T: My first sexual encounter was at fifteen. After school I went over to this boy's house. We took off all our clothes and we did what a guy and girl are supposed to do. It wasn't painful; I didn't bleed all over the sheets. But after all my friends had said about sex, their excitement, I just felt, wow, this is what I'm supposed to look forward to all my life?

S: If you have an idea in your head there's supposed to be fireworks, that's where you start fucking up. How can you have a real experience with those misconceptions in the way. One of the reasons it's no good is because you're not there, in the experience, you're trying to make it into something else.

C: Since I didn't use birth control, my overriding fear was the fear of getting pregnant and that overruled the pleasure. It just wasn't worth it.

T: I consider myself a virgin until I slept with a woman for the first time and I realized my body does respond in such and such a way. After that I had a very different feeling about my own sexuality and my own body.

Both my parents are artists, so besides being married, coupled, they have a very strong friendship and a very strong working relationship. I don't think my parents' relationship in any way made me a lesbian. If anything, theirs is an example of a very good heterosexual relationship that functions very well to this day. When I was growing up, my parents had a lot of straight friends as well as gay friends, and so, in a sense, they were not as uptight about sexual differences as most Japanese families are.

S: I think that's real unusual, having as a model parents who are individuals relating to each other as two human beings. It seems to me that mostly people perceive themselves as "husband" and "wife," "mother" and "father," and that those roles are limiting, rather than self-defining.

C: My parents scream a lot, but I know they love each other. They're very physical with each other. They're very emotional. I realize that a lot of parents aren't. But mine have always been that way, so my brother and I are also very physical and emotional with people.

L: What do you expect from your sexual relationships? How do you relate sexual experience with a love relationship? For me, on a physical level good sex is like orgasms; on an emotional level, it's fulfillment.

S: I don't see how even a one night stand can be physically satisfying if there's not some sensitivity and caring involved. Otherwise, you just might as well masturbate by yourself. On the other hand there seems to be a judgment that somehow love is necessary to have physical satisfaction. I'm not so sure that holds up either.

T: I think that as women we have been socialized into thinking we need love to validate our sexual experiences. It took me a long time to really divorce myself from that dichotomy and acknowledge both lust and love as very valid categories and say, ok, I can have a sexual experience with somebody and there might not be love involved.

C: If a woman is promiscuous, she's a slut, but if a man is promiscuous, he's a stud. I have a very masculine sense of sexuality because I grew up with my brother and I hung out with a lot of his friends and was usually the only girl around. Even when I'm hanging out with the guys in the Asian Movement, they accept me in situations and conversations where other women might feel very intimidated.

L: Men always have had the option to get sex whenever they wanted it with no stigma attached. Even now, after the '60s made women feel freer to just enjoy sex for the hell of it, we still approach a one night stand differently than men. I think that the whole issue of lust for women is relatively new—being able to divorce it from love is something that we've never been allowed to think about.

I also think that there is a biological difference. I think that the sexual organs are different in a man and a woman. I think that biology makes a difference in

men's and women's attitudes towards sex.

S: But is it biological or is it rather a culturally ingrained view toward biological differences? There's a difference. Because with a statement like you just made you can easily get into biological determinism.

T: What I consider the most important criteria in a relationship is how much I will be able to discover about myself through another person. How much exchange is going on. Also, I don't think I would feel comfortable getting involved in a relationship with a woman who'd deny she was a lesbian, who'd say the fact she likes women is incidental. What I expect in a relationship is to minimize the possibilities of being hurt or used in an unfair way. It has to be reciprocal, because I think a one-sided relationship can really be destructive.

J: The word that keeps popping up in my head is trust, openness and mutual trust. Caring just doesn't seem strong enough. Love is always sort of . . . vague. It's a word that gets kicked around a lot. In a group of women talking about love, I'm not sure we're all talking about the same word. When we're talking about trust, I'm pretty sure we're talking about the same thing. Trust and respect are the core I think of in a sexual relationship.

S: I'm not sure we're talking about the same thing even with trust because we all make assumptions. I would assume trust means taking risks, and I would assume a certain kind of vulnerability. On the other hand, I could conceive of someone saying, "No, it means not having to take risks, knowing you don't have to because the other person should know all that."

I think what's enormously difficult is avoiding seeing that other person only through your own lens—what you want, what you need.

C: Within the last couple of years I've realized that now I know what I want. Before that I felt I was so subservient to my boyfriends, that I helped them get their careers together instead of developing myself. I really just saw myself as part of them, instead of them caring about me. Now, instead of saying, oh, do you think he's going to like me? I feel like I'm making the judgment. "Do I like this person, is he up to my standards?"

T: Being conditioned as an Asian woman in the United States I always felt it was taken for granted that we as women were supposed to think of the other first, before ourselves, as sort of an altruistic act. We were supposed to think of their needs at the expense of ours.

C: If I know that there's something that makes me feel sexually good, now I can ask a man to do it, something I never could have done before. I know now that I have the right to feel good from a sexual experience and not just be there for a man to get off. I don't know in general whether most Asian women feel that way.

S: The real problem is fear of rejection. You can say, "I'd like you to do this" and he can say, "What? Are you a pervert?" It's not always so easy to articulate what you need. Where a lot of women—myself included—get confused is that we're in transition, and sometimes we put out conflicting mes-

sages. We try to initiate at the same time we're saying, "Well, you do it."

C: Why do women have a tendency to just sit back and grit their teeth and bear it if a man they're involved with is fooling around, instead of saying, Go take a hike?

S: There are assumptions about monogamy here, that if you spend a whole lifetime with someone, they're going to fulfill all your physical needs. If they're not, it seems to me absolutely human and predictable that they're going to look for other relationships. We make value judgments and I personally would probably say, Yeah, take a hike. But that's because there's a difference between up here (points to head) and down here (points to heart). I think if we're serious about saying human beings have very complex needs, then what does it really mean when a person honestly reaches out to someone else. On the other hand, I don't want to get into that liberal bullshit and say, Well, they just need other people.

C: I was at this Chinese conference last week where a woman was talking about sex education, and she said that there were three things about sex that her father said to her when she went off to college (her father was born overseas and she was born overseas too): that you can get VD, that you need birth control, and that if you have a lot of mates, you will always be making comparisons. This was an old man's advice to his daughter.

L: I think in order to take risks, you have to feel real strong about yourself. I think that given the situation that women are in in this society, it's hard for women to feel strong about themselves.

T: What I think about is all the heterosexual assumptions that float around and to what degree I or other lesbians reenact or reinforce them in different ways because we are all living in this society. Being involved in coalition work, some of it around mail order brides, has really made me think about that dichotomy between virgin and whore; between being a slut and being the madonna. Images we carry in one way or another define our perceptions of sexuality as women. I don't think lesbians are exempt from the stereotypes that define what is allowed sexually and what isn't, what you bring into a relationship, what you do. I think the question of what kinds of expectations we have is not easy to answer. We all want to be loved, however nebulous that sounds, but in terms of working relationships or what you can actually manage with another person, a lover, it's really hard to define.

Audience interaction with panelists:

H: As I've been sitting here, I've become aware of the fact that a lot of the women here are third generation, or more. You said (**C.**) you're fifth generation. It would have been interesting to have my daughter here and open up a discussion of what she got from me, and what came down from my own parents in terms of being Asian because, obviously, there are a number of things I'm sure I passed on to her. And I'm much closer as a second generation Nisei to Asian experience and Asian hang-ups—of which there are a number!

L: What are some Asian hang-ups about sex?

S: It's dirty, it's filthy. I think it's very basic to the way my father thinks I'm a

piece of shit and I'm filthy. The only time I became ok and the only context in which I'm ok now is in relationship to my being a mother. But even that is not truly ok because I'm a single mother.

B: But aren't there two sets of values in Asian culture? You don't hear about erotica in Western culture the way you hear about it in Eastern art-pillow books. You hear about certain sexual education that is passed on to young women. Where does that come from? Is there a double standard?

S: I'm not sure what the fact of a lot of erotic art or literature means. If you look at the medium historically, you don't have a lot of erotic Chinese literature in the twentieth century. There's a lot of erotic Victorian literature because it was a repressive society. Then, if you look at film as a modern medium, you get real bizarre notions of erotica. I look at supposedly erotic Chinese movies and they show a naked breast and you go, oo-oo-oo. Then they take a knife and cut it off and you want to go, euhhhhhhh! And then you see all of these women assimilating that sense of erotica. The other side of sexuality for Asians is like whenever I used to have my fortune read and they would look at my palms, they would say, "That's it. She's marked for life. This is someone who is very sensual." So it's considered damning for a woman to have passion and want sexuality because it means you're going to lose control. It's part of that fear that a woman who is passionate and has strong needs and desires is going to be destructive—she won't stay at home and keep house! And they were right . . . they're not going to keep me at home!

But while you were talking I was tantalized by the image of my mother sitting in a room with people who are willing to talk about their sexual experiences.

V: I think if my parents had a choice between death and listening to this conversation, they'd choose death! I'm first generation like **S.** and the only person who ever said a thing to me was my uncle last year who asked if I ever thought I might get married. Nobody in my family's even mentioned things like marriage, boyfriends, anything. So I said, "Well, I don't know." And he replied he sort of thought it was not always a good idea to get married anyway. That was it. That was the conversation about sex in my family.

H: One of the things my mother always says is women should always cover their genitals. The breasts are ok: they're a functional organ. You could walk around the house, but always keep covered. And whenever I went to the bathroom, I had to hide menstruation from my brothers, because they weren't supposed to know I was menstruating. My daughter also wears panties to bed. And if my granddaughter isn't dressed in the morning, if she's running around totally naked, my daughter tells her to put on her underpants. As far as I'm concerned now, she could be running around naked. After all, she's in the house. But somehow or other it is important to my daughter that her daughter should have her clothes on when she's running around. I think that unconsciously I passed that down.

S: Children start discovering their genitals around the age of three. My son had discovered his in a big way, and it's been a major topic for the last two

months. Yesterday we were sitting in a restaurant and he's doing something underneath the table. I looked at him and he's got a hard-on, his little penis is sticking up and he's pulled down his pants to look at it. And we're all at the dinner table and I go, "Oh God!" But I'm very conscious of my attitudes and I don't want to say, "Well, put it away!" He says, "Look, mommy, big." The whole table is laughing, of course, and I say, "Yes, it is honey. Now let's have dinner." I'm very conscious of all the uptightness my parents transmitted to me, but now I feel I'll be so self-conscious about it that I'll be in a bind. I'm very aware of what I'm transmitting to him. Should I be naked in front of him, or shouldn't I? We read all these books and some say it's good, some say it's bad. But we're aware, and that's the difference I think—that we're trying to make an effort to be conscious of what we're transmitting.

H: I think more in terms of privacy, of Japanese culture in general, or Chinese. If you have someone who is kinda off the wall, it's never discussed. You keep it quiet. It's keeping things within the family and not letting the outside world know you have these particular problems. I remember growing up you always heard about somebody's father having an alliance with someone else, but it was never, never discussed openly. I have a very good friend whose father had a mistress. He actually died in the mistress's bed. But she and I never discussed it. To this day she has never talked about it.

T: Talking about the public versus the private domain, the thing that really fascinates me is language and sex. It came up in a different way before when we were talking about that transition point between having expectations and trying to verbalize them. In this culture there's all that talk about the free love, etc. but we've discussed how hard it really is for women to verbalize what we feel about sex, about our sexuality, period. How hard it is to say to a partner, "Do this" or "I like this being done," or to talk with other people and not feel like, "Oh, there's something wrong with me." I think a lot of our ideas about sex are manifested through language, that being a realm of power in itself.

V: Aside from language and gesture, we have no other way to communicate.

NOTE: This workshop took place in 1983 before the true proportion of the AIDS epidemic was known by many communities. Asian American activists and researchers like Suki Ports stress the necessity for care, treatment and "Major education programs . . . to be undertaken . . . following cultural sensitivities which will enhance the ability for educational messages to succeed in their goal—to prevent the spread of AIDS in our multi-language, multi-cultural Asian origin communities."

INTERVIEW WITH YONG SOON MIN

PENNY FUJIKO WILLGERODT

Where did the term "1.5 generation" originate?

YONG SOON MIN: I first encountered it in an article on me and my work in a local Korean language paper which referred to me as a 1.5. The term's used to designate Koreans who immigrated abroad at an early age as distinguished from the majority of Koreans in New York who immigrated within the past decade as a result of liberalized immigration laws. There are more second generation and 1.5s in the urban centers of the West Coast, which also experienced the earliest waves of Korean immigration—beginning in the early 1900s when Korea was colonized by Japan and Korean contract laborers were recruited by American companies. In the aftermath of the Korean War immigration became composed mostly of refugees, war brides and orphans. The 1.5s have more in common with second generation Koreans than the more recent first generation Koreans because of their greater degree of assimilation into this society. Their primary language is English and they are less likely to be bilingual. Most important, the 1.5s are usually more concerned with conflicts about identity. Most recent Korean immigrants do not question their "Koreaness."

I was born in 1953 in one of those quaintly picturesque Korean villages located a few hours south of Seoul. In those days villages like mine had one or two stores and no automatic vehicles of any sort. I was raised by my grandparents on their small farm until I was six when I joined my mother and brother in Seoul—our mother was supporting us by working long hours at a US army base located just outside the city limits. My father had immigrated to the States a month before I was born, coinciding with the official resolution of the Korean War. A US army officer my father worked for during the war as a translator arranged for him to finish his college work in the States. This relationship between my father and the US Army is the subject of a recent drawing sarcastically entitled "American Friend." It took my father over seven years to settle securely enough in California to send for the rest of the family. This sort of long term separation of family members is one of the central metaphors of the Korean peoples' experience in this century.

PFW: Why did you become an artist?

YSM: In contrast to the rigidness of Korea's educational system where the wealthier kids got preferential treat-

ment, here I was fortunate enough to have some good teachers in grade school who early on encouraged me in the arts. Also, under the influence, I guess, of my disciplinarian father, I changed dramatically from being a problem child in Korea who played "hooky" from school to being an ideal student here. Like most Asian parents, who seem to just expect it of their kids, my parents took my good academic performance for granted. At the end of high school when I announced I was going to be an artist it took them quite some time to accept my decision.

I continued my art education at U.C. Berkeley, where I stayed on to earn my M.F.A. I started out as a painter during my undergraduate years and ended up with a mixed media narrative installation for my final graduate work. I was apolitical at the time, very much steeped in formalism and the Western aesthetic tradition. I certainly had no Asian American or Third World consciousness, and even though Berkeley had an excellent Asian American studies program at the time, I never took advantage of it. I knew I was different, but I didn't think that really mattered—I felt that other people (mostly white friends and community) accepted me.

So I grew up oblivious of my Asian heritage until I came to New York in 1981 to do a residency with the Whitney Museum in a work-study program. I was still very much steeped in art theory and the avant-garde, in a sort of pseudo-Marxist intellectualized, academicized critique of art totally divorced from any practice of art or politics. What really opened my eyes was getting a job in 1985 as an administrative coordinator for the Alliance for Asian American Arts and Culture, an umbrella organization for many Asian American arts organizations. This was to be the start of a new chapter in my life. One of my first tasks was to coordinate the first annual multidisciplinary arts festival called "Roots to Reality," held at and in collaboration with Henry Street Settlement.

PFW: That's where I met you.

YSM: That's right. The Alliance job opened a whole new community to me. One of my first contacts was Fred Houn, a Chinese American jazz musician/composer/activist with three albums to his credit. He was then the director of the "Roots" festivals and an advocate for Asian American arts. He was also the first of many Third World artists I would come to know who wore many different hats—like Nicaraguan poet, Rosario Murillo, who is also head of the cultural workers union or "Charlie" Chin, a Chinese American folk singer who is also an administrator at New York's Chinatown History Project. These artists challenge the commonly held stereotype of the artist as a marginal figure who keeps society at an arm's length. For them active engagement in the affairs of society is a source of enrichment for their work. I began to realize I had only talked and read radical aesthetics up until then while these artists, whether consciously or unconsciously, were living their ideals and putting them to work.

PFW: Would you say that "American Friend" is one of the first art works in which you addressed the Asian community?

YSM: Actually, no. The first is probably another drawing called "Back of the Bus—1953." There were several earlier works also based on snapshots of

my mother's life in Korea, but this particular drawing represented for me an attempt to suggest a relationship between myself and my mother both symbolically with the title—1953 is the year I was born as well as the year my mother was sitting in the back of a bus full of GIs—and pictorially by representing my head closely cropped below the image of the bus interior turning frame by frame—first towards the image and gradually full face confronting the viewer. Before "Back of the Bus—1953" I'd dealt with political issues in my work, but they weren't Asian American issues.

"Echoes of Gold Mountain, Different Name, Same Game," my most recent installation work, was really a unique project because the format of the show entailed a collaboration between the artist and some sort of political or social service organization. I chose to collaborate with the Coalition Against Anti-Asian Violence. We agreed to focus on Asian American history because you hardly ever find Asian American history as the topic of any artwork in a gallery setting outside of an Asian American venue. One half, under the title "yellow peril" was the history of Asian Americans before contemporary times—from boat landings in California, to the early exclusion act against the Chinese, the predominant media stereotypes of Asians (Fu Manchu, Charlie Chan, and Suzie Wong), to the way I represented the Japanese internment—a sign in the desert of the internment camp of Topaz. Then you get into the other half of the wall, the more contemporary struggles—the International Hotel eviction and destruction in San Francisco's Chinatown, the Vincent Chin murder in the form of a T-shirt slogan "We Remember Vincent Chin," and the protest against the film "Year of the Dragon." Also there were symbolizations of the case of the Korean bicyclist who was beaten by the police. "Gold Mountain" illustrates the fact that our legacy is still defined by whites—for whom we're either the yellow peril or, as it serves their convenience, the model minority. When we analyze the history of these popular perceptions and stereotypes, these constructs of discourse, it's clear that it's all used for their purposes, either to put us down, to prop themselves up, or to put down the other minorities. For example, when Blacks were leading the Civil Rights struggle, then Asians became touted as the model minority. It was "Why can't you be as nice as they are?"—divide and conquer.

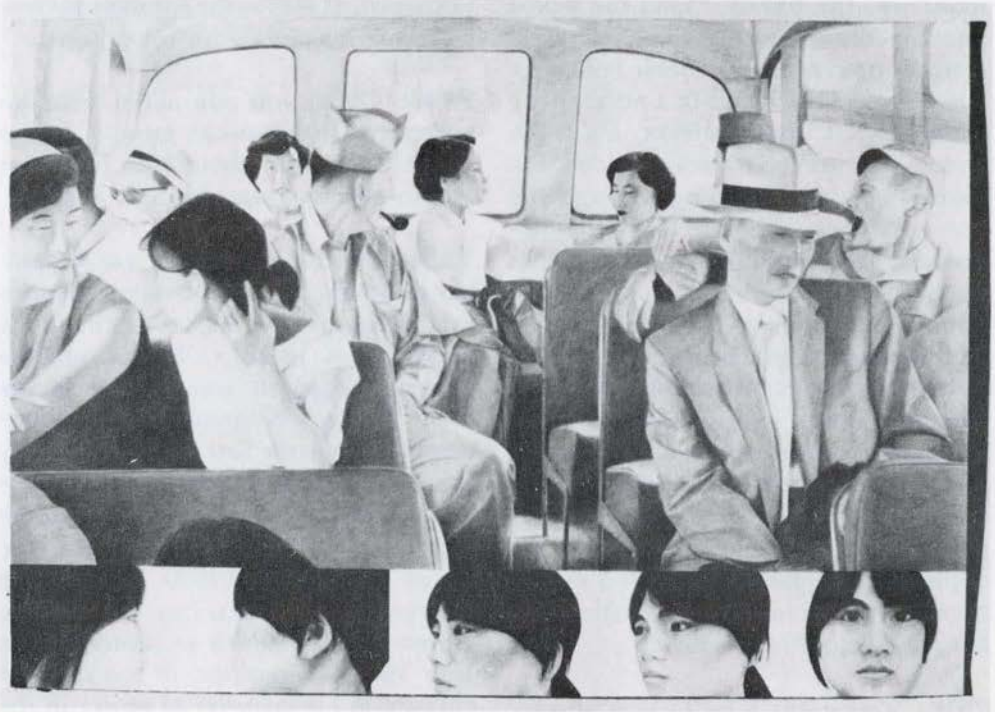
PFW: Multi-media installations reflect a complexity of ideas, textures, and feelings—did you choose to work with that medium because it best serves the integration of all aspects of your life?

YSM: I've been doing multi-media installations for quite some time. In the middle of my graduate program in college, my paintings began to lose meaning for me. You'd understand why if you knew the kind of painting I was doing—very minimalist, geometric, works so reductive I felt like I had really cornered myself. So I stopped doing any artwork for a very concentrated period of time and came back with a complete about-face. I felt there shouldn't be any limitation on what I considered a proper ingredient in my work, especially when, in my real life at that time, I was getting input and information from so many sources outside the art world.

We live in a collage culture where you're barraged by a glut of information and materials, so a very natural re-

sponse is to try to process all these materials and make some sense out of them, to let chance enter in to see what new meanings arise. But I soon also got disenchanted with this type of collage-oriented work. I decided I didn't want to just assault the viewer with arbitrary coincidences, I wanted to control what I had to say. Also I realized I was interested in telling a story, but not in the traditional mode with a beginning, middle and end and a particular development of a narrative to a climax and resolution. At that time I was heavily influenced by Goddard and his way of going in and out of a narrative, combining narrative and didactic as well as metaphoric ways of expressing ideas. Gradually, through the years, I began using the whole wall. Layering the narrative was another innovation that added yet another dimension to the wealth of ways of telling a story.

Multi-media installations have been a receptive vehicle for a major neurotic impulse of mine when making art—which is to try to say everything in each and every work. I'm trying to temper this in some of the recent works, but it's really difficult to overcome a sense of inadequacy I feel about one self-contained object's ability to communicate and emote on different levels. However, the basic principle guiding all these works is that the location of meaning is found in a relationship, in a context, and that the viewer is a fundamental component of this experience—which tends to be very demanding of the viewer. In "Half Home," the viewer had to physically press the tracing paper to the wall in order to see the material underneath. The narrative was physically as well as metaphorically layered.



"Back of the Bus 1953" YONG SOON MIN

"Whirl War"—created specifically for the Jamaica Arts Center—was my most ambitious project to date, finally getting away from the wall and creating an environment. It was the first time I had dealt with totally-in-the-round forms, trying to integrate narrative and two dimensional with three dimensional elements. It talked in an impressionistic way about my heritage, my roots, followed by immigration, being up-rooted from my home until the very last frame of the text portion jarred one by displaying a livingroom scene with a TV blaring images, the news. The other wall was very bold and graphic, a collage of black and white newspapers the reverse of each other—a wall of oppositions, of conflict. The background collage on one side was all English version papers, and on the other were Korean papers, and painted on top of the spiral motif was the phrase "Half the world knows not how the other lives," which is actually from a fortune cookie I once got which expressed for me in a nutshell the frustration I have always felt with people who are too narrow-minded, too quick to judge. Running through the very middle was the word DMZ (demilitarized zone), because that word, to me, epitomizes the cold-war conflict—one of these incredible divisions that exist in contemporary life. The last wall was not necessarily about resolution, it was just trying to convey a sense of positive development. At the center was an image of me and the world—an attempt to find a tongue-in-cheek way to symbolize empowerment. The floor in a spiral originating from a post was painted with a mantra in Korean and English: "To live, to love, to live, to love."

PFW: There was a lot to look at and piece together in it, but it was fun because you had the whole room to play with—with the layering of the scrolls, the floor, the things on the floor, and the other walls. It wasn't like you were just going to a wall to look at a picture. But how do you come up with your text?

YSM: Text is an important element in my work, of equal importance with visual elements. Sometimes the visual imagery affects how I develop the text, sometimes the text evolves from a stream of consciousness that's totally unpredictable, and other times there are key words that help get the ball rolling. The crucial element in all my work is my response to the fact that I am part of the cold war generation and so much of my life has been affected by war and conflict. I emigrated to the United States as a result of the Korean War. The Vietnam War was certainly another major influence, as well as the conflicts in Central America and in our inner cities.

PFW: Could you talk about your involvement with Korean groups, Binari in particular, and about Min Joong art and its effect on your life and work?

YSM: During 1986-87, I was a member of Young Koreans United, a political organization with chapters in all the major cities in the US and affiliate groups abroad. It was formed in the early '80s by a Korean activist who recently became the first Korean officially granted political asylum in the US. He had been living here in exile because he was one of the student organizers of the Kwan Ju uprising of 1980. Kwang Ju is a large Southwestern city in southern Korea which rose up to protest Chun Doo Won's imposition of martial law enroute to his takeover of power in the aftermath of the assassination of Park

Chung Hee. In his effort to crush the rebellion some sources estimate that over 2,000 civilians were brutally murdered by Chun's elite military, forces whose assignment was officially sanctioned by the US general who is also the operational commander-in-chief of the South Korean armed forces. For many Koreans, the Kwang Ju Massacre, like the Sharpeville Massacre for South Africans, serves to symbolize the domestic and foreign oppression against which the people's movement struggles.

YKU is politically aligned with the student and worker opposition movements of South Korea whose primary issues are reunification of North and South Korea, US troop withdrawal and self-determination for the Korean peninsula. YKU is involved in educating Koreans living here, as well as the general public, about these issues and working to change US foreign policy. Another goal is to do solidarity work with other Third World liberations movements working here in the States.

I first became aware of YKU through my interest in Binari, the Korean American Cultural Troupe, which represents the cultural arm of YKU. Its purpose is to keep the traditional Korean folk culture—what they consider the people's culture—alive in the communities here. Binari has ongoing weekly workshops open to the Korean community where they teach all the basic traditions of dance and music. I performed with Binari on several occasions on college campuses, in community centers, at rallies and on the picket lines. All the performers are dedicated volunteers who learn the necessary skills with the group. In addition to smaller ensemble performances each year, Binari produces an innovative multi-media performance which is largely rooted in the traditional shamanistic rituals called "Madang Gut." It is ceremonial theater held in the round, usually outdoors. There is a liberal use of masks and puppets and other visual props, but simplicity and informality are the dominant characteristics of these performances. There's always a narrative involved, and within that format they've adapted and included Brechtian influences of modern political material. It's not a traditional linear narrative as such, making for a really lively give-and-take between the audience and the performers.

Min Joong, loosely translated "peoples' art," is a result of a resurgence in political art in Korea since the '80s. The earliest exhibits were general expressions of discomfort with and alienation from contemporary society and with the enormous foreign influences in most urban centers—by both the West and Japan. Min Joong Art really developed fully after the Kwang Ju massacre. People were shocked and there was a lot of soul searching among the activists to determine the next stage of struggle. Because of that, in '84 and '85, a lot of people became active and many artists worked closely with the activists in trying to construct a new language in order to best express their newly-born commitment. At the heart of the movement is a real attempt to forge a new cultural identity for the Korean people in an attempt to separate ourselves from foreign influences, to define what is inherently Korean, what our national characteristics are—to say, let's look back on our own history, a lot of which is repressed history, and let's see what's there and use this as a role model, a resource for our work.

The figure in Min Joong art is used to emphasize the common person, the laborer, the farmworker, the peasant (I

don't like that term), instead of the aristocracy of Yang Ban which had dominated "higher art"—to depict the Korean in common and traditional dress, but traditional dress that is plain, folksy, earthy. In a way, it's now become a convention and sometimes you see generic Min Joong art that is pretty mindless and derivative. But I must stress another important aspect of Min Joong art—it is no longer just about criticizing society or pointing out problems and conflicts, it is also trying to forge a new identity, trying to create a new world, a new and positive vision of the future.

Min Joong's primary impact for me was its part in my whole process of learning more about my Korean heritage, the incredible wealth and richness I hadn't been aware of before.

PFW: Do you find any conflict in integrating so many different identities—as a woman, an Asian, an artist, an activist?

YSM: I'm afraid that I've been so consumed with coming to terms with my identity as an Asian American, a Korean and an artist, I haven't really fully come to terms with feminism as a political stance. However, I am aware that when I compare notes with other female activists about their experiences in their respective progressive organizations, we seem to share a common frustration and a common struggle: to get the guys to own up to their lip service of sexual equality and put it into daily practice. I'm so thankful that I had the opportunity to work with some seasoned female organizers who make up the core of the Coalition Against Anti-Asian Violence. It was quite a revelation for me to work in an environment of easy give-and-take without the tensions of the sexual politics which are usually present in male-dominated working groups. Sometimes to my Korean peers my rather bohemian lifestyle as an unmarried female artist in her mid-thirties just does not jive with their way of life either here or back in Korea. I've become used to the inevitable questions of my marital status whenever I meet any Korean in just about any situation. However, I do understand the fact that I lived through my early adulthood on the West Coast with a very liberal education at a time to reap the benefits of the '60s sexual revolution and the women's liberation movement of the '70s means I've embraced a certain set of assumptions and attitudes different than most of theirs. It seems unfair to me to take my values and superimpose them on Koreans from completely different cultural backgrounds.

The kind of integration you're talking about is a long hard struggle. But then, maybe one's search for identity really is neverending. Even now that I have embraced my origins and my heritage, I know I can never fully feel at home either here or in Korea. In a larger sense I think for any member of a Third World minority living in this culture, there is a heightened sense of alienation and confusion as one grapples with the vicissitudes of living and being assimilated in varying degrees in a country like the US which continues to assert its cultural, political and economic hegemony on us and on our homelands. The rich and painful irony of living within the "belly of the beast" is also the source for me of an even greater resolve to continue the search while seeking temporary haven in my solidarity work with other searchers, with all those who struggle.

"Whirl War" YONG SOON MIN

"Echoes of Gold Mountain:
Different Name, Same Game" YONG SOON MIN

JOURNAL ENTRY

WEDNESDAY JANUARY 1, 1975

the night dad died in the hospital, he was so weak, he couldn't move or pick up his hands. I held his hand and squeezed his fingers wondering if he felt the touch. watching him try to say something, his jaws locked tight. his mouth slightly open, making a sound from his throat: pushing, forcing, working all the muscles for the strength to utter sounds and trying to focus his oscillating eyes as they were losing control over nerves that would not work for him.

there wasn't anything I could do to help him as demons fought to pull him away from us in the room. we stood around the bed.

then he was crying, tears rolling down the inner corners of his eyes, breathing with much difficulty. I wiped the tears, patting the crown of his head the way he used to do with us when we were little and sick.

it's okay dad, go to sleep. when you wake up, you'll be okay. he fell into a deep sleep.

I miss him. no answers to many questions. learning to be more open, to be able to express feelings to others without feeling ashamed or embarrassed, to be less afraid. wishing I could have shared, explained to him certain of my life choices.

FAY CHIANG

A LETTER TO JEAN

I look at this photograph of us at sunset in the Mojave desert, sky in pinks and purples against sand and stone, the world a very quiet place. And how we've remained hopeful, didn't let go of our dreams and our art work despite the life events around us: that we gave each other the love and support, space when we needed it. I know if you weren't there many times in the past few years, I would have flown out of my mind. Luckily I had and have you to turn to.

You're going to do fine in Japan. Never mind the jitters. It took me a good part of the trip in Taiwan and Hong Kong to feel comfortable on my own. But everytime I look back, I'm glad I did it, because I know I can go anywhere, any time on my own, again.

I feel this is a turning point, even more than that time in the desert. You're initiating the next turn for the both of us and when I meet you in Mexico, we'll make that total turnaround: that when the both of us return to New York in the fall, we're going to begin that deep commitment to our art work.

I'll miss you. I think a large part of me was scared of your leaving, because I do depend on your being here. Staying in this apartment on my own is forcing me to get that sense of my own rhythm without all the voices, crescendos, circuses. there's been some tension between us; it's transitional, I think, because we're both on the verge of our new selves: you, on your way to the pottery villages of Japan and Mexico, and me in this apartment writing, painting. When we're in our new skins comfortably, we'll be chattering again.

FAY CHIANG

ASIAN AMERICANS EMERGE

TERU KANAZAWA SHEEHAN

I had not been prepared for him. I was walking past Herald Center when I heard a loud voice distinguishable from the usual cacophony of the busy intersection at 34th Street. The voice was compelling in its self-assurance, its clear tone, and enunciation. As I drew near I saw that the speaker held a Bible. An amplifier blaring marching music stood at his feet. What came as a total shock was that he was Asian.

Overcome with embarrassment, my first impulse with mixed feelings of contrition and excitement was to protect this foreigner. "Hey, don't you know that people are laughing at you," I almost said. I then realized my warning wasn't necessary as the shopping crowds were ignoring him. And he talked on in his perfect English evidently oblivious to their indifference, his rapt and handsome face addressing their highest spiritual being which he was watching somewhere up in the sky.

After I passed him I shamefacedly realized that I had seen my first Asian American unselfconscious of his racial identity. Of course I didn't know him. He might have been trying to cover up some deep, misguided racial self-hatred in the best way he knew but there was such an innocence in his face! Do you know what I mean? If he felt any alienation I am sure he had transcended it with his attachment to a being outside his physical boundaries. I, on the other hand, treat my skin color as a burden to be born or a mast to sail depending upon the situation. In other words, it is always there.

A few days later as I was walking up Fifth Avenue just south of the Flatiron building, I missed by an angel's hair a couple passionately embracing on the street. This was not an uncommon sight as the weather had recently changed for the better. What took me again by surprise, however, was that the couple was Asian and that the street was fairly crowded with passers-by. It was the first time that I had witnessed an Asian couple kissing north of 14th Street. I started marvelling again on the phenomenon of the arrival of the Asian American. Don't get me wrong, most of us have been here for generations, but you know, it is one thing to live somewhere and another to feel that you truly belong.

The last incident that I'll mention hit me even more personally. The day after I saw the amorous couple I passed a construction site in my neighborhood. Now, of course, it's been a long time since the construction worker constituted "the enemy," yet when I pass a site I often can't help but assume a more defensive posture. Anyway, on the back of this pick-up truck sat a worker eating Japanese food with chopsticks, no less. The sight affected me less this time as I was be-

coming now fully accepting of the arrival of the Asian American.

But afterwards I thought more deeply, trying to sort out some connection between the three events—and found that they could be said to represent three types of human hunger—spirituality, love, and sustenance. The civil rights movement, the globalization of the world economy, the Japanese challenge, the change in immigration quotas may soon make the eating of Asian food on the backs of pick-up trucks a common occurrence.

Yet, we all know that not only does every cloud not have a silver lining, every good development gives rise to a negative one and we have seen it again in the rise of anti-Asian sentiment. But the point is, the breath of freedom this short and recent era has given us has released the hunger for self-expression by Asian Americans.

VIETNAM MEMORIAL

TERU KANAZAWA SHEEHAN

A poem is scotch-taped to the base
of the pale-green illuminated glass;
against the letters etched in twilight
along Water St., among the drunken,
weaving steps of bankers—

the killed-in-action are eulogized.

Their lives, captured in home-stoked
plastic tubes, are flung by the
tunneling winds to distant doorways.

Philip served in Vietnam and came home
to die in the city streets, selling
encyclopedias. Dressed in his uniform
he lay, his face a pale-green glaze.
I remember his optimism like a brother's;
his hair coarse and black like my own

and when his mother sees me now she cries.

Letters written at twilight as this
poem. Lives disremembered as hailstones
that follow the turbulent winds. No,
we were not acquiescent during the war

slithering through the head-high grass
that can arbitrate the soul under massive
stone and sanctimonious flags.

EPIDEMIC

NINOTCHKA ROSCA

It occurred to Lazaro Reyes, M.D., that if he could kill one child—just one child—everything would be all right again. The problem was to find *the* child. Having found him, Lazaro would know what to do: a quick glide of the scalpel across the throat, the body hung by its feet over the garden faucet drain. He was sure his hands wouldn't tremble; he would not hesitate. Such was his rage against that face of innocence: black mop of hair, brown-gold eyes, snub nose and full lips, atop a lanky body within filthy, loose clothes.

On the accursed day reality turned brittle, a series of omens had warned him. First, his pot of cattleya, those well-bred orchids, had teetered on his bedroom windowsill and seemingly by itself, slid out the open window to smash on the driveway below. On his way to the bathroom, his feet had been snagged by his ten-year-old daughter's skateboard which, propelled by an immense kick, had zoomed down the corridor, to the stairs and into infinity. Then, his air-conditioned car, usually well-mannered, coughed, spat smoke and uttered a terrible bleat at the turn of the ignition key. It died, leaving him stranded in his own garage, for his daughters had taken the second car while the third, of course, was with his wife who was visiting her parents in the province. His own chauffeur was still on vacation, which could've explained the car's tantrum but that still left him running for the diesel public bus at nine in the morning to wedge himself into the packed humanity of offensive smells inside.

The bus had taken him to the shopping center where he hoped to catch a cab. Despite the hour, a million people were abroad, marching in and out of shops, standing on the curb, darting forward with flailing hands and managing to lure one cab after another away from him. The summer heat and the noise made him light-headed. His collar, limp with sweat, was a comatose snake about his neck. He was certain his blood pressure was rising. A sudden pain in the area of his kidneys jolted him into turning around. But it was only a look, a stare, from a boy, age ten. "Want me to call you a cab, mister?" the boy asked. He used the proper third person plural pronoun of the native language, signalling his immeasurable respect for the being of Lazaro Reyes, M.D.

At his nod, the boy took off, sprinting through and among the moving vehicles. Lazaro lost him in the confusion of the traffic. He thought he spotted him, playing matador with a rampaging bus, but when the kid raised his face, Lazaro saw it was the wrong child. Then again, another boy crossed the highway, zigzagging through black exhaust fumes but he had a pack of cigarettes in his hand and was selling them, stick by stick, to harassed drivers of minibuses. Wrong kid. Lazaro shifted his weight from foot to foot; it was taking quite

a while—fifteen, twenty minutes. Again that jolt in his kidney area. He looked over his right shoulder. Another boy of the same age, almost a twin of the first. "Want a cab, mister?" The same articulation of respect.

Lazaro nodded; the boy took off. After five minutes, he was back, leading a cab, his waving right hand laying an imaginary red carpet toward Lazaro on the curb. The doctor pulled out his wallet, untangled a peso bill and handed this to the boy who, with a grin and a flourish, opened the passenger door. At that instant, the first boy came running, leading another cab through traffic and throng. "Sir, sir," he called out.

"Too late," Lazaro told him, just as the second cab eased itself behind the first.

The boy's face mirrored the shock of those words. It seemed to Lazaro that, in the twenty minutes he'd been gone, he'd managed to get himself even filthier. Sweat streaks ran from his temples to his jaws and the skin above his upper lip was wet and glistening.

"Oh, sir," the boy wailed. "You could've waited."

Now, the second boy threw him a look of remonstrance and Lazaro quivered in anger and embarrassment. There seemed to have been a rule of conduct here, whose violation had disturbed the universe. The second boy said he would give the first a commission and to Lazaro's surprise, apologized for having stolen the first boy's customer. The elaborate procedure alerted him; he felt he was expected to make amends, perhaps to add to the remuneration given. But someone jumped into the second cab which zoomed away while the driver of the first leaned on his horn and shouted, harsh and demanding. A voice cried out for a cab. The second boy nudged the first, telling him to go for it.

Lazaro was already in the cab when he saw the boy slipping through the traffic. The light turned green, his cab leapt forward, its snarl masked by an even louder shriek of brakes, a thin scream and a boil of noise from the corner where he'd last seen the boy. The driver stopped just long enough for a look. Lazaro saw it, too—two dirty soles, toes to the sky, on the asphalt. Beyond, two black truck tires. "Well, he certainly bought it," the driver said, "must've been desperate." He shook his head, gave a horselaugh at his own uncalled-for sympathy and began the run from the shopping center to the business section of the city where Lazaro Reyes, M.D., held office.

His nurse-secretary had managed to keep his patients waiting. They were mostly minor cases: measles for the seven-year-old son of a friend, bronchial infection for a middle-aged woman, gout attacks for a businessman. He liked his clientele, their neatness of manner and clothes, their obedience. He spent a little more time than was warranted by their various illnesses, taking his pleasure in the handling of their bodies and in the clean scent of their flesh. Even their fevers were perfumed.

It was a ruse, of course, this lingering over minor complaints. He was putting off the Colonel who waited outside, alone and at ease, smoking cigarettes. It was nearly lunchtime when Lazaro admitted to himself that the Colonel wouldn't leave to return another day and so he signalled his nurse-secretary to let the man in.

The Colonel was neither too tall nor too short and had a forgettable face. He was somewhat stocky, having put on weight these last two years. The good life had made his chest rotund; Lazaro saw that in a few years, he would acquire the profile of the aging: barrel torso on spindly legs. The Colonel suffered this inspection calmly and then surprised Lazaro by saying that he was taking the good doctor to lunch. Today. This minute. Nervously, Lazaro glanced at his calendar and saw what the Colonel had seen. There were no appointments listed until three o'clock.

They took the Colonel's car to a nearby Japanese restaurant. Lazaro was partial to Japanese food, believing it healthier than any other cuisine. How the Colonel had known this, Lazaro didn't ask. The Colonel decided to park right in front of the place—either because it was convenient or because his army license plates allowed him to park in no-parking zones. As they left the car, Lazaro felt that jolt in his kidney area again and when he looked over his shoulder, there was the boy. "Clean your car, sir?" A deep and abiding respect.

Lazaro looked at the Colonel who nodded. The boy ran for his pail and rags and in a little while, they could see him through the misty front windows of the restaurant (humidity condensed in the air conditioning) wiping the hood of the car. The Colonel ordered sake and teriyaki for himself and told Lazaro to take the sushi since he liked the stuff. Sushi was expensive.

The Colonel said he needed a good doctor, one absolutely trustworthy. Lazaro sighed. He knew, from professional gossip, what kind of medical work military men required. Usually fixing up a girlfriend or two, at little or no cost. Lazaro had been spared for some years now but with doctors immigrating like the proverbial Capistrano swallows (where was Capistrano?), he could be grateful for that respite.

But the Colonel had other things in mind. Six of his men were in a fix (VD? thought Lazaro) and had to be bailed out as quickly, as legally as possible. They'd gone on an A-and-S raid and being flushed with success, had taken it into their heads to have a little fun, to push their luck a little further. And to cut a long story short, there was the body now and they needed a death certificate—correction, an unassailable, legal death certificate since the relatives were bitching like crazy and there wasn't time to fix *them*.

Lazaro's ears felt plugged with wax. What, he asked, was and A-and-S? The Colonel smiled. Arrest and seizure. And the body? The Colonel's lips moved very carefully, saying that the boy who bought it had frightened himself to death, his men really had no intention of harming him. It appeared, from initial investigation, that the kid had scared himself enough to swallow his tongue and choke on it. Impossible, Lazaro said.

The flat declaration hung across them even as the steam from the food remained in the air—an ephemeral trellis. The Colonel looked at Lazaro and Lazaro, looking into the Colonel's eyes, saw himself. He would have to see the body, he said finally and didn't know why heat rose to his cheeks. Confused, he lowered his eyes to the sushi.

The boy was waiting beside the car, his pail at his feet. Lazaro saw he'd rinsed and wrung out his rags which were now folded with care at the pail's bottom. The

car was clean. The Colonel scanned it with his eyes and declared himself not satisfied; he could've asked one of his men in the motor pool for a better job for free. In the end, though, he tossed a coin to the boy and barked at him to take himself off before he was arrested for vagrancy.

The boy didn't look at the coin in his palm. He stared at the Colonel before his head swiveled toward Lazaro Reyes, M.D. The brown-gold eyes were devoid of accusation. "Sir, didn't you have any left-overs?" the boy asked, "they would've wrapped them for you. For me." Before Lazaro could answer, the Colonel barked and he found himself sliding into the front passenger seat. Lazaro, said the Colonel, could see the body now, since it was still an hour before his next appointment. Without waiting for the doctor's answer (indeed, Lazaro felt he didn't have any), the Colonel drove to the camp.

The Colonel preceded him into the morgue. Stopping by a mortuary table, he swept the covering sheet off the cadaver and stepped aside. Although an effort had been made to clean the body, an odor still clung to its lanky arms and feet. There were contusions on the chest and back, rupture and bleeding in the anal region, hematomas on the thighs and legs. The windpipe was crushed. Lazaro remarked on this to the Colonel who replied that that meant the boy had died of asphyxiation, no doubt because of fright. Lazaro fixed his eyes on the toes; black matter rimmed the nails. After a while, he nodded. It was asphyxiation. The Colonel coughed—a delicate sound of approval—and ordered the sergeant to bring in the prepared death certificate.

Lazaro's eyes jumped to the face. It was the boy, of course. He nerved himself to reach down and push the right eyelid up: a brown-gold pupil stared without seeing. He withdrew his hand but the eyelid stuck and the eye went on looking into infinity. The sergeant entered and Lazaro unclipped his gold pen to sign the certificate; it was already prepared. As he scribbled his name, he asked the Colonel if the kid hadn't been too young to be . . . well, involved in a mess. The Colonel agreed but it seemed that the group in the raided house had adopted the boy from off the streets, giving him food whenever he dropped in, teaching him how to read and write as well as a host of other nonsense. He was indeed young—that was why the Colonel's men had thought him easy, that he would blab whatever odds and ends he'd picked up at that den of iniquity. Unfortunately, the loyalty of the young could be so absolute, so inflexible. The Colonel sighed. After a while, he added: there were too many children. A virtual epidemic.

Lazaro couldn't help but admire the Colonel's perspicuity of phrase. An epidemic of children. Those brown-gold eyes, snub nose, full lips—dark calyx of misery—replicating themselves throughout the landscape. As he paced back and forth in his office, waiting for his next patient, he found his memory besieged by that face (those faces?), lurking within frames of remembered scenes. The boy sprouted from the garbage heap glimpsed by the eye's corner as Lazaro marshalled his daughters to the theater. Hordes of boys running through shopping centers, looking for customers, as he glanced at a silk shirt in the display window. The boy again fallen asleep beside his vendor's box of cigarettes as Lazaro exited from a nightclub. Boys squatting on the sidewalk, back propped on walls, their

eyes crinkled against the noonday heat as Lazaro drove past in an air-conditioned car. The boy bawling, snot running through the fingers of the hand he held against his face, his keening as heartbroken as only a child's weeping could be.

An epidemic, Lazaro thought. As he worked on his next patient (tapping his chest, listening to the hiss of air in the lungs), he found himself trembling with the thought of one of those microbes (those faces) reaching full growth, the lanky body suddenly insolent with a young man's virility. The boy (no boy now but a man) would loiter in front of theater lobbies, looking over the girls who entered, including perhaps (or maybe it was a certainty) one or both of Lazaro's daughters. In such a manner would vengeance be extracted and the karmic law fulfilled. Lazaro froze, his muscles trembling as though he were being pricked by needles from head to foot.

He got rid of the patient with a few words and a prescription. He told the nurse he needed some rest and closed the door to his office. The silence was that of a mortuary. He rummaged through his equipment, testing scalpels. It seemed to him that if he could only find the first one, the original—the owner of that metastasizing face—he could do away with the problem. First, the original, he said to himself. Then, its descendants—one after another. And the world would be safe for clean, well-fed children.

As the scalpel cut through the skin of his thumb, he acknowledged this debt to himself: his life had been spent in the removal of disease from the pleasant-odored flesh of his patients. In its total eradication, whether by surgery, sterilization or medication. The blood that seeped out of him was rich and thick—pure, clean ichor. Indicator of health. Of well-being. Laying the scalpel down, he cleaned the wound carefully, his lip-corner jumping from the bite of the peroxide, and dressed it, his left hand clever in its manipulation of gauze and plaster. He opened his office door, showed the nurse the thumb and said it was an accident; he was upset and was going home unless there was a major case. There wasn't. As Lazaro turned off the desk lamp, his eyes fell on the scalpel, its tip tinged red. With a guilty shiver, he picked it up and slid it, its blade naked, into his shirt pocket.

His ride home (the nurse called a cab) was marked by the boy whose face (faces) appeared at every street corner. Lazaro Reyes, M.D., despite the intervening glass pane of the car window, felt the touch of those brown-gold eyes, those rather neutral, rather gentle, never-surprised eyes. Anticipation was in the air; something, something was expected to happen, was already happening. Lazaro leaned forward and told the driver to speed up.

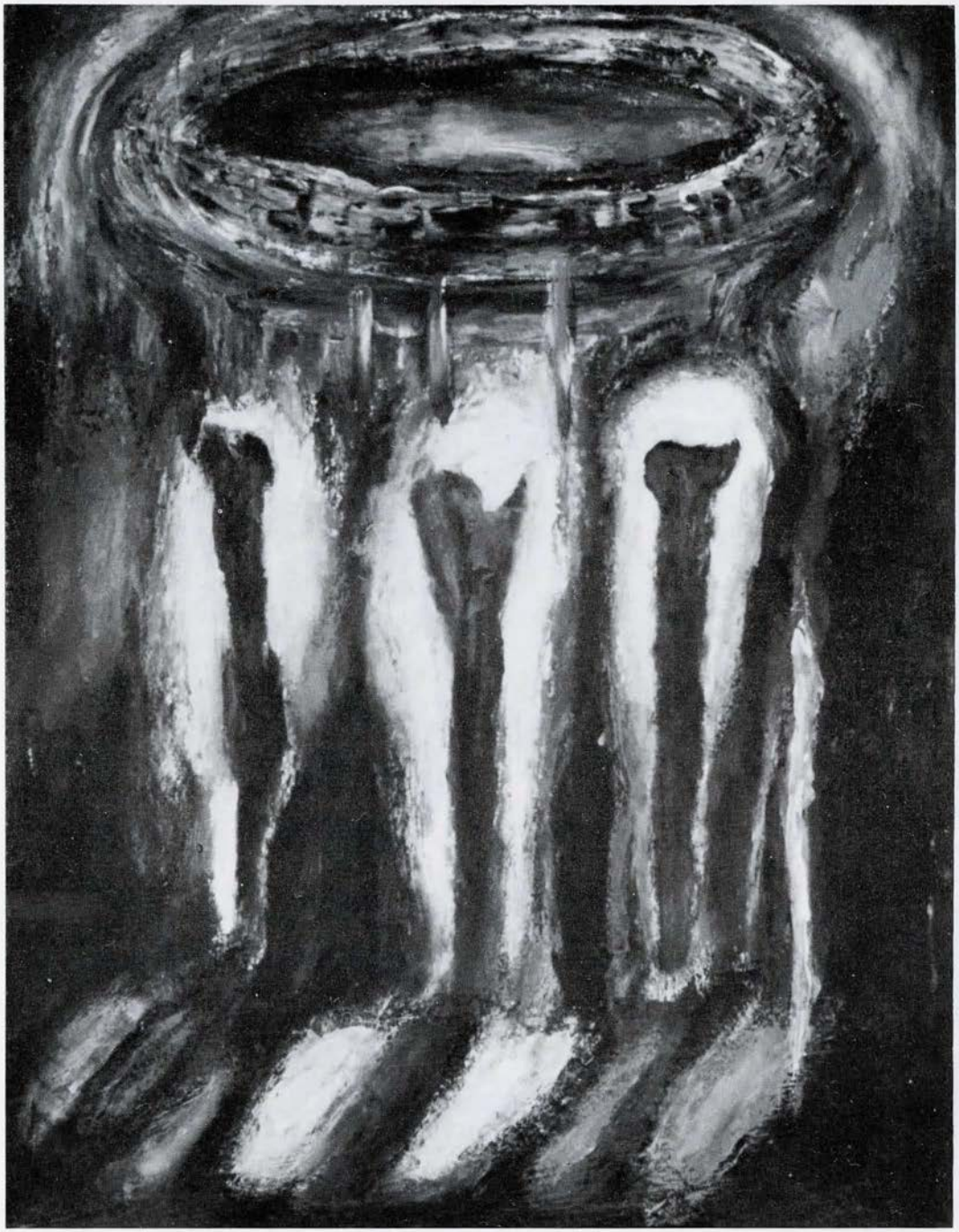
The second car in the driveway told him his daughters were home: sweet Liza, 18, and happy Grace, 10. He paid the cab driver with relief, walked up to the front door and used his keys. When he pushed the door open, rock music wedged through and smashed against his chest—a solid haze of sound that sent the blood pounding in his temples. Still, he exhaled with gratitude at this familiarity and entering, walked towards the stairs. That was when the floor convulsed and his feet flew up, so that he landed on his backside on the marble floor. His coccyx shriveled with the pain that rushed up his spine to his head and eyes. Through

the clang of pain in his head, he saw the skateboard and with the roar of a beast, he sprang, clutched at it and hurled it at the stereo. There was a terrific sound as the record broke, the noise of its destruction coursing through amplifiers. Then, he heard his own voice, with its incredible filth, storming towards his ten-year-old who had rushed to turn off the stereo. He saw her bud of a mouth paralyzed open, her brown-gold eyes with dilated pupils. A split-second image which became a little kid rushing in tears up the stairs. Lazaro remembered the kick he'd given the skateboard that morning.

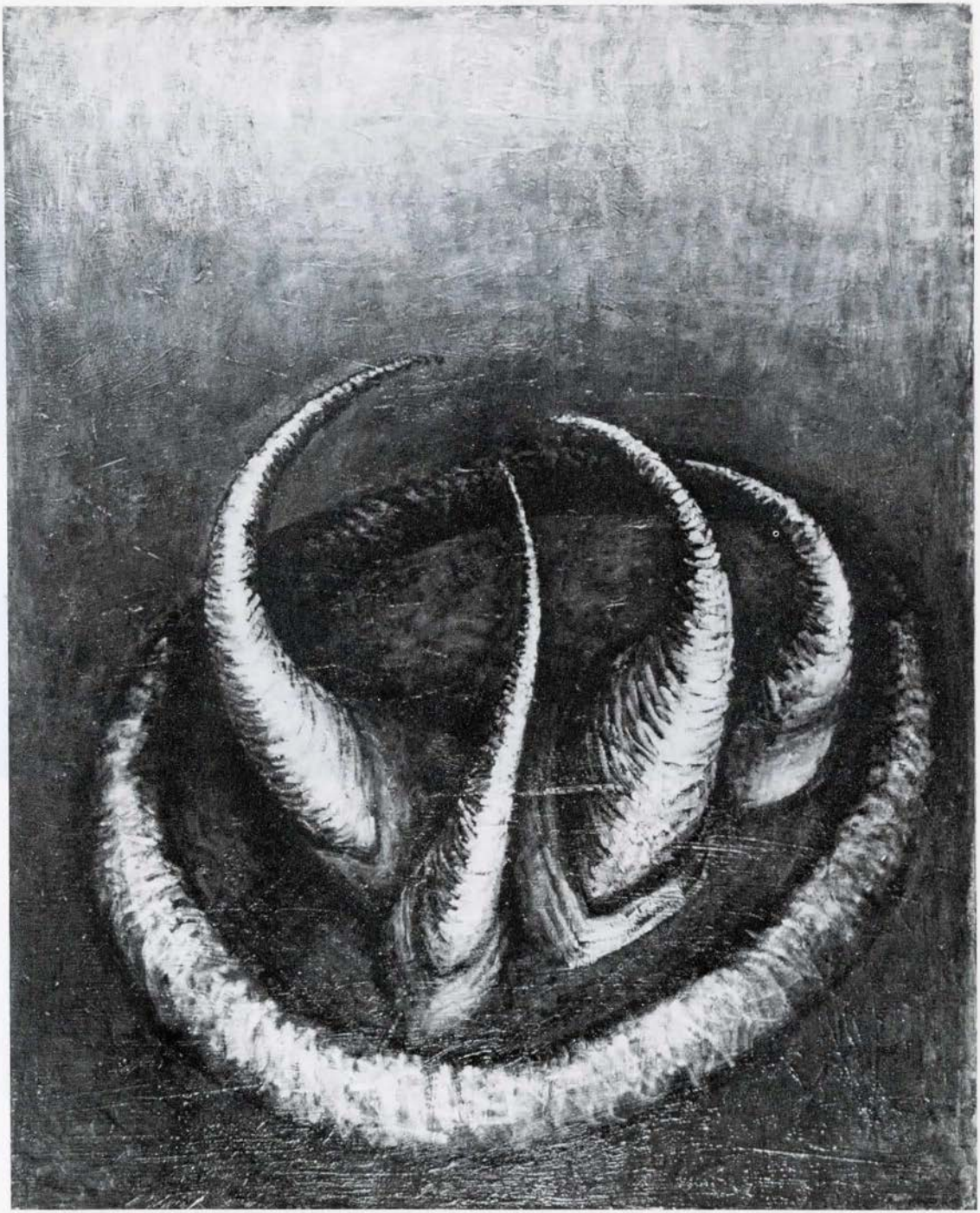
Upstairs, a door slammed shut. Lazaro knew she was weeping the way she always cried: sitting on the edge of her bed, her face buried in her hands, the tears oozing between her fingers. He would kneel before her, take her hands from her face and lick those tears away, absorbing into his own body all the ache of her passage through the years. She, tickled by his tongue, would start laughing, and soon, her eyes would be shining again and all her features would be restored to order.

Calmness filled Lazaro—an almost dreamy tranquility as his own sweat cooled his body. Step by step, he ascended the stairs and moved toward his ten-year-old daughter's room. He paused before reaching for the doorknob and touched his shirt pocket, feeling there the scalpel biting into the cloth. For wouldn't it be awful, awful, if upon his walking into that room, upon his prying away the hands covering the face of that figure of grief, he discovered the full extent of the boy's vengeance? What if the face beyond that barricade of fingers, the face which would blossom to meet his eyes, were the boy's?

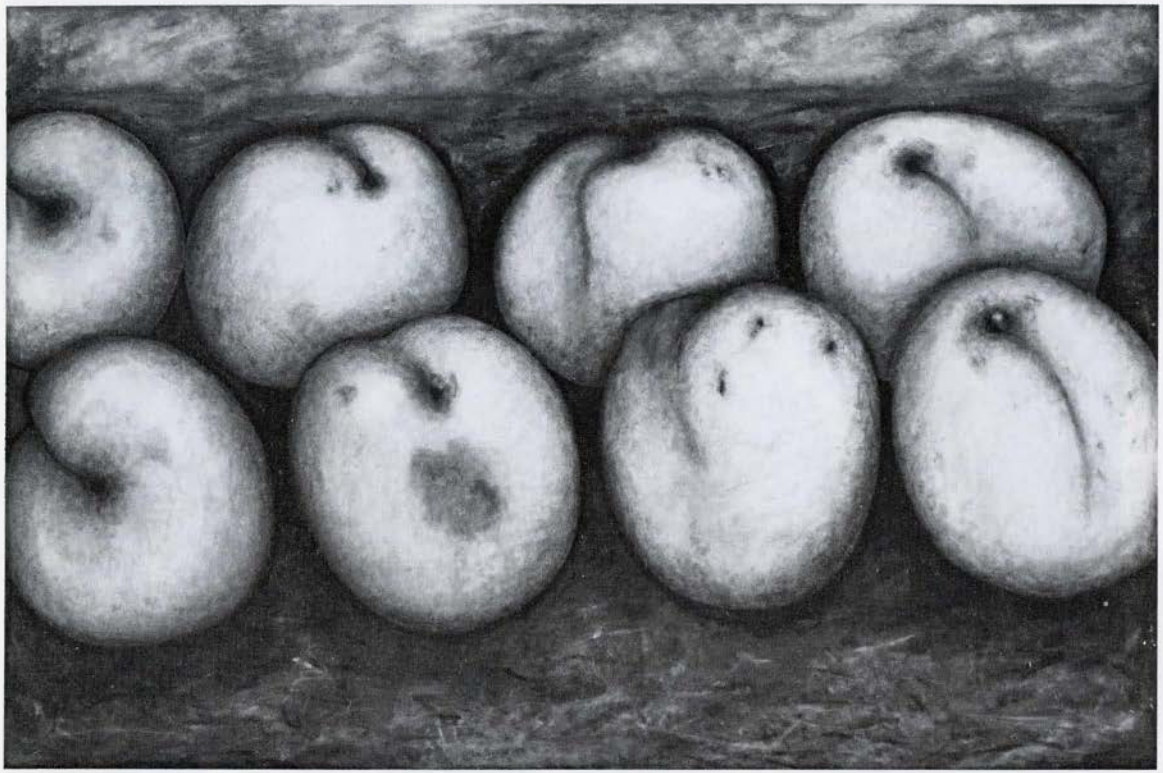
"Colima" HELEN OJI



"Untitled 1986" ANNA KUO



"Rachet-Head" **CAROL SUN**



"Apricots" **AMY CHENG**

7/13/84

PEGGY HONG

sleeping with words:
i am too filled with words too many words i
sleep in words as i have ears as i have
fingers & hair as i think of you
you
goddamn it
seem to have removed from me
my sense of me as sole audience
all of japan is addressed to you

outside a mr softee?
everything is a confusion
the roofs with shingled tile wings
set against high rise condominiums
with numbers instead of roofs
the sound of ice cream against the rooster

sleeping in ted berrigan sonnets
berrigan sonnet words: apple belly dream
green wan night sleep

in japan almost constant state of excitement
as excited as berrigan all those exclamation marks

beauty

in search of love & beauty
did i wander will i
wander
beauty

though i forget
reminded by voices outside

chairs as societal
there'll be none in mine
like there are none in yours
we'll be closer to the ground

this is the ideal sitting corner
on ground book in left hand
typewriter between legs voices
out the window spin cycle downstairs

matriarch scrubbing the stoop for reminiscence sake every
morning you every morning the spray of the hose like at her
old house in korea squatting like across the street at 104th
the korean grocer turns off the hose when we pass our shoes
get damp as we pass leave footprints on the way to school
a girl a little girl stopping lifting her dress squatting under
a tree like that man like a roosting pigeon that man looked
like my uncle waiting for the n to queens like the grocer like
the matriarch this morning on the way to school she lifted
her dress no panties no panties with lace inserts no panties
with cotton crotch a girl stooped under a tree urban tree
shitting

    the garbage out by 9 me up by 6 breakfast at 7
    discussed feminism and anorexia by garbage

across the street a child singing
someone is playing the piano for him
he cant hit the top note
his voice is strident
he keeps singing anyway

    i saw you while i was asleep
    playing with a ball
    throwing it against the wall
    it rebounding off your hip
        your ass
                your elbow
    a beach ball
                you headed it
    you were wearing your swimsuit

a womans voice now demonstrating
heavy vibrato the melody is pentecostal
    pentatenie   pentimento
her chest in her throat

    johns music downstairs
    embarrasingly american van halen shit

yesterday on the beach
the girls wore tshirts
over their swimsuits
walking holding hands
giggling

the boys played hard
heaving running
in rolled up pants
crewcuts but no school uniforms

man walks out of the water
out of the primordial broth
like the dinosaurs
he's happy today he's
happy today

he's in his underwear
shaking the water off
he sees john
exclaiming in japanese
shakes johns hand
touches the small of his back
admiring his chest
his biceps

calling waves calling
camera he wants his camera
for john he asks sumo
camera he says

he has a brown face
brown hands brown forearms
he keeps talking
we're all listening
& still talking
he walks out into the water

we're mostly water we came from water we'll end up in water
at least i will i'll have my ashes
flushed down the toilet

the humidity makes the paper limp

A MEDITATION ON MOTHERHOOD

PEGGY HONG

this is the season
everything falls off the walls
the paint
the movie schedules
the jazz
the cigarette smoke
i think it's called spring
spring

spring ahead
fall behind
we lose an hour
babies are born
i take long baths
willow weeps for billie holiday
disc jockey rambles on
a little under eight pounds
she was smiling

"doctor says it comes from inside
doctor says it's a reflex"

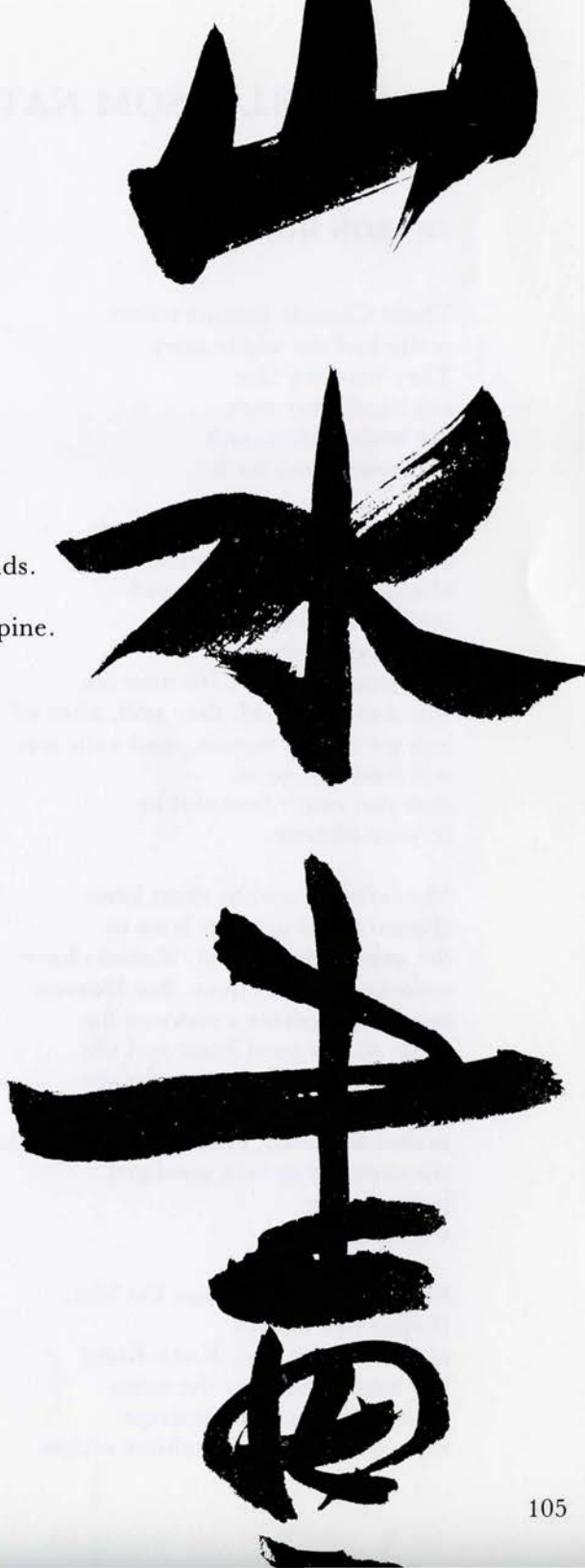
she turns her head
rolling her eyes up to the ceiling
she forgets
to hang on to the nipple

i slept in my mother's room
listening to her breathe
her silk nightgown
inhaling exhaling
the house full of mothers

LANDSCAPING

WILLYCE KIM

Wild in the gathering
I fill my arms with your shoulders.
My mouth
leans into the ranges of your back
I tongue the ridges
turning them under like earth.
The ground heaves.
I dream I am planting rice.
Green onions dance between the fields.
Your muscles swell beneath me
as koi swim the long curve of your spine.
I lap at your neck.
Rosemary spills from your hair.
While lightning flares across
darkened skies,
we ride your shoulders home.



PEACH BLOSSOM NATURE

SHARON HOM

Those Chinese fortune tellers
really had the whole story.
They read my face
my hands, my ears
the hour, day, month
and year of my birth.

My face is covered by moving
constantly moving clouds, signs
of a lifetime of changes and
seeking, only to wake
at the last moment
as if from a dream. No time left.
But don't feel bad, they said, after all
you are only a woman, and your son
will find and be all
that you won't find and be
in your lifetime.

My earlobes are the short lobes
characteristic of those born in
the year of the Rabbit. Rabbits have
notoriously short lives. But Heaven
sometimes grants a reprieve for
those with a good heart and life.
So my mother, worrying for me
and loving me, her only daughter,
shakes her head, eyeing my short earlobes,
she says, try to be a good girl,
just try to be
a good girl.

My eyebrows are Kuan Do Mei,
shaped like swords
of the warrior god, Kuan Kung.
My mother decides the safest
path is to pluck and reshape
them into peaceful feminine arches.

But mostly, my mother worries
about the peach blossom nature
imprinted on my hands and face,
the curse of a woman who will
never have a heart at peace.
I could go on
to ride the white horse
back to the village, red silk ribbons
in victory, but the peach blossom will
always hang over my head.

But these are just signs, reflections
of the positioning of the Heavens,
And I know
I can shape the lines
of my hands and face,
create my own signs,
pull on my earlobes,
live my 55 plus years, and
trick the Heavens, just by
plucking my eyebrows.

ARTIST DREAMS

LEI-SANNE DOO

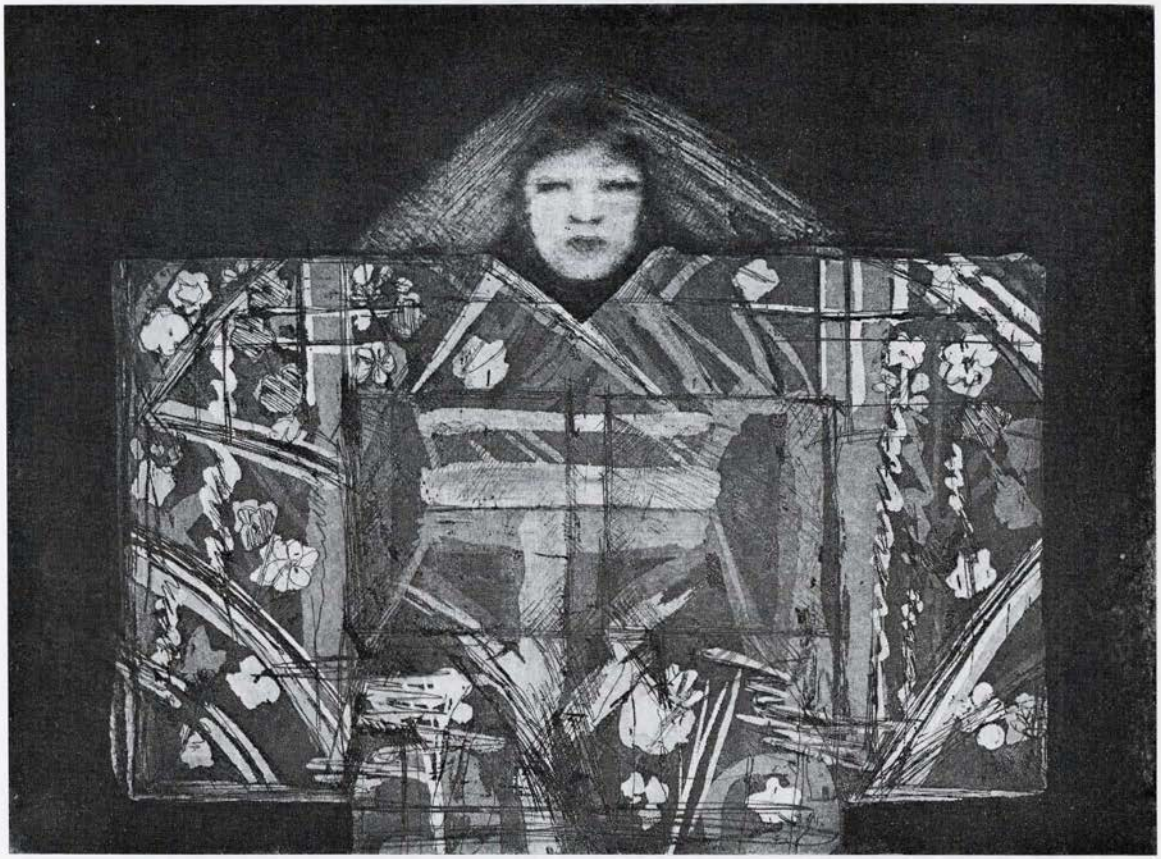
In the dark
a mother's warmth
reassured the passage of time
and the promised daylight.

Yet at an age
of inconsistent images of
daughter, woman, child, the
search begins for a matching twin
not to be found.

Yat Loy dresses and Liberty House boxes
become Macy's maroon shopping bags.
The outer self well-dressed to disguise
the confusion of modern life.

The guide is lost and the artist begins.

"Rice" TOMIE ARAI



"Woman in a Kimono" TOMIE ARAI

WOMEN BORN TO OBEDIENCE

TINA CHOI

Most Korean and East Asian customs regarding women are based on the teachings of Confucius. These teachings have played a leading role in the degradation of the status of women. Confucius based his teachings about human society on three concepts: the patriarchal family, ancestor worship, and the duty of filial piety.

In Confucius' society, the role of women is simple: to obey men without question. Women are creatures born to obedience. Throughout a woman's life, her duty is to follow three laws: 1) to obey the father before marriage; 2) to obey the husband during marriage; and 3) to obey her son should her husband die.

Buddhism further teaches that "women are creatures with the appearance of angels but diabolical in spirit."

"Women are full of sin; and nothing is to be dreaded so much as women."

In Korea, these philosophies underlie the inhumane treatment that women have been subjected to for centuries. For example, a Korean woman was legally denied her name during her lifetime; she had no legal status. Until marriage, she was called simply by her childhood name such as "sopunne" ("Disappointing"), "Sopsop" ("Pity"), "Yukam" ("Regret"), "Big One," or "Little one."

After marriage, however, her childhood name was discarded, and she was known to the community only by her husband's surname, for example, Kim-si or Choi-si. In the home she was addressed by a kinship term denoting her position in the family organization or by her children's name plus the word for mother, for example, "daughter-in-law," or "little-one's mother."

Only in 1909, were women given names for the first time, in accordance with the census registration law of that year.

Separation of the sexes (which has happened in all East Asian countries, and to a certain extent still does in Japan, where the majority of girls and boys attend different schools up until college) was another form of mistreatment of women. When boys and girls reached the age of seven, they were not allowed to sit together. In the home, they were not permitted to use the same dining table or other commodities.

The arrangement of the living quarters of the household was that the father lived in the front room while the wife was closed off in the most rear room. On the street or in public, it was the rule for the wife to walk several steps behind the husband, the same as in Japan. The rule of separation of the sexes persisted until the beginning of the 20th century.

With the extreme forms of segregation, women in Korea were neither seen nor heard. Inevitably, they were cut off from opportunities for independence in social activities. Women were not only denied the benefits of formal education, but also were discouraged from developing any natural ability or talent which might be useful for work outside the home.

"A woman's lack of talent is in itself a virtue," and "If a hen crows, the household crumbles," were frequently-used proverbs to check any worldly ambitions of a woman. The woman's place, first as daughter, is one of contempt. A missionary's little six-year-old once came to her father with tears in her eyes and said, "Papa, I have a question."

"Yes, what is it?"

"Are you sorry that I wasn't a boy?"

"Well, I should say not. I wouldn't trade you for a dozen boys. Why do you ask?"

"The Koreans were talking just now, and they pointed at me and said, 'What a pity that she wasn't a boy.'"

Even now, under the oppressive socio-economic conditions, low wages and starvation, many simple women seek an exit to a safe marriage, or if that is not possible, they are forced to become prostitutes for foreign tourists and American GIs. They are told to make "Patriotic" contributions to the economic development of the nation, and their dehumanization is promoted by the government, which claims these women earn $300 million without any capital or raw materials.

DANNY'S GIRLS

BHARATI MUKHERJEE

I was thirteen when Danny Sahib moved into our building in Flushing. That was his street name, but my Aunt Lini still called him Dinesh, the name he'd landed with. He was about twenty, a Dogra boy from Simla with slicked-back hair and coppery skin. If he'd worked on his body language, he could have passed for Mexican, which might have been useful. Hispanics are taken more seriously, in certain lines of business, than Indians. But I don't want to give the wrong impression about Danny. He wasn't an enforcer, he was a charmer. No one was afraid of him; he was a merchant of opportunity. I got to know him because he was always into ghetto scams that needed junior high boys like me to pull them off.

He didn't have parents, at least none that he talked about, and he boasted he'd been on his own since he was six. I admired that, I wished I could escape my family, such as it was. My parents had been bounced from Uganda by Idi Amin, and then barred from England by some parliamentary trickery. Mother's sister—Aunt Lini—sponsored us in the States. I don't remember Africa at all, but my father could never forget that we'd once had servants and two Mercedes-Benzes. He sat around Lini's house moaning about the good old days and grumbling about how hard life in America was until finally the women organized a coup and chucked him out. My mother sold papers in the subway kiosks, twelve hours a day, seven days a week. Last I heard, my father was living with a Trinidad woman in Philadelphia, but we haven't seen him or talked about him for years. So in Danny's mind I was an orphan, like him.

He wasn't into the big-money stuff like drugs. He was a hustler, nothing more. He used to boast that he knew some guys, Nepalese and Pakistanis, who could supply him with anything—but we figured that was just talk. He started out with bets and scalping tickets for Lata Mangeshkar or Mithun Chakravorty concerts at Madison Square Garden. Later he fixed beauty contests and then discovered the marriage racket.

Danny took out ads in papers in India promising "guaranteed Permanent Resident status in the U.S." to grooms willing to proxy-marry American girls of Indian origin. He arranged quite a few. The brides and grooms didn't have to live with each other, or even meet or see each other. Sometimes the "brides" were smooth-skinned boys from the neighborhood. He used to audition his brides in our apartment and coach them—especially the boys—on keeping their faces low, their saris high, and their arms as glazed and smooth as caramel. The immigration inspectors never suspected a thing. I never understood why young men would pay a lot of money—I think the going rate was fifty thousand

rupees—to come here. Maybe if I remembered the old country I might feel different. I've never even visited India.

Flushing was full of greedy women. I never met one who would turn down gold or a fling with the money market. The streets were lousy with gold merchants, more gold emporia than pizza parlors. Melt down the hoarded gold of Jackson Heights and you could plate the Queensboro Bridge. My first job for Danny Sahib was to approach the daughters in my building for bride volunteers and a fifty buck fee, and then with my sweet innocent face, sign a hundred dollar contract with their mothers.

Then Danny Sahib saw he was thinking small. The real money wasn't in rupees and bringing poor saps over. It was in selling docile Indian girls to hard-up Americans for real bucks. An Old World wife who knew her place and would breed like crazy was worth at least twenty thousand dollars. To sweeten the deal and get some good-looking girls for his catalogues, Danny promised to send part of the fee back to India. No one in India could even imagine *getting* money for the curse of having a daughter. So he expanded his marriage business to include mail-order brides, and he offered my smart Aunt Lini a partnership. My job was to put up posters in the laundromats and pass out flyers on the subways.

Aunt Lini was a shrewd businesswoman, a widow who'd built my uncle's small-time investor service for cautious Gujarati gentlemen into a full-scale loan-sharking operation that financed half the Indian-owned taxi medallions in Queens. Her rates were simple: double the prime, no questions asked. Triple the prime if she smelled a risk, which she usually did. She ran it out of her kitchen with a phone next to the stove. She could turn a thousand dollars while frying up a *bhaji*.

Aunt Lini's role was to warehouse the merchandise, as she called the girls, that couldn't be delivered to its American destination (most of those American fiances had faces a fly wouldn't buzz). Aunt Lini had spare rooms she could turn into an informal S.R.O. hotel. She called the rooms her "pet shop" and she thought of the girls as puppies in the window. In addition to the flat rate that Danny paid her, she billed the women separately for bringing gentlemen guests, or shoppers, into the room. This encouraged a prompt turnover. The girls found it profitable to make an expeditious decision.

The summer I was fifteen, Aunt Lini had a paying guest, a Nepalese, a real looker. Her skin was white as whole milk, not the color of tree bark I was accustomed to. Her lips were a peachy orange and she had high Nepalese cheekbones. She called herself "Rosie" in the mail-order catalogue and listed her age as sixteen. Danny wanted all his girls to be sixteen and most of them had names like Rosie and Dolly. I suppose when things didn't work out between her and her contract "finace" she saw no reason to go back to her real name. Or especially, back to some tubercular hut in Katmandu. Her parents certainly wouldn't take her back. They figured she was married and doing time in Toledo with a dude named Duane.

Rosie liked to have me around. In the middle of a sizzling afternoon she would send me to Mr. Chin's store for a pack of Kents, or to Ranjit's liquor store for gin. She was a good tipper, or maybe she couldn't admit to me that she couldn't

add. The money came from Danny, part of her "dowry" that he didn't send back to Nepal. I knew she couldn't read or write, not even in her own language. That didn't bother me—guaranteed illiteracy is a big selling point in the mail-order bride racket—and there was nothing abject about her. I'd have to say she was a proud woman. The other girls Danny brought over were already broken in spirit; they'd marry just about any freak Danny brought around. Not Rosie—she'd throw some of them out, and threaten others with a cobra she said she kept in her suitcase if they even thought of touching her. After most of my errands, she'd ask me to sit on the bed and light me a cigarette and pour me a weak drink. I'd fan her for a while with the newspaper.

"What are you going to be when you finish school?" she'd ask me and blow rings, like kisses, that wobbled to my face and broke gently across it. I didn't know anyone who blew smoke rings. I thought they had gone out with black and white films. I became a staunch admirer of Nepal.

What I wanted to be in those days was someone important, which meant a freedom like Danny's but without the scams. Respectable freedom in the bigger world of America, that's what I wanted. Growing up in Queens gives a boy ambitions. But I didn't disclose them. I said to Rosie what my Ma always said when other Indians dropped by. I said I would be going to Columbia University to the Engineering School. It was a story Ma believed because she'd told it so often, though I knew better. Only the Indian doctor's kids from New Jersey and Long Island went to Columbia. Out in Flushing we got a different message. Indian boys were placed on earth to become accountants and engineers. Even old *Idi Amin* was placed on earth to force Indians to come to America to become accountants and engineers. I went through high school scared, wondering what there was in my future if I hated numbers. I wondered if Pace and Adelphi had engineering. I didn't want to turn out like my Aunt Lini, a ghetto moneylender, and I didn't want to suffer like my mother, and I hated my father with a passion. No wonder Danny's world seemed so exciting. My mother was knocking herself out at a kiosk in Port Authority, earning the minimum wage from a guy who convinced her he was doing her a big favor, all for my mythical Columbia tuition. Lini told me that in America grades didn't count; it was all in the test scores. She bought me the SAT workbooks and told me to memorize the answers.

"Smashing," Rosie would say and, other times, "Jolly good," showing that even in the Himalayan foothills, the sun hadn't yet set on the British Empire.

Some afternoons Rosie would be bent over double in bed with leg pains. I know now she'd had rickets as a kid and spent her childhood swaying under hundred pound sacks of rice piled on her head. By thirty she'd be hobbling around like an old football player with blown knees. But at sixteen or whatever, she still had great, hard, though slightly bent legs, and she'd hike her velour dressing gown so I could tightly crisscross her legs and part of her thighs with pink satin hair ribbons. It was a home remedy, she said, it stopped circulation. I couldn't picture her in that home, Nepal. She was like a queen (The Queen of Queens, I used to joke) to me that year. Even India, where both my parents were born, was a mystery.

Curing Rosie's leg pains led to some strong emotions, and soon I wanted to

beat on the gentlemen callers who came, carrying cheap boxes of candy and looking her over like a slave girl on the auction block. She'd tell me about it, nonchalantly, making it funny. She'd catalogue each of their faults, imitate their voices. They'd try to get a peek under the covers or even under the clothing, and Danny would be there to cool things down. I wasn't allowed to help, but by then I would have killed for her.

I was no stranger to the miseries of unrequited love. Rosie was the unavailable love in the room upstairs who talked to me unblushingly of sex, and made the whole transaction seem base and grubby and funny. In my Saturday morning Gujarati class, on the other hand, there was a girl from Syosset who called herself "Pammy Patel," a genuine Hindu-American Princess of the sort I had never seen before, whose skin and voice and eyes were as soft as clouds. She wore expensive dresses and you could tell she'd spent hours making herself up just for the Gujarati Hindu classes in the Temple. Her father was a major surgeon, and he and Pammy's brothers would stand outside the class to protect her from any contact with boys like me. They would watch us filing out of the classroom, looking us up and down and smirking the way Danny's catalogue brides were looked at by their American buyers.

I found the whole situation achingly romantic. In the Hindi films I'd see every Sunday, the hero was always a common man with a noble heart, in love with an unattainable beauty. Then she'd be kidnapped, and he'd have to save her. Caste and class would be overcome, and marriage would follow. To that background, I added a certain American equality. I grew up hating rich people, especially rich Indian immigrants who didn't have the problems of Uganda and a useless father, but otherwise were no better than I. I never gave them the deference that Aunt Lini and my mother did.

With all that behind me, I had assumed that real love *had* to be cheerless. I had assumed I wouldn't find a girl worth marrying, not that girls like Pammy could make me happy. Rosie was the kind of girl who could make me happy, but even I knew she was not the kind of girl I could marry. It was confusing. Thoughts of Rosie made me want to slash the throats of rivals. Thoughts of Pammy made me want to wipe out her whole family.

One very hot afternoon Rosie, as usual, leaned her elbows on the windowsill and shouted to me to fetch a six-pack of tonic and a lemon. I'd been sitting on the stoop, getting new tips from Danny on scalping for an upcoming dance recital—a big one, Lincoln Center—but I leaped to attention and shook the change in my pockets to make sure I had enough for Mr. Chin. Rosie kept records of her debts, and she'd pay them off, she said, just as soon as Danny arranged a Green Card to make her legit. She intended to make it here without getting married. She exaggerated Danny's power. To her, he was some kind of local bigwig who could pull off anything. None of Danny's girls had tried breaking a contract before, and I wondered if she'd actually taken it up with him.

Danny pushed me back so hard I scraped my knee on the stoop. "You put up the posters," he said. After taping them up, I was to circulate on the subway and press the pictures on every lonely guy I saw. "I'll take care of Rosie. You report back tomorrow."

"After I get her tonic and a lemon," I said.

It was the only time I ever saw the grown-up orphan in Danny, the survivor. If he'd had a knife or a gun on him, he might have used it. "I give the orders," he said, "you follow." Until that moment, I'd always had the implicit sense that Danny and I were partners in some exciting enterprise, that together we were putting something over on India, on Flushing, and even on America.

Then he smiled, but it wasn't Danny's radiant, conspiratorial, arm-on-the-shoulder smile that used to warm my day. "You're making her fat," he said. "You're making her drunk. You probably want to diddle her yourself, don't you? Fifteen years old and never been out of your Auntie's house and you want a real woman like Rosie. But she thinks you're her errand boy and you just love being her smiley little *chokra-boy*, don't you?" Then the smile froze on his lips, and if he'd ever looked Mexican, this was the time. Then he said something in Hindi that I barely understood, and he laughed as he watched me repeat it slowly. Something about eunuchs not knowing their place. "Don't ever go up there again, *hijra-boy*."

I was starting to take care of Danny's errands quickly and sloppily as always, and then, at the top of the subway stairs, I stopped. I'd never really thought what a strange, pimpish thing I was doing, putting up pictures of Danny's girls, or standing at the top of the subway stairs and passing them out to any lonely-looking American I saw—what kind of joke was this? How dare he do this, I thought, how dare he make me a part of this. I couldn't move. I had two hundred sheets of yellow paper in my hands, descriptions of Rosie and half a dozen others like her, and instead of passing them out I threw them over my head and let them settle on the street and sidewalk, and filter down the paper-strewn garbage-littered steps of the subway. How dare he call me *hijra*, eunuch?

I got back to Aunt Lini's within the hour. She was in her kitchen charring an eggplant. "I'm making a special *bharta* for you," she said, clapping a hand over the receiver. She was putting the screws on some poor Sikh, judging from the stream of coarse Punjabi I heard as I tore through the kitchen. She shouted after me, "Your Ma'll be working late tonight." More guilt, more Columbia, more engineering.

I didn't thank Aunt Lini for being so thoughtful, and I didn't complain about Ma not being home for me. I was in a towering rage with Rosie and with everyone who ever slobbered over her picture.

"Take your shoes off in the hall," Lini shouted. "You know the rules."

I was in the mood to break rules. For the first time I could remember, I wasn't afraid of Danny Sahib. I wanted to liberate Rosie, and myself. From the hall stand I grabbed the biggest, sturdiest wood-handled umbrella—gentlemen callers were always leaving behind souvenirs—and in my greasy high-tops I clumped up the stairs two at a time and kicked open the door to Rosie's room.

Rosie lay in bed, smoking. She'd propped a new fan on her pillow, near her face. She sipped her gin and lime. *So*, I thought in my fit of mad jealousy, he's bought her a fan. And now suddenly she likes limes. Damn him, *damn* him. She won't want me and my newspapers, she won't want my lemons. I wouldn't have cared if Danny and half the bachelors in Queens were huddled around that bed. I

was so pumped up with the enormity of love that I beat the mattress in the absence of rivals. Whack! Whack! Whack! went the stolen umbrella, and Rosie bent her legs delicately to get them out of the way. The fan teetered off the pillow and lay there beside her on the wilted, flopping bed, blowing hot air at the ceiling. She held her drink up tight against her nose and lips and stared at me around the glass.

"So, you want me, do you?" she said.

Slowly, she moved the flimsy little fan, then let it drop. I knelt on the floor with my head on the pillow that had pressed into her body, smelling flowers I would never see in Flushing and feeling the tug on my shoulder that meant I should come up to bed and for the first time I felt my life was going to be A-Okay.

FOR MY NEPHEW WITH BRIGHT EYES

NELLIE WONG

The night is cold and brisk. When I walked home
tonight from work, I was struck by the beauty of
liquid ambers on Lee Street. Ah, fall's the season
for ox-tail stew, chrysanthemums, time for remembering
Ma and Pa, their dates of birth, their deaths. But still
they live. Oh, my glorious oh so human mother and father,
and now tonight the telephone rings. The melody's light
and tickles my heart. It is my sister, Leslie.
Our new nephew is born! 6 lbs., 6 oz., 19" long,
still unnamed. Our sister-in-law Joyce is doing fine,
and brother Bill must be flying high. Soaring
is an act of joy.

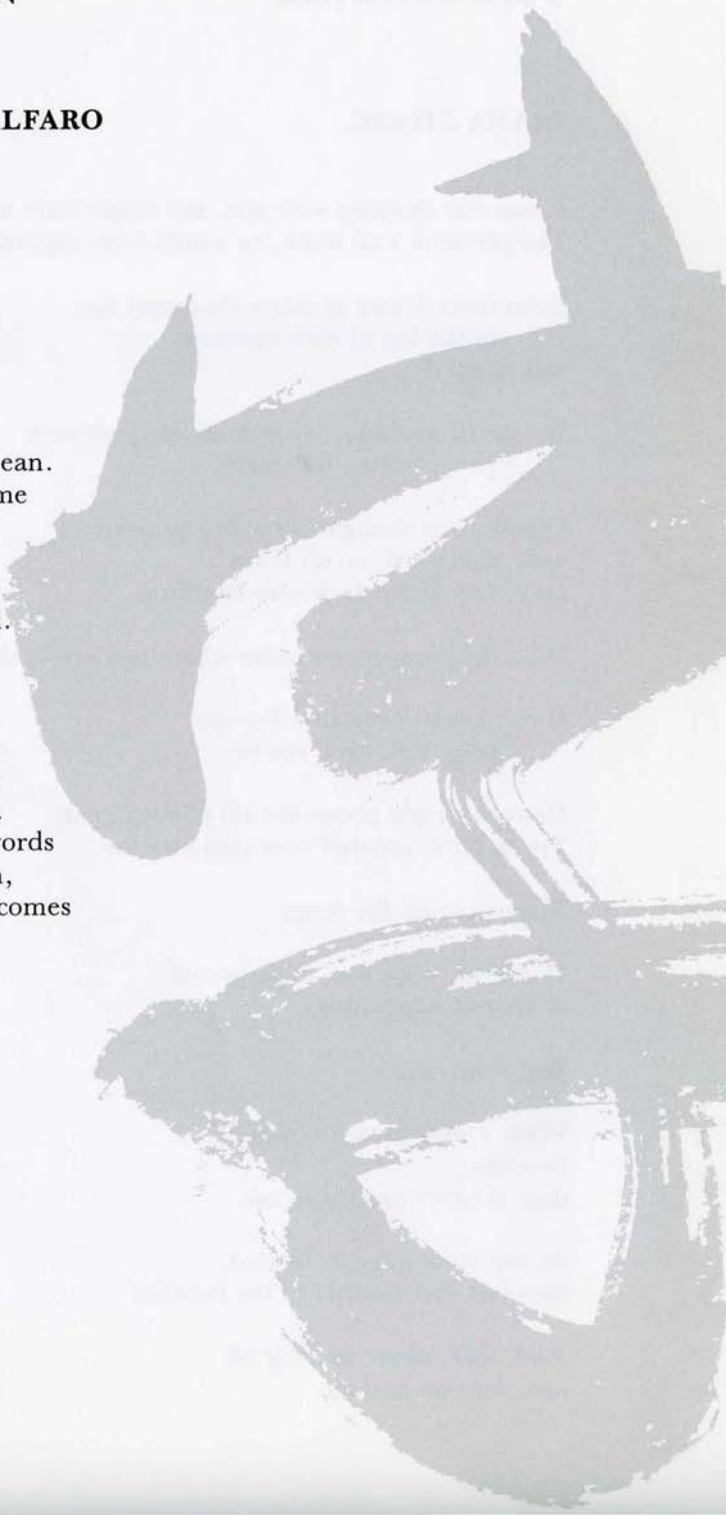
Oh, child that cries new, cries loudly. The stars sparkle
more brightly than ever and beyond where your grandfather
and grandmother Gee live, they are gathering mushrooms
and picking chrysanthemums, they are washing and combing
each other's hair, they are sealing red envelopes with
precious coins for their newborn grandson.
Oh, clean the house, sweep the floors, think no bad thoughts,
wash the bowls and teacups, preserve the sweetmeats,
and boil the chickens. Dim gai wah! Sing and laugh,
dance! A new child is born! A new child is born!

(Written on the night that Samuel Lawrence Mende-Wong entered the world, November 12, 1982)

IN THE KITCHEN

ROSANNA YAMAGIWA ALFARO

I am not at all sure
If you can fully appreciate
The dubious pleasures
Of finishing up
Whatever it is that
Little children leave
On grimy plates,
Of licking the bowl
And sucking the soupbone clean.
But, please, before you call me
Fat and ugly, remember
All the loving care
And admirable thrift
That make me so substantial.
Remember too
A nip of sake
Tickle of wasabe
Sets loose a myriad fantasies
Clamoring for air and space
In this, my crowded kitchen.
I have learned to work my words
Patiently like working dough,
Kneading until my poem becomes
As soft and supple
As a baby's bum.



THE CHANCE

DIANA CHANG

It was fun sleeping with you, she might have said.
The pleasure's all mine, he would have replied.

Even their dream at thirty thousand feet
    in the lap of such concord
was mutual

In case of ditching, remove all sharp objects:
    pens, words, memories

Clamp your thoughts between your knees
and, afterward, on all fours
crawl out of the dark aisle headfirst

With deliverance, consider where you are in the world

If you haven't reached Europe,
    pray with even strokes

Heaven's right above the sill of your eyes
Try to hoist yourself over into no time

They were on the verge

However, what was as perpetual
as chance happenings

flew from them

What's your favorite color?
So close,
they'd never needed to ask

At the same airport, landed,
they lost one another to the familiar

And, safe, never woke at all
and slept on and on

INVITATION

MEENA ALEXANDER

Don't misunderstand me sister
if I haven't invited you in,
perhaps I'd like to.
The black pot bubbles,
there's meat in the stew.

Remember me?

We touched each other at seven
when those blind winds rocked
mama's belly

we touched each other at eleven.
I prised your petticoat loose
then rushed through sugar cane
scraping my thighs.

Thereafter numbers splatter.
When the river's in spate
no one's face survives.

If you took an axe to my door
and knowing you I wouldn't be surprised,
which of the eighteen hells
mama with her open book
preached to us night after night
would you find?

Remember me?

Your black sister,
resin of paradise.
Meat in the stew.

BRIEF CHRONICLE BY CANDLE LIGHT

for Madhu Kishwar and Ruth Vanita

MEENA ALEXANDER

Children torn by the winds
married women burnt in their own homes
I thought I had seen it all that night
as I lit a candle at my door.

In the brief chronicle of candle light
I cried out as a child might
to all the night creatures I know:
jackal, cobra, the thousand eyed owl.

I thought the wind howled in the badam tree.
In a forest of bamboo once bent to a storm
I heard hundreds of whispering feet.
Countless women, their hours lent

to pounding grain
massaging the ankles of strangers,
their necks spent with bearing bricks
sticks, straw for fires that could one day consume them

would they perish at the muddy centre
of all our gathered lives?

I tell you I watched them that night.

Very simply they set their feet
to the waiting trees and climbed them.
They wandered in the night sky
telling the stars in wonder

wrapping us, for we were cold that night,
in a true story

a benediction that called up the cobra
from its hole under the stones:
it danced on its tail
in a future light

the jackal pranced by the ancient stones
delighting the sleepy children,
like a raw creature the owl cried out
"tweet-t-woot" and all its thousand eyes
could not drink up the moving women.

CONTRIBUTORS

MEENA ALEXANDER was born in India in 1951. In Spring, 1988, she was Writer in Residence at the Center for American Culture Studies at Columbia University. She teaches English and Creative Writing at Hunter College, CUNY. Her volume of poetry *House of a Thousand Doors* has just been published by Three Continents Press, Washington, D.C.

ROSANNA YAMAGIWA ALFARO has published many short stories and poems. Her plays have been produced in New York by Pan Asian Repertory, in Cambridge by People's Theatre, in Los Angeles by East West Players and in Philadelphia by Theater Center.

TOMIE ARAI is a graphic artist who lives in N.Y. with her husband and two children. Her work has appeared in *Heresies, Bridge Magazine, East Wind*, and other Asian-American publications. Presently, she is artist-in-residence at the New York Chinatown History Project.

DIANA CHANG is the recipient of a New York State Council on the Arts award this year for media production. She will adapt her short story "Falling Free" published in *Crosscurrents* for Public Radio. She is a novelist, poet and painter who teaches creative writing at Barnard College.

MAY YING CHEN, 40, has worked in the Immigration Project of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, Local 23-25 since 1984. Active in the Chinese community for almost 20 years, she has participated in tenant organizing, women's rights and day care, Asian American Studies, and educational programs.

AMY CHENG's recent exhibitions in Manhattan include the Asian Arts Institute, Tradition Thousand Gallery, Hunter College Art Gallery, the Arts in General Gallery, and the Parker Smalley Gallery. She has also exhibited recently at Hamilton College in Clinton, New York.

FAY CHIANG, poet and visual artist living and working on the Lower East Side, is the author of two collections of poetry—*In the City of Contradiction* and *Miwa's Song*—as well as the play, *Laundrymen*. Former Director of the Basement Workshop, Chiang is currently Director of Asian American Outreach through the Arts Program at the Henry Street Settlement.

TINA CHOI holds a Doctorate in Business and is Executive Director of Korean Manpower and Development. She is also an Adjunct Professor at Laguardia Community College and a member and former president of Korean American Women for Action.

FRANCES CHUNG was born and raised in New York's Chinatown where she currently works as a mathematics teacher. A recipient of a CAPS fellowship in 1980–81, she has taught poetry for the Poetry Project and the New York Public Library. Presently, she is writer-in-residence at the Henry St. Settlement Arts for Living Center.

LEI-SANNE DOO is a visual artist with great hopes. She grew up near the ocean and mountains of the island of Oahu, Hawaii, in a large supportive extended Chinese-American family. She currently resides in Massachusetts with her own small, supportive family.

JESSICA HAGEDORN: Born and raised in the Philippines, Jessica Hagedorn's books include *Dangerous Music, Pet Food & Tropical Apparitions* (Momo's Press) and the forthcoming novel *Dogeaters* which will be published by Pantheon in 1989.

KIMIKO HAHN is Project Director of *Word of Mouth*, a multicultural literature project in Chinatown, and former poetry editor of *Bridge: Asian American Perspectives*. She was awarded poetry grants from NEA (1986) and The New York Foundation for the Arts (1987). Her poetry collection is forthcoming from Hanging Loose Press.

NANCY HOM is a graphic artist whose silkscreen posters are widely known in progressive communities. She is a former member of *Unbound Feet*, a Chinese women writers' group and the Kearny Street Writers Workshop. Born in China and raised in New York City, she currently resides in San Francisco with her husband and five-year-old daughter.

SHARON HOM has been living and working in China on a Fulbright award for the past two years. She is on the faculty of CUNY Law School at Queens College in New York. She is a single parent of a seven-year-old, Jamie, who is an aspiring painter (when he's not busy building Legos).

PEGGY HONG was born in Korea, raised in Hawaii and has since lived in Buffalo, New York City, and Nashville. She attended Barnard College where she published a collection of poems, *everything i know* (Red Crayon Press, 1984). She now lives in Milwaukee, Wisconsin with her husband and her two daughters.

SASHA HOHRI, sansei mother, occasional artist and writer, activist and organizer, is currently employed as Field Director at the Ms. Foundation for Women. She is a contributing editor for *East Wind*, a publication on the politics and culture of Asians in America.

FLORENCE HOUN is a doctor. She has previously published in several journals.

WILLYCE KIM, who has published two books of poetry, *Eating Artichokes*, and *Under the Rolling Sky*, has just finished a novel, *Dancer Dawkins and the California Kid* and is awaiting word of its publication. She is currently working on a poetry collection, *Love Notes to the Heartland*.

ANNA KUO has received a Visual Arts fellowship from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts in 1987 and a Harrison Council for the Arts Award in Painting. Her exhibitions include the Asian Arts Institute and Asian American Arts Center in New York, Instituto Superiore per le Industrie Artistiche di Urbino (Italy).

NINA KUO has exhibited at the Brooklyn Museum, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Basement Workshop, Camera Work Gallery, Loisaida and curated with the China News Service, Beijing, China, "China Today" at the Floating Foundation of Photography. Kuo was also commissioned by Artmakers, Inc. for a photomural for the MTA. She teaches community art classes at the Asian-American Arts Center.

DEBBIE LEE, born in China, raised in the US, is in her early 30s, an AWU member, and on the AWU Journal Editorial Board. Most deadly with a needle, she is a fabric artist specializing in quilted wall hangings, mostly with a Chinese-American theme. She is a member of CADA (the Chinese American Designer Association).

LILY LEE, a member of AWU and the AWU Journal Editorial Board, has been the Treasurer of AWU for the past five years. She has worked with Asian CineVision, Chinatown History Project, and the Organization of Asian Women. In her own words, she is a "staunch supporter of the Universal Jazz Coalition." By profession, she is a graphic designer.

AMY LING was born in Beijing, China and came to the United States at age six. She has a Ph.D. in comparative literature. Her publications include a chapbook of poems and paintings, *Chinamerican Reflections*, and numerous articles on Asian American literature. She is completing a book, *Between Worlds: Women Writers of Chinese Ancestry in the United States*.

SUSAN LOUIE is a founding member of Asian Women United, a member of the AWU Journal Editorial Board and the Organization of Asian Women through which she has been active in community and women's issues. She is a freelance graphic designer. Her latest accomplishment is the birth of her two-month-old son, Seiji.

LYDIA LOWE is a second generation Chinese American woman born in New York City, raised in California, and currently living in Boston, Massachusetts. She is an English major at U Mass/Boston.

MARGO MACHIDA was born in Hilo, Hawaii. She has received two NEA grants (1983-84, 1988), an Artist-In-Residence Grant from NYSCA (1984-85) and has shown at many galleries including the Henry Street Settlement, the San Diego Museum of Art, Bronx Museum of the Arts, The Alternative Museum, Asian Arts Institute, Hunter College Art Gallery, and the Brooklyn Museum.

DIANE MEI LIN MARK is a fifth-generation Chinese American writer from Hawaii whose work since the early 1970s has focused on Asian American history and media. Her poetry has appeared in *Pearls, Breaking Silence: An Anthology of Contemporary Asian American Poets, Asian Women, Third World Women*, and *Montage: An Ethnic History of Women in Hawaii.*

YONG SOON MIN has taught Fine Arts at the University of Ohio/Athens, been a Yaddo resident, and has been awarded a NYSCA grant and several visiting artist lectureships including the San Francisco Arts Institute. She has exhibited widely, most recently in the Museum of Modern Art's "Committed to Print" and the Public Art Fund's "City Hall Park Sculpture Exhibition."

JANICE MIRIKITANI, sansei, poet, choreographer, community activist, has co-edited several collections including *Ayumi*, a Japanese American Anthology spanning four generations. Her most recent book of poetry and prose is *Shedding Silence* (Celestial Arts Publishing, 1987). She works at Glide Foundation/Urban Center in San Francisco as Program Director and President of the Corporation.

BHARATI MUKHERJEE was born in Calcutta. She teaches writing at Columbia University and the City University of New York. She has had stories included in *Best American Short Stories 1987, Best Canadian Stories* and *Editor's Choice*. She has previously published three books of fiction and two of non-fiction.

HUONG GIANG NGUYEN, born in Vietnam, currently lives and works in Paris. She was a member of ALOEC (Asian Lesbians of the East Coast). Coming to the United States in 1975 started her "coming out" process.

HELEN OJI, a painter who also works in print and set design, has exhibited in museums such as MOMA, The New Museum, Nordjyllands Kunstmuseum, and Mississippi Museum as well as in galleries and alternative spaces such as Sidney Janis, Louis Meisel, A.I.R. and P.S. 39/Longwood Arts Project. Oji will be exhibiting her paintings at Long Island University, Brooklyn Campus, in December, 1988.

MARI OSHIMA has had many exhibitions including, most recently, Pier 41, the Asian American Arts Center in New York, "The Two," a simultaneous projection show, at A.T.W. (New York) and Dusseldorf, and an installation "Buddha's Birthday" at 13th St. (New York City). In 1985, "New York & Asokusa" was exhibited at Gallery Q in Tokyo, Japan.

NINOTCHKA ROSCA is the author of *Bitter Country* and *The Monsoon Collection*, both short story collections; of the non-fiction *Endgame: The Fall of Marcos* (Watts, 1987); and the novel *State of War* (Norton, 1988). Born in the Philippines, she resides in Manhattan.

TERU KANAZAWA SHEEHAN is a sansei, born and raised in New York City. She served as English Editor of the New York Nichibei and writes poetry, essays, and journalistic pieces on Asian Americans for local and national publications. Her latest project is a novel-in-progress.

CAROL SUN was born and raised in New York City. For 1986-87, she was awarded an Artist-in-Residence at the Asian Arts Institute, funded by the New York State Council on the Arts. Sun's work has been exhibited at Artists Space, The Alliance for Asian Arts and Culture, The Brooklyn Museum, Kamikazie, Perdue University, and the BACA Downtown Cultural Center.

VIVIAN TSAO left her native Taiwan for graduate studies at Carnegie-Mellon University and in 1985 was awarded a NYSCA artist-in-residence grant. Now a New York resident, she has exhibited her paintings at the Brooklyn Museum, the City Gallery of New York, the Taipei Museum and other institutions and is a correspondent for the *Hsiung Shih Art Monthly*, an international Chinese language magazine in Taiwan.

PENNY FUJIKO WILLGERODT, born in Wilmington, Delaware, spent her childhood in Taipei, Singapore and Tokyo. She was the English editor of the *New York Nichibei*, a Japanese American/Asian American newspaper, currently works at the Ms. Foundation and is active with the Coalition Against Anti-Asian Violence and New York Asian Women's Center, a battered women's program.

NELLIE WONG, a clerical worker, is active in AFSCME Local 3218 at the University of California, San Francisco, and the Freedom Socialist Party and Radical Women. She has taught writing at Mills College and Women's Studies at the University of Minnesota. Her latest book, *The Death of Long Steam Lady* was published by West End Press.

LIZ YOUNG, a native Californian and founding member of AWU, is also on the board of Asian American Professional Women and a co-founder of Inter-Change Consultants, specializing in multi-cultural resources for leadership and communications training. A partner in Cultural Frenzy, she is exploring performing comedy and co-hosting a cable talk show.

CYN. ZARCO, a poet and a journalist, was born in Manila and has lived in Florida, California and New York. Author of *Cir'cum-nav'i-ga'tion* and *Wild Style*, she now lives in Miami Beach and is a columnist for the *Miami News*.