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# The Remasculinization of Chinese America: Race, Violence, and the Novel

*Viet Thanh Nguyen*

## 1. Introduction

The year 1968 signaled a change in consciousness for Chinese Americans, as many of the younger generation in college became radicalized around the antiwar and anti-imperialism movements, and began to connect those issues with the cause of domestic racial empowerment. In that year, Japanese, Chinese, and Filipino American student activists at San Francisco State College coined the term “Asian American.”<sup>1</sup> As part of their radicalization process, these young Asian American activists during and after 1968 began to see violence as a tool they could use for agency, rather than only as a weapon that targeted them as objects.<sup>2</sup> Although violence throughout American history had been used to emasculate Chinese American men by exploiting their labor and excluding them from American society, young Asian Americans discovered that violence could also be used to *remasculinize* themselves and the historical memory of their immigrant predecessors. Though begun in 1968, this remasculinization of Chinese America continues because the gendered subordination of Chinese American masculinity persists in mainstream culture through stereotypes that have not substantially changed since their creation in the latter half of the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> As this essay will argue, recent Chinese American literature has assumed the task of dismantling these stereotypes largely through the assumption of the same violence that was earlier used to subordinate Chinese Americans. More important, this violence, whose features are nationalist, assimilationist, and masculine, becomes a significant method for claiming an American identity that has a long tradition of deploying violence to define itself.

Authors like Frank Chin and Gus Lee, Chinese American writers who emerge after 1968, represent the American and

Asian American body politic as a violent one. Through their assertion that the individual male body can be discursively transformed into a representative of the larger ethnic and national community, they mark the male body as a site for a series of activities and movements that will serve to regenerate masculinity through violence.<sup>4</sup> Implicitly for Lee and explicitly for Chin, this regeneration of the body personal is also a metaphorical regeneration of the ethnic and national body politic.<sup>5</sup> While the metaphor of the body politic has long-standing roots in Western political discourse, it has material, corporeal meanings for Asian immigrants and their descendants, whose political discourse is predicated on biases about their bodies. Chinese American literature is one example of this discourse, and in reading it, this essay treats the literature symptomatically, as both product and rearticulation of the pervasive violence in American culture that finds expression in literature among other, varied American cultural venues.

Ironically, violence and its reenactment serve as key elements of the shared experience between Asian Americans and other Americans; through violence Asian Americans are first marked by others, as aliens, and then marked by themselves, as Americans. Through their familiarity with the varieties of American violence, Asian Americans are able to recognize its legitimate and illegitimate forms, embodied respectively in the regenerative violence that white mythology claims for itself and the degenerative violence that this mythology displaces onto blackness. Violence is an initiation for immigrants, Asian and otherwise, into the complexities of American inclusion and exclusion, mobility and inequality. It is on this unequal terrain of American society that we can identify a juncture between Asian American and American studies. This inequality, defined through the contemporary practice and function of violence and the history of its deployment, has been an object of study for both fields. Scholars such as Susan Jeffords and Richard Slotkin have demonstrated the historical and contemporary functions of violence in American society, particularly the methods by which violence has served to differentiate an American Self from various racial and gendered Others, but have not addressed how these Others in their turn have understood the seeming necessity of practicing violence themselves. The experience of Asian Americans with violence provides evidence to supplement these earlier studies, demonstrating even further how endemic violence is to American culture and its new initiates. The Asian American experience also provides material to expand upon the conclusions of these earlier studies. This is because violence, in addition to shaping the expe-

rience of Asian Americans in a national context through the struggle for assimilation, also shapes their prehistory before arrival through immigration and its international context. The international context reminds us that while the myth of American violence as a regenerative, heroic practice legitimizes American state power to Americans themselves, this same violence functions ambiguously and precariously in the international arena. Here, other states may offer a different interpretation of American violence as being simply another particular version of a lawless, degenerative struggle for control. For Americans, that aspect of violence is domestically displaced onto blackness and the ghetto, where it serves as the other of a state-sponsored, legitimate violence.

The role of myth in shaping American self-conceptions of their heroic, regenerative violence indicates the general importance of cultural narratives that tell particular stories about the fashioning of both individuals and nations. The method of reading literature as symptomatic of deeply entrenched and historically rooted cultural beliefs allows the literary critic of Asian American and American studies to present some conjectures and conclusions beyond the realm of literature. Through literature we can see the integral role of narrative in justifying the violence that forms state power and has become embedded in the American character, where it remains to be inherited by citizens and learned by immigrants. Literature and violence are, in the end, public acts, and certain genres, like myth and its more prosaic descendants such as the *bildungsroman* or novel of formation, unify both literature and violence. The *bildungsroman*, while narrating the public inclusion of its subjects, also enacts violent exclusion against those who do not match the profile of its ideal subjects (white, heterosexual, male, and eventually propertied). A significant strand of American literature adapts the European *bildungsroman* by presenting narratives that trace the successful struggle of characters who achieve this public identity and its prerogatives: the formal or informal rights to property, political participation, and patriarchal domination of women. For Chinese American authors, using the *bildungsroman* both proclaims a public identity for themselves and their subjects, and reenacts exclusionary processes of violence found in traditional representations, in this case directed at Chinese American women and African-American men.

For both Asian Americans and Americans in general, this deeply masculine public identity reached a critical point during the late 1960s to the late 1980s, a period that constitutes a “crisis

of hegemony” for the American nation-state and its dominance of the world economy. It was also a crisis in which Asians as foreign economic competition and Asian Americans as a model (and threatening) minority figure prominently.<sup>6</sup> In *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War* (1989), Jeffords argues that a process of remasculinization occurred in American culture at this time, largely through the discourse of the Vietnam War. In this discourse, the remasculinization of the (white) American male body in literature and film served to counter various cultural, political, and economic changes exceeding the scope of the war that were thought to be eroding the social and material status of the American white male. The turmoil of the war and the economic threat of Asia, with its contribution to the real or imaginary erosion of white male privilege, exacerbated an already present orientalist tendency in American culture to conflate Asians and Asian Americans.<sup>7</sup> While Asian American remasculinization is inevitably influenced by this dominant discourse of remasculinization, it is also antagonistic to its orientalism. Thus, I situate the project of Asian American remasculinization both within and against the dominant American remasculinization, for it partakes in American patriarchy’s attempts to continue the masculinization of political and economic public life, but it opposes the racialization and subordination of races that in the past characterized this masculinization of nation-state and civil society.<sup>8</sup>

In Chinese American literature, this remasculinization through violence provides a vehicle for the narrative enactment of assimilation as a process of bodily change. The bodily basis of remasculinization is important because the history of American legislation concerning Asian immigration has been explicitly a biopolitics of bodily regulation, shaping the Asian American community through acts targeting gender, sexuality, race, and class.<sup>9</sup> Immigration exclusion focused first upon Chinese prostitutes in the Page Law of 1875, which nearly halted Chinese female immigration and started the transformation of the Chinese American community into a bachelor society. The 1922 Cable Act furthered the legislative assault upon Chinese American sexuality by stripping citizenship from women who married aliens ineligible for citizenship—namely, the Chinese and other Asians.<sup>10</sup> Legislation and popular rhetoric concerning Chinese immigrants reflected the related fears that Chinese immigrant men were, depending on circumstance, both asexual and oversexed. The asexuality of Chinese immigrants, an aspect of their inhuman dedication to work, threatened white labor, while their contradictory

voracious sexuality threatened white womanhood and white patriarchy. In neither case did Americans see Chinese immigrants as “real” men.<sup>11</sup> The historical legacy of such violence upon Chinese American masculinity was to render it in the eyes of dominant American society as something subordinate to a normative American masculinity; to a certain extent, this subordination affected the self-perception of Chinese Americans as well.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, in the era after which racial emasculation was essentially American state policy, racial remasculinization through the performance of violence by the male body becomes the dominant mode of political and aesthetic consciousness for Chinese American male writers. The Chinese American novel provides an important vehicle for understanding violence because of the novel’s properties—its representation of violence and formal relation to the social contexts it depicts—and the argument’s prominence in the Asian American community. In the Chinese American novel, Asian American masculinity Americanized itself in the most ironic fashion, by affirming patriarchy through violence that had previously been directed at Asian Americans en masse.

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## 2. Violence and Assimilation

Lee’s novel *China Boy* (1991) depicts Kai Ting, a young Chinese immigrant who comes to America during the 1950s with his father, a veteran of the Chinese army, and lives in the Panhandle, a black-dominated ghetto of San Francisco. After Kai’s mother dies, the father remarries a white woman who disciplines Kai harshly and arbitrarily, becoming the embodiment of a violent America that threatens to forestall his manhood. At the end of the novel, after Kai has been bullied by both the stepmother and the black children in the neighborhood, he assumes a fighting stance and utters this declaration of independence to his tyrannical white stepmother: “You not my Mah-mee! *I ain’t fo’ yo’ pickin’ on, no mo’!*” These two sentences signify the ways in which language, violence, and duality are mutually involved in the emergence of a unique Asian American identity. Kai delivers these threats of both verbal and physical violence in dual dialects, the former Chinese English, the latter Black English. Chinese American masculine identity begins to emerge in this unspoken gap between Chinese English and Black English, which respectively signify an alien exclusion *from* and a partial inclusion *in* American society. Kai’s inclusion and masculine maturation is fully realized later, not in the black ghetto where he spends his immi-

grant youth, but at a “civilized” citadel of violence, West Point, in *China Boy*’s sequel, *Honor and Duty* (1994).

The title character of Chin’s novel *Donald Duk* (1991) follows Kai’s trajectory of assimilation from ghetto to West Point in form if not in detail. Donald sees contemporary Chinatown as a place of degradation and must eventually learn to reinscribe this space of exclusion from American society as a space of inclusion. His education is accomplished through a realistic dream in which he visits the heroic past of the Chinese railroad worker. In this dream Donald seems to experience bodily the toil, suffering, triumph, and disappointment of the Chinese workers. Whereas Kai is masculinized through the black ghetto and West Point, Donald embarks on his masculine young adulthood through a journey from the Chinese ghetto to the frontier West, a space of violent character formation even more fundamental to the American imagination than West Point.

These three novels centered on the travails of young manhood are examples of the *bildungsroman*, the novel of formation. The *bildungsroman* is centrally important to both American literature in general and to Asian American literature in particular, where the genre offers a formal vehicle for representing both the outsider’s desire for assimilation and upward mobility, as well as the limits imposed on those possibilities by dominant society in regards to women and minorities. The *bildungsroman* traces a youthful individual’s cultivation through various means of education that culminate in his maturity, which includes an identification with dominant national values.<sup>13</sup> The classical German *bildungsroman* and its descendant in the US generate at their conclusions a sense of closure concerning this maturation and identification, according to Gunilla Kester, who argues that “the classical genre strives to resolve the contradiction between the world and self; in a Kantian fashion, the imagination of the mature subject can overcome the restrictions of the world and thus obtain a sense of harmony” (10). Horatio Alger’s rags-to-riches novels, published in the latter half of the nineteenth century, are perhaps the prototypical examples of an American *bildungsroman*, particularly in the conclusions that they offer their characters and audiences. In these novels, “the story of the fictional adolescent in the Republic and the narrative of the adolescent Republic were made one” (Nackenoff 271). The closures found in these novels center on the successful rise of a hard-working, self-reliant young man, who typically becomes a solid member of the middle class rather than a capitalist. His status as an outsider in relation to dominant society is defined by class, which does not in the end erode his individuality, unlike race or gender.



The narrative compromise reconciles the demands and difficulties of industrialism and unfettered capital accumulation with the “traditional” values of the petty bourgeois.<sup>14</sup>

The war novel is another version of the American *bildungsroman*, recent examples of which have been produced around the experiences of young American soldiers in Vietnam. In these novels, the disillusionment that soldier-authors often experienced with American nationalism and values complicates the issue of narrative closure. At the same time, the identity of the American soldier as a representative of the youthful American and his struggles with adult identity and society in general is secured against the representation of the Vietnamese as Other.<sup>15</sup> In these two examples of the American *bildungsroman*, the role of the Other is critical to the production of the dominant American Self, which like its European version, is a white, male propertied citizen—the assumed inheritor and representative of national identity. The educations of these representative individuals are culturally significant because, as David Lloyd argues, there is a correspondence between “the monopoly of violence claimed by the state . . . [and] the monopoly of representation claimed by the dominant culture” (4). Thus, the *bildungsroman*’s development of the universal individual is inherently violent as it justifies the exclusion of those who are “incompatible” with the nation and its modernity. For the American *bildungsroman* in general, where incompatibility has often been defined through race in addition to gender, this tendency towards the erasure of racial difference complicates the possibility of racialized Others adopting the form. Hence, Kester coins the term “narratives of African American *bildung*” instead of using the term African-American *bildungsroman* to indicate that the closure offered by the classical *bildungsroman* does not exist for African Americans in novels such as *Invisible Man* (1952). Instead, these works exhibit a sense of perpetual double consciousness.

As with African-American literature, the Asian American version of the *bildungsroman* is an enduring, if contradictory, subcategory of Asian American literature because so much of the literature is concerned with the education or formation of the individual and the community as hyphenated Americans. Shelley Wong claims that critics often read Asian American novels as immigrant *bildungsroman* that “present the narrative of a ‘minority’ culture growing into a recognition of its place within the majority culture” (129). The central character’s achievement of an “autonomous selfhood” serves “as a prelude to the Asian American subject’s achievement of political representation” (130). This “autonomous selfhood” is complicated, however, by the hetero-



geneties and contradictions found within Asian American texts often classified as *bildungsroman*. As Lisa Lowe argues, well-known Asian American texts such as Carlos Bulosan's *America Is In the Heart* (1973), John Okada's *No No Boy* (1957), Monica Sone's *Nisei Daughter* (1979), and Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* (1982) often attempt to prevent the type of narrative closure associated with the *bildungsroman* despite formal similarities they share with the genre. The main characters are often fragmented and divided, and the narrative representations of America ambivalent. Even novels stressing realism and closure, as *China Boy*, *Honor and Duty*, and *Donald Duk* do, may "express a contradiction between the demand for a univocal developmental narrative and the historical specificities of racialization, ghettoization, violence, and labor exploitation" (Lowe 100). All three novels exhibit this contradiction, but they are also troubled by both sexism and misogyny. The novels represent the feminine and the maternal as obstructions to both masculine development and the incorporation of the immigrant into American national identity.

In Lee's *China Boy*, these contradictions of genre and national identity develop through two narratives that operate in counterpoint to each other. The foregrounded narrative features Kai, the protagonist, recording his self-formation as a man and as an American. The other, "shadow" narrative is the anti-*bildungsroman* of his Panhandle neighbors, who are primarily African American and primarily poor. While Kai's use of violence enables him to leave the ghetto and go to West Point, his African-American neighbors' deployment of an even more threatening violence condemns them to remain in the ghetto. The novel's central contradiction in relationship to the narrative of self-development is this problem of why violence functions differently for different populations. Adopting Slotkin's work, we can lay the initial groundwork for understanding this contradiction, which involves the prevalence of violence in the ghetto, the role of violence in determining the life chances of the characters, and its importance in relation to race, masculinity, and the state. These aspects of violence are ironic features of the novel that link it to American society and history.

According to Slotkin, Americans hold an enduring mythological view that their national character was formed and regenerated through the violence of Euro-American settlement. The mythical American individual, embodied in heroic, representative individuals like Daniel Boone, confronted the unknown—symbolized through the frontier—by himself and tested his individual character against danger. The American *bildung* was one of cultivation through violence, and more importantly, a cul-

tivation of violence. Through the exercise of violence, Euro-American civilization was formed in opposition to the dangerous violence of the American wilderness and its inhabitants. Slotkin carefully stresses the mythological dimension of this conception of *bildung*, meaning that its power lay in its claim to a symbolic truth about Euro-American character rather than in historical veracity. Through the political and cultural dominance of Euro-Americans, this mythological dimension of American character that stems from the ethnocentric experience of European settlers became part of the hegemonic definition of American identity. The power of such mythology influences even Americans of non-European descent, who must grapple with their symbolic place in such a mythology.

In *China Boy*, Lee frames Kai within this mythology of formative violence and the degenerative violence it confronts. Kai learns this formative mode of violence through the YMCA's paramilitary boxing school, which enables him in the end to defeat the much larger neighborhood bully. Kai chooses the type of violence that allows him to fulfill the terms of the American *bildungsroman* by becoming a man and an American through a disciplined violence that represses the other's dangerously unrestricted violence, manifested in unrestrained, lawless, and murderous streetfighting. He assimilates into the American *bildung*, while his African-American peers are relegated to an anti-*bildungsroman* that writes them out of the national identity. As James Baldwin puts it, "In the United States, violence and heroism have been made synonymous except when it comes to blacks" (72); their violence is unwanted because it is perceived by dominant, white society as destructive rather than formative. In white mythology, while violence is liberatory for some, it is (self) repressive for others.

Because the American perception of violence is influenced deeply by the history of race and class, we must look at violence as a discourse that operates in the interests of both civil society and the state. By doing so, and by treating the depiction of violence in Lee's novels as symptoms of deeper and wider cultural attitudes towards violence, we can draw analogies between the manifestations of violence in the formal space of the novel as *bildungsroman*, the domestic space of the ghetto, and the international space of foreign relations. These three spaces are linked through a correspondence between the monopoly of representation by the dominant culture, which promotes the existence of certain types of culturally acceptable narratives, and the monopoly of violence by the state. Walter Benjamin argues that this monopoly of violence by the state masks itself through a dis-

course that transforms state violence into law: “[O]ne might perhaps consider the suprising [sic] possibility that the law’s interest in a monopoly of violence vis-à-vis individuals is not explained by the intention of preserving legal ends but, rather, by that of preserving the law itself; that violence, when not in the hands of the law, threatens it not by the ends that it may pursue but by its mere existence outside the law” (281). From the state’s perspective violence in all forms when exercised by the state and its representatives is law, while violence exercised by unsanctioned individuals is criminality. In American mythology, however, the importance of violence to the formation of the American character and the nation means that the place of violence in relationship to the individual and the state is an ambivalent one. Heroic American violence resides between legality and criminality, civility and wildness, embodied in historical and literary figures such as Daniel Boone and Natty Bumppo.

The obvious constructedness of the law outside national boundaries contributes to this ambivalence over the nature and sovereignty of the law within the US. While the state exercises a legal and civilizing monopoly of violence within its own borders, it cannot do so in the international arena. As Norbert Elias points out, “At this level there is no central monopoly of physical violence to restrain the participants from violent action if they believe themselves stronger and expect advantages from it” (181). The state’s suppression of “illegal” violence within its own borders, which often happens with a parallel discourse of simultaneous racialization and criminalization targeted at minorities, functions uneasily with the shadow of the “primitiveness” that is coded as international politics. All immigrants exist in a critical moment of transition between the international and the national dimensions of violence, and many also exist in a critical moment of transition between being members of the majority to being members of a minority. In the US, the relationship between the majority and the minorities has always been violent, either explicitly so, as it has been for the overwhelming duration of the nation’s history, or implicitly so, as the case may now be for many, if not all, immigrants.

This transition through violence for immigrants is often-times symbolized in their relationship to African Americans, historically the most visible objects of American violence. Domestically, Asian immigrants often see themselves and are seen as being caught between the white and black polarizations of the American racial order, a position that is both contradictory and opportune for assimilation, either *into* whiteness or *against* blackness.<sup>16</sup> In *Honor and Duty*, Kai recounts how his black peers

are unsure of whether he is white or black, as if no other option exists (17). Like many immigrants, however, Kai initially draws comfort from his awareness of the Chinese history that leads to his immigration to the US and his immersion into American racial politics. For Kai, this Chinese history is oriented around China's decline as a national power, especially in contrast to the rise of the US as a world power. Kai and his father are preoccupied by the significant difference between the ability of China and the US to control violence. For Kai's father, the problem is twofold. On the one hand, medieval China had mastered violence to such an extent that it created its "worst nightmare. A world at peace" (19). On the other hand, the resulting Chinese culture's "immutable humanistic standards" became antithetical to violence (4). As Benjamin summarizes the problem, "when the consciousness of the latent presence of violence in a legal institution disappears, the institution falls into decay" (288). China's decay is realized in "the chaos, the irresponsibility, the waste, and the obsolescence of a culture that could not fashion an airborne corps, run a modern railway, operate a film industry, or defeat superstition" (*Honor* 70). Through Kai's father and in Kai's struggles with contemporary Chinese social and moral decay, Lee creates a dualistic opposition between a vital American culture and an outmoded, feudalistic Chinese culture, as represented in their militaries. Being a pragmatic man, Colonel Ting follows the one obvious course open to him, which he sums up very aptly: "America. It has the answers" (128).

For Kai, remasculinization takes place in this context of an ineffective Chinese culture, its American counterpart, and the daily lessons on the uses of violence in the ghetto. For the reader, the conclusions that can be drawn from the cumulative effect of Kai's domestic lessons and his memory of China are that violence operates as a culture for the individual and the nation-state, and its mastery or lack thereof functions as a signifier for assimilation and inclusion into the nation's body politic. Through the variable uses of violence, the American male body's masculinity becomes coded as civilized and legalized, savage and illegitimate, or decrepit and ineffective. Violence is also important on the global scale, as nation-states rank themselves and each other relative to the degree of violence they can exercise, not just the degree of economic power they possess in global capitalism.<sup>17</sup> Immigrants to the US are then in a state of transition between the international culture of violence and the American domestic culture of violence. Their appropriation of violence and the ways they are already marked by racialized signifiers of violence and

*Immigrants to the US are . . . in a state of transition between the international culture of violence and the American domestic culture of violence. Their appropriation of violence and the ways they are already marked by racialized signifiers of violence and legitimacy determine the possibilities of their Americanization.*

legitimacy determine the possibilities of their Americanization. For immigrants, appropriating violence productively becomes a sign of successful assimilation into American culture.

The American *bildungsroman* is therefore an ideal genre for immigrant authors to use in depicting their movement from being victims of xenophobic violence to agents of violence, because the genre itself is expressive of the dominant society's violence in both form and content. Kai pursues the opportunity of violent assimilation offered to him by his environment at the cost of accepting both the American narrative about proper violence and cultural formation and the Orientalist narrative about the degeneracy of China. Chin's work poses an illuminating contrast: instead of an immigrant protagonist, we have an American-born one; instead of a black ghetto, we have Chinatown; instead of a degenerate China, we have a heroic one; instead of a vision of the future, we have a vision of the past; and instead of a lawful mode of assimilation through violence, we have an *outlaw* mode.

### 3. Chinatown Outlaws and Railroad Workers

Chin's short fiction of the 1970s, collected in *The Chinaman Pacific and the Frisco R.R. Co.* (1988), *The Chickencoop Chinaman* (1981), and *The Year of the Dragon* (1981) are set in the ghetto of Chinatown. In this setting, the Chinese American man (immigrant and American-born) becomes conscious of his body within the embodied setting of the ghetto. American popular discourse, from explicitly racist late-nineteenth-century versions through mutedly racist versions of the late twentieth century, depicts Chinatown as a geographic and cultural body that is separate from the civil body of the city and as a site where the individual body may degenerate physically and morally.<sup>18</sup> In the same way meanings accrue to Chinatown because of its juxtaposition to the white city of San Francisco, the Chinese male body in Chin's work takes on degenerate meanings in juxtaposition to white and female bodies. The narrators of Chin's works, the working men of Chinatown, are incapable fathers, insufficient role models, and inadequate lovers burdened by their bodies.<sup>19</sup> As Elaine Kim argues, Chin's work displays an "overriding sense of the utter futility of the male protagonist's efforts to define himself" (186). Furthermore, according to Daniel Kim, Chin's early work paints "literary self-portraits of an Asian American masculinity in ruins, of men who seem only to hate themselves for their inability to be men" (296). Chin presents a portrait of the Chi-

nese American man, outlaw, and antihero trapped within social conditions that negate his masculinity and seemingly demand an equal negation of the female body.

In *Donald Duk*, however, Chin reconsiders the image of Chinatown, especially in its relationship to masculinity, and uses the title character to demonstrate his project of remasculinization. The novel shares some formal features with *China Boy*, being about a young boy on the brink of young adulthood, facing challenges that he has to overcome physically while not yet having to confront heterosexual sex and its gendered antagonisms. Donald, unlike the immigrant Kai, is a fifth-generation Chinese American. His Chinatown is a warmly depicted ethnic enclave where the sights, sounds, and smells of living in close quarters are reassuring rather than alienating, so much so that “Chinatown’s life lay against Donald Duk’s cheek like a purring cat” (15). Unlike Chin’s angst-ridden protagonists from the 1970s who suffer for good reason in Chinatown, Donald has little excuse to be what his father calls him: a “little white racist” (90). Instead, according to his uncle, Donald’s self-hatred and resentment stem from his blaming “every Chinese who ever lived, everything Chinese [he] ever heard of for the way white kids act like fools when they hear [his] name” (23). Donald’s adolescent frustrations are symbolized in his yearning to be a dancer like Fred Astaire. That desire is a sign of both his need for freedom and mobility, and also of his need for control over his own body. For Donald, control signals a sense of power that is lacking in all the petty humiliations of his youth, and by the end of the novel, Donald learns to dance, not in the ballroom like Astaire but in the Chinese lion at New Year’s; he also learns what his father, King Duk, has been trying to teach him, that “Chinatown is America” (90).

*Donald Duk* is thus a *bildungsroman* about the education of its title character into accepting the fundamentally American character of his identity, his family, and his environment. The novel accomplishes this education through a crucial double move that is also found in Lee’s novels: it simultaneously remasculinizes the male body and transforms the space in which that body is situated. In Kai’s case, he undergoes an actual geographical move from the Panhandle to West Point; in Donald’s case, Chinatown becomes for him an American space after he dreams he visits the Chinese-populated American West. Whereas Kai moves outward and forward, Donald ultimately moves inward and backward in his dream to the 1860s and the construction of the Central Pacific Railroad, which was built with Chinese labor. The dream functions as a mode of time travel, so to speak, because he experiences it as if it were actually happening to his body.



Donald becomes one of the railroad laborers, many of whom (according to the novel) were barely adolescent. In contrast to the history of passive and weak Chinese workers he is taught in school, Donald discovers a group of literate, articulate, and strong Chinese immigrants. These immigrant laborers must compete with the Irish crew of the Union Pacific Railroad, who are building the east-to-west stretch of the first transcontinental railroad (the Chinese are building the west-to-east stretch). They are competing to see how many miles of track can be laid down in one day, and the Chinese, under the direction of the backtalking, fierce foreman Kwan, win handily. Kwan physically and verbally dominates the building, including the white owners and overseers of the railroad, but even he cannot prevent the ultimate humiliation of the Chinese laborers. At the completion of the railroad, the laborers sign their names onto one final railroad tie that will mark the point of junction between the Central Pacific and Union Pacific railroads. The white owners have the tie torn out and the Chinese shunted off under armed guard, and the famous spike-driving ceremony at Promontory Point, Utah—the official moment of the railroad’s completion—takes place without the physical or symbolic presence of the Chinese. Donald, in shock over the injustice of history and after having experienced the perils and hardships of railroad work with his own body, awakens to the “real” world of Chinatown determined to rediscover his heritage and integrate himself into Chinatown society. He does this by participating as one of the lion dancers in the New Year’s parade, thus joining his desire for freedom through the dance with Chinese cultural expression. Donald expresses his Americanization through an acceptance of Chinatown only after learning how integral the Chinese were to American history. Rather than remaining as sites for exclusion, Chinatown and Chinese American history become spaces for Donald to stake a claim of inclusion for Chinese Americans.

*Donald Duk* therefore signals a shift in Chin’s fictional strategy. Instead of confronting American racism and Chinese American self-hatred with his typical acerbity, Chin celebrates ethnic pride in the service of American pluralism. Like *China Boy*, however, the novel contains a serious discourse about the meaning of violence in its relationship to the individual, to narrative writing, and to the state that supplements the novel’s pedagogical aspect as a vehicle of (counter) cultural formation. This counterculture is configured in Kwan the foreman, who is explicitly a version of Kwan Kung, the Chinese god of war and literature and the same god that Donald’s father, King Duk, is famous for playing in Cantonese opera. King Duk’s operatic performance of the god



merges Kwan Kung as cultural icon of Chinese masculinity with King Duk's responsibility as paternal role model. Unlike the fathers in Chin's short stories of the 1970s, King Duk is a strong and virile man, a former railroad brakeman, a cook extraordinaire, and an opera performer of the best quality. His right to masculinity and paternity is enacted through performing Kwan Kung, a role so demanding that few dare take it on. To be Kwan Kung, an actor must be pure in body and soul. As Donald's uncle puts it, "No sex. No meat. No talk. No company. You do everything alone. No one does anything for you. . . . [N]obody wants to play Kwan Kung. Too risky" (67–68). Donald is thus confronted with two father figures, one real and one mythical, and the conclusion of the book is the merger of the two when King Duk performs Kwan Kung. The performance is an ideal of discipline, a model of the male actor's body in abstinence, purity, individuality, and controlled violence that is clearly a prescription for masculinity. More important, Kwan Kung's role as god of both war and literature implies a connection between the two that is made explicit in the prime lesson that King Duk teaches Donald: the mandate of heaven.

According to King Duk, the mandate of heaven is a Confucian philosophy explaining the legitimacy of state power: "Kingdoms rise and fall. Nations come and go" (124). In this explanation, power is transitory and taken up by different kingdoms and nations in succession, legitimating their rule in the eyes of their subjects by demonstrating their monopoly of violence. The state's violence is also a discursive one, as the state deploys narratives that justify and write into history and memory its own legitimacy. As King Duk says, "History is war, not sport! . . . You gotta keep the history yourself or lose it forever, boy. That's the mandate of heaven" (123). In essence, that is the lesson Donald learns when he sees the railroad tie with the Chinese names and their claim to the railroad being torn out and destroyed. Thus, Kwan Kung's tasks as god of war and literature are fundamentally related because their functions as violence and narrative jointly bring into being and legitimate the existence of the state. Thus, what Donald learns in this *bildungsroman* are a set of lessons very similar to what Kai learns, except that where Kai disparages China as a model for martial power and masculine rights, Donald privileges it. Whereas Kai must negotiate between black and white bodies and violent modes, Donald must inhabit the Chinese male body which has lost its masculine meaning for him through racism and emasculation. Kwan Kung is the violent body politic that becomes his model, versus the American soldierly ideal to which Kai turns.

Ultimately, both Donald and Kai learn that sport and labor, two modes of disciplining the adolescent male body in order to transform it into an adult body, are themselves insufficient without violence, the most important discipline of all. Kai learns in the ghetto that the greater intent of sport is the control of violence. Boxing in the ghetto is not an apolitical mode of competition but an activity that assumes great magnitude as it incorporates all of the political and economic hopes of an isolated population. Donald discovers, in contrast, that labor for Chinese immigrants was not simply a mode of survival but ultimately a method for owning a portion of America. The fact that labor itself is not sufficient for such a claim to America is emblemized in the erasure of Chinese immigrant workers from the dominant version of history and memory concerning the transcontinental railroad. By rewriting the history of Chinese immigrant workers, Chin metafictionally draws attention to the story of what happens when storytelling is taken away from one people through another people's greater violence. Through the figure of Kwan Kung, storytelling becomes a masculine act, and the storyteller becomes the privileged enactor of that masculinity. Kwan Kung is, of course, refigured in this metafiction as Chin himself, creator of the *bildungsroman* that claims a space in American history and literature for Chinese Americans as both subjects and authors.

#### 4. Emasculation and Feminization

While racism and labor exploitation characterize the experience of Chinese American men in both the ghetto and the frontier, emasculation and feminization are the deeply related threats they face in domestic and literary spaces. In Kai's formation, mothers and the female gender become important signifiers of oppression. Edna, his white stepmother, signals the beginning of Kai's assimilatory stage, replacing the nurturing, traditional Chinese mother with her own brand of xenophobic authoritarianism that demands the removal of all signs of Chinese culture in the household. She evicts Kai from her "protection" prematurely, into the street where no legal authority exists to regulate the rampant violence. Kai is left no choice in the assimilation process: he is barred from the house, unable to engage in reciprocal acts of violence against Edna, threatened by the street and its inhabitants until he learns that survival depends on the ability to exercise violence. Assimilation in the lawless Panhandle means establishing one's own law through fighting.

For Kai, the female gender represents either this emasculat-

ing terror of white femininity that renders him inadequate in the face of the Panhandle's violent culture, or the aristocratic, scholarly, and ineffective Chinese culture repudiated by his father and embodied by his mother and his Uncle Shim. He must find a suitable masculine ideal, and *Honor and Duty* becomes a search for a representative patriarch, initially Kai's father and then a succession of American father figures. His search culminates in a symbolic moment of confrontation with the statue of George Washington, who is "a cold and unresponsive mass of melted metals forged into the shape of an unreachable father" (99). Kai's personal struggle to communicate with his own father and to replace him with substitute father figures is emblematic of a struggle to establish manhood and citizenship under a viable representative figure of patriarchal strength. In American society, a young man's successful completion of this struggle culminates in the assumption of patriarchy itself, meaning the establishment of one's own authority recognized by the state and symbolized here by George Washington.

We can see this in two places, first through examining how the inhabitants of the ghetto struggle over exactly the same problems of authority and law as the state itself does, and second through examining the ways in which the rather straightforward path to assimilation is complicated in *Honor and Duty* through the notion of cultural hybridity. The difference between the state and the Panhandle, of course, is that the state already has some measure of authority and law, while the Panhandle inhabitants only have criminality. Big Willie Mack, the neighborhood bully, desires to establish and maintain his own law among the neighborhood kids by using force to exact tribute and subservience. As Kai's friend Toos puts it, "He don't take 'em [Kai's clothes] ta wear. He take 'em to *take 'em*" (106). The tribute and the subservience that Big Willie can extract are less important for their material value than for their symbolic value, because, as Benjamin writes, "from the point of view of violence, which alone can guarantee law, there is no equality, but at the most equally great violence" (296).

At the end of *China Boy*, Kai is able to establish his equality in both the public and private spaces of his life through a violence at least equal to, and possibly superior to, his foes, the bully, and the stepmother. Kai's violent transformation from weakling to winner is accompanied by a shift in his cultural bearing, from foreign Chinese immigrant to assimilated ghetto inhabitant, signified through his shifting dialect. In the moment of final confrontation, as we have seen earlier, Kai says to his tyrannical stepmother: "You not my Mah-mee! *I ain't fo' yo'*

*pickin-on, no mo'!*" From Chinese American dialect to Black English, Kai's triumphant line indicates the evolutionary nature of *bildung*. Unable until this point to speak anything but Chinese English, Kai confronts representative white authority by shifting his allegiance to blacks through the use of Black English, indicating that he has learned the violence he needs to survive, if not to assimilate. The final step, then, is a third dialect shift to standard English that Kai constantly employs in his role as the reminiscing narrator. Somewhere in the future, Kai has learned to assimilate into American society, an accomplishment signified by his proficient use of standard English and his writing of his own story. Presumably, the Panhandle residents would still be speaking Black English as the irrepressible sign of their (self) exclusion, their seeming inability or unwillingness, as it is perceived by outsiders, to learn the narrative of the American *bildungsroman*.

But blackness is not only a sign of exclusion, and whiteness is not only a sign of inclusion. This contrast between a violence that is coded as formative (read: white) and destructive (read: black) leaves no position for a Chinese American. To survive, Kai must seemingly choose one or the other, but eventually he decides to fashion a Chinese American identity out of both choices, as becomes clear in *Honor and Duty*. This novel, which follows Kai through his three years at West Point, reconsiders neat binaries of inclusion and exclusion, white and black, masculine and feminine, as Kai enters the overwhelmingly white academy as someone who "had been raised as a Negro youth" (4). His early experiences at West Point are marked by these recognitions: "the cadence and emphasis of [the white cadet's] speech were almost Negro, but there was no comfort in it" (6); "*THAT'S WRONG, CRAPHEAD!* [the white cadet] screamed in that unique, Negro-like, military meter" (10); "'Git outa mah road, damn Yankee *scum*.' . . . It was familiar and strange, as if a white man were speaking the colored dialect of Negro streets" (13–14). Kai's introduction to West Point is a strange contrast between the whiteness of the cadet population and the rhythms of black culture that arise in their voices, a return of the repressed that is not even recognized as such by the cadets. Kai is thus an anomaly in the academy, a man who is able to perform his masculinity in its various versions, black and white, and able to recognize this dimension of its performative aspect. He is not able, however, to recognize an even more important dimension of masculinity's performativity, namely the mutually necessary condition of this black and white bifurcation. West Point—at least from the perspective of dominant society—becomes the site of masculine formation or cultural initiation, while the culture of the ghetto be-

comes white masculinity's necessary other, the site of masculine deformation or criminalization. Kai, not recognizing this, can do or say nothing to address the reality of such inequity.

His major concern is fulfilling the terms of dominant masculinity, becoming a "proper" man. As *Honor and Duty* closes, Kai meets a nice Chinese girl and proves that he is neither emasculated nor feminized. The romantic closure offsets the lack of closure concerning Kai's military career, because he has left West Point, having failed, ironically, engineering. He is not defeated by the physical challenge of West Point but by the very mode of intellectual work that stereotypically defines the successful Asian American. In a subtle way, Lee distances Kai from that stereotype, which serves both to include Asian Americans in a technological America and also to exclude them from the public life of corporate management, public policy, military hierarchy, entertainment visibility, and so on. Kai's failure at West Point also signals an ambivalence on Lee's part concerning the possibilities of a successful assimilation via the method of state-sponsored violence, which at that time was engaged in fighting the racially defined Vietnam War. Lee is convinced about the necessary rituals and methods by which a proper masculinity is enacted but he is uneasy about the racial dimensions integral to that masculinity's definition. By introducing issues of race, Lee attempts to define masculinity as a project that every American man can participate in through the discipline of the violent body. In this project, black men are excluded by dominant society not because of race but because of their perceived lack of discipline. Their presence, however, haunts the halls where the utmost discipline of violence is instilled, as the shadow presence of an undisciplined degeneration.

The novels themselves exist as evidence of Lee's own claims to a public masculine identity, because the discipline of writing ultimately substitutes for the discipline of fighting in a metaphorical gesture. For Chin, no such substitution can occur, except metonymically. For Chin, writing is fighting, and it is an attempt to combat the "fake" with the "real," as he argues in his essay "Come All Ye Asian American Writers of the Real and the Fake" (1991). In this polemical essay, Chin is explicitly concerned with the emasculation of Chinese American men and the distortion of Chinese culture in popular Chinese American literary representations. He argues that the recent popularity of Chinese American writers such as Maxine Hong Kingston, Amy Tan, and David Henry Hwang are substantially due to their exploitation of stereotypes concerning Chinese culture as patriarchal, sexist, and collectivist. He rejects *any* validity to claims that there

exists misogyny or collectivism in Chinese culture, and divides the world into the “real and the fake” (9), proposing a literally militant stance on literature—“life is war,” “writing is fighting” (35). His virulent positions and language are all signs of a deeper crisis than simply the recuperation of Chinese masculinity against a traitorous femininity.

Instead, Chin’s polemics concerning masculinity and authentic Chinese culture indicate an ongoing “moral panic.” As Stuart Hall et al. note in *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* (1978), a moral panic is a reaction that is not commensurate to the reality it is concerned with; more importantly, moral panic is a sign of a social crisis, or a crisis in hegemony, that is more fundamental than the phenomena with which the panic is explicitly concerned (219–22). Chin is explicitly concerned in this essay and in much of his work in general with emasculation, which frequently collapses into feminization: for Chin, there is little difference between being less than a man and being a woman. This collapse between emasculation and feminization signals a threefold crisis that Chin is trying to police. The first and most easily understood aspect of that crisis is the loss of patriarchal power, or perhaps to put it more accurately, the deprivation of the opportunity for Chinese American men to partake in patriarchal power. Second, as Lowe argues, there is a crisis of essentialism, a destabilization of masculinity as an essence that is refigured in literary debates between the Chin camp and the feminist camp of Asian American literature as a conflict between nationalism and assimilation (71).<sup>20</sup> Third, I propose that there is a crisis of the “real,” a crisis of the material in addition to the essential, the historical in addition to the masculine.

Chin’s writings reveal a determination to assert the “reality” of history as a material, indisputable fact against the alleged distortions of writers like Kingston, and that assertion is carried through an alignment of the body personal with the body politic. Thus, the conclusion to “Come All Ye Asian American Writers of the Real and the Fake” is a mantra of materialism:

It matters that Fa Mulan was not tattooed. It matters that the Chinese and Japanese immigrants came as settlers. . . . It matters that all the Chinese and Japanese American writers in this book, no matter what they believe or what literary form they favor, make the difference between the real and the fake. It matters that the Asian American writers [in this volume] are not—with one exception—yellow engineers of the stereotype. The pleasure of these works do not depend on the reader’s ignorance of the real. It matters. (92)



This passage reveals that Chin is not only or not so much a sexist or misogynist but also a historical fundamentalist. History is real for Chin in the sense that it is absolute. The dispute over history is a war-like dispute for Chin, as previously seen in the discussion of *Donald Duk*: the winners of war and other conflicts have the privilege of writing history. The losers must struggle to reclaim that privilege. While writing historical narrative is clearly an act of interpretation reserved for the victors, Chin, as a fundamentalist, rejects the complication of interpretation and replaces it with the charge of distortion—history cannot be interpreted, only distorted in the “fake” stories of race traitors. In Chin’s perspective, the distortions implicitly help to service such fake stories as the dominant narrative concerning the construction of the railroad.

For Chin, the disempowerment that results from being unable to write history and being subject to fake versions of it is similar. The material result is emasculation, the violation of the male body, the proper body for the performance of masculinity and the assertion of power in the service of the state. The “correct” legend of Fa Mulan that Chin presents in the beginning of his essay is not even an exception to the rule of proper masculine performance because Fa Mulan has to dress as a man to act like a man. Chin is offended by Kingston’s version of the Fa Mulan legend not only because it is a distortion of Chinese legend but also because it signifies the affirmation of the female body’s materiality as bearer of both history and vengeance. In Kingston’s version, *The Woman Warrior* (1976), Fa Mulan’s body is tattooed with her parents’ words; these words record what was done to their village and family, and serve as a reminder of what Fa Mulan must do. Kingston’s story is thus more than just a story about a woman performing as a man, but a story about a woman who *is* masculine: a woman whose body is marked by violence, is the vehicle of violence, and is the embodiment of violence. In response to this violation of proper gender roles, Chin engages in what Daniel Kim calls an “incessant recirculation of fury and wrath, [laying] his hands on the thing that most defines manhood in our culture: a ‘promiscuous’ violence” (296).

### 5. The Violent Body Politic

In his obsession with the violence already inflicted upon the masculine Asian American body, a violence that emasculates and feminizes it, Chin reveals that his version of the *bildungsroman* is a troubled one. The closure and identification of reader with



protagonist and protagonist with nation that is normally associated with the *bildungsroman* are not methods easily adapted by an Asian American author aware of how the biopolitics of American political economy and immigration erect obstructions to closure and identification. In a similar fashion, Lee demonstrates an awareness of racial politics and class inequality that together limit assimilation for all. Yet both authors strive at great lengths to construct novels that do seek closure for their protagonists even as they acknowledge historical inequalities. Both turn to the military and warfare as models for masculine training, performance, and assimilation with the critical difference being that Lee embraces American martial models while Chin turns to Chinese legend. Lee's *bildungsroman* deploys a distinctively American, multiculturalist model of assimilation that seeks to acknowledge historic inequality and the integral place of blackness in American culture. Chin uses a cultural nationalist model based upon ethnic descent and self-determination that privileges authenticity and purity in contrast to the hybridity that Lee acknowledges.

While Chin's polemical writings have angered many literary critics, the project of remasculinization in his fiction is important whether or not one agrees with it because it affirms the critical role that literature has in relationship to national politics and culture, especially for Asian Americans. Even though the critical role of literature in American society as a whole may be very disputable, given the availability of mass media cultural forms, it is in literature that Asian Americans have succeeded in obtaining the highest degree of visibility that they can control to a large extent. Their success in literature takes place against the background of relative cultural and political exclusion elsewhere. Thus, Chin's proclamation that "writing is fighting" is appropriate and even affirmed by his archnemesis (at least in his own perception) Kingston. Through writing, Asian Americans seek to counter their exclusion from American society and its collective memory. For Asian Americans as a racial minority in the US, literature and the acts of reading, writing, and producing it become highly charged political acts regardless of authorial intention. While the most notable literary debate over intention and reception has centered on Chin and Kingston, Asian American literary critics in general have treated Asian American literature as a useful object of analysis from which general social and political conclusions or conjectures can be derived.

The *bildungsroman* has proven to be a particularly important genre in this regard; through it, Asian American authors have adapted a form that is well-suited to do the work of claim-

ing America, which involves illustrating its prejudices, demanding its professed rights, and being implicated in its contradictions. Chinese Americans' appropriation of writing and the *bildungsroman* allow them to address exclusionary violence both formally and narratively, in terms of the subgenre and its properties in the American context, and in terms of the stories of young men who become adults by transcending their status as a racial Other. Ironically, in the process of transforming themselves, the characters and the authors deploy historically accessible tropes of blackness and femininity as the Others that can be opposed to their own creation of an American Self. Their use of the conventional *bildungsroman* is a socially significant act beyond the stories they choose to tell.

While describing the Americanization of their characters, the authors also participate in their own implicit Americanization through the use of conventional literary form. Lowe's statement that "the novel as a form of print culture has constituted a privileged site for the unification of the citizen with the 'imagined community' of the nation" may very well apply to both the characters and creators of the novel (98). That unification comes with a cost, namely the novel's suppression of inequality and contradiction, and its appropriation of difference. The violence of this suppression shapes the formal dimension of the *bildungsroman* and finds an allegory in the violent content of the Chinese American novel. The violent body politic with which these Chinese American novels are concerned is hence threefold: the Asian American masculine body, regenerated and qualified for citizenship; the American masculine body, canonized and memorialized in the classic *bildungsroman*; and the body politic of the nation as a whole historically, characterized by violence of all kinds—homicidal, exploitative, racial, sexual, and gendered. Collectively, Chin and Lee demonstrate through the form of the novel the fundamental importance of violence in constituting racial and masculine identity within the conflicted territory of American identity. Reading their works as symptoms manifested by the American body politic, we can see that the violence that concerns them is neither an isolated phenomenon confined to some obscure part of the body politic, nor is it simply a tale from our mythological past. American citizens inherit this past, while new immigrants learn from it and contribute violent legacies of their own. Reading these symptoms, we discover that violence—domestic and foreign, national and international—serves as a disturbing bond of unity among Americans new and old.

## Notes

1. In this essay, "Asian American" will be used interchangeably with "Chinese American," except when Chinese American refers to specific situations or conditions pertaining only to Chinese Americans. The slippage between these two terms is indicative of two things. First, the racialization of Asians in the US has meant that Asians of different ethnicities are often perceived to be interchangeable; Asian American mobilization in the late 1960s turned this aspect of racist nondifferentiation into a strength through racial coalition. This essay continues that nondifferentiation at certain points to emphasize how the political and aesthetic conditions and opportunities pertaining to Chinese Americans are often relevant to Asian Americans as a whole. Second, within Asian American discourse, "Asian American" has often referred to the experiences of Chinese and Japanese Americans, the dominant groups in the Asian American coalition. While this essay does not endorse the second slippage, its purpose is not to criticize it.
  
2. For a history of Asian American student and community movements, including accounts of the rising consciousness of violence and its role in revolution, see William Wei, *The Asian American Movement* (1993), and Glen Omatsu, *The "Four Prisons" and the Movements of Liberation: Asian American Activism from the 1960s to the 1990s* (1994). The period of 1943–1965 forms a preliminary history to Asian American formation: in 1943, Congress repealed the bans on Chinese immigration that had endured since 1882, and instituted symbolic quotas for Chinese immigration; in 1952, the McCarran-Walter Immigration Act eliminated all further Asian immigration bans; and the 1965 Immigration Act eliminated discriminatory racial quotas for immigration. For more on the Immigration Act, see Takaki 406–71 and Chan 145–65.
  
3. On the relative permanence of anti-Asian stereotypes and the culturally and politically fraught position of contemporary Asian Americans as an "abject" population despite their seeming success, see Li. For the endurance of Asian stereotypes in popular film, see Gina Marchetti, *Romance and the "Yellow Peril": Race, Sex, and Discursive Strategies in Hollywood Fiction* (1993).
  
4. In "Of Men and Men: Reconstructing Chinese American Masculinity" (1998), King-Kok Cheung also focuses upon Chin and Lee as authors who try to "measure up to American notions of manliness by valorizing physical aggression" (190). Cheung's project of reconstructing masculinity involves finding alternative models of masculinity not dependent upon violence; in the works of Chin and Lee, Cheung detects an "ethic of caring" in the behavior of violent men that can be redeemed and emphasized (192–94).
  
5. This Asian American body politic is a historical result of racial formation and a panethnic strategy among the different communities. In *Racial Formation in the United States* (1986), Michael Omi and Howard Winant argue that race is a social and political formation evolving from political conflict. Contemporary racial formation in the US inevitably involves negotiation between social movements and the state, which has an interest in the bureaucratic control of racial identity. In *Asian American Panethnicity: Bridging Institutions and Identities*

(1992), Yen Le Espiritu uses the term “panethnicity” to describe the political alliance between different Asian ethnic groups in the US that results in the formation of a political alliance called “Asian America.”

6. Hall et al. develop the term “crisis of hegemony” more fully within the context of Great Britain.

7. For a history of Asians as the “yellow peril,” both within and outside the US, see Okihiro 118–47 and William F. Wu’s *The Yellow Peril: Chinese Americans in American Fiction, 1850–1940* (1982).

8. Asian American critics have dealt with other aspects of this intersection of race, gender, sexuality, the nation, and literature. See Elaine Kim, *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context* (1982); Colleen Lye, “*M. Butterfly* and the Rhetoric of Antiessentialism: Minority Discourse in an International Frame” (1995); and Sau-ling C. Wong, “Ethnicizing Gender: An Exploration of Sexuality as Sign in Chinese Immigrant Literature” (1992).

9. For the concept of biopolitics and biopower, see Foucault 139–43. In “The 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act: An ‘End’ to Exclusion?” (1997), Eithne Luibheid criticizes the tendency to see the immigration policy as neutral and fair. As she points out, the Act was only passed because US Senators believed it would not substantially change the nature of American immigration.

10. For a more detailed account of these and other laws, and their impact on Asian immigrants, see Chan 103–18 and Yung 15–51. See also Roger Daniels, *Asian America: Chinese and Japanese in the United States Since 1850* (1988), and Victor Nee and Brett de Bary, *Longtime Californ’: A Documentary Study of an American Chinatown* (1986).

11. For a visual history of these racial depictions, see Philip P. Choy, Lorraine Dong, and Marlon K. Hom, *The Coming Man: 19th Century American Perspectives of the Chinese* (1994).

12. The exemplary case of this impact is found in Chin’s body of work. While this essay is concerned primarily with his work in the 1990s, the most revealing texts concerning his simultaneous antiracism and possible self-hatred are found in his writings of the 1970s. See Daniel Kim for an analysis of Chin’s writing and psychology during this period. It is important to note that Chinese immigrants vigorously resisted, through legal means at the very least, the discrimination directed against them. See Charles J. McClain, *In Search of Equality: The Chinese Struggle Against Discrimination in Nineteenth-Century America* (1994), for a history of legal cases involving anti-Chinese discrimination and their contestation by Chinese immigrants.

13. *Bildung* literally means “culture” or “cultivation.” My information on the *bildungsroman*, esp. its literary history, comes from Fritz Martini, “*Bildungsroman*—Term and Theory” (1991), and Jeffrey L. Sammons, “The *Bildungsroman* for Nonspecialists: An Attempt at a Clarification” (1991).

14. Nackenoff rereads Alger’s work and legacy to argue that he has been falsely maligned as an apologist for capitalism. According to Nackenoff, Alger,

while advocating so-called American values of self-reliance, thrift, and industriousness, was highly ambivalent about the social upheavals created by late-nineteenth-century industrialism.

15. For an account of American novels concerning the Vietnam War and their representation of the Vietnamese, see Renny Christopher, *The Viet Nam War! The American War: Images and Representations in Euro-American and Vietnamese Exile Narratives* (1995).

16. For accounts of Asian Americans as being caught between the racial polarizations of black and white, see Okihiro. See also Mia Tuan, *Forever Foreigners or Honorary Whites?: The Asian Ethnic Experience Today* (1988).

17. In *Nation-State and Violence* (1987), Anthony Giddens makes an important distinction between conceiving of the world as organized economically, as in world systems theory, and being organized militarily. In the realm of state violence, the Soviet Union (at the time of Giddens's work) must be conceived as a "core" nation, not a peripheral nation. Giddens claims that this examination of the importance of military violence to the modern formation of nation-states is underprivileged in sociological discourse.

18. This depiction of the Chinese coexisted with the exoticized version of Chinatown as exotic colony of China itself, pretty but still irredeemably foreign. James Moy, in *Marginal Sights: Staging the Chinese in America* (1993), demonstrates how the Chinese were relegated to a separate existence within the city, so that in the turn-of-the-century cartography of San Francisco, "the overall map of San Francisco appears as a white city in which Chinese-occupied cells stand out, like a cancer inhabiting the body of white America" (65).

19. The key works of Okada and Bulosan on emasculation had only recently been republished or rediscovered by Chin and his fellow editors of *Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Asian American Writers* (1975). Thus, emasculation as a cultural form, even though it had already been produced, had not yet entered the public consciousness of Asian Americans; to put it more accurately, it had been suppressed or forgotten.

20. These debates have focused on the status of Maxine Hong Kingston's writing, in particular *The Woman Warrior*. Kingston's critics, led most vocally by Chin, accuse her of distorting Chinese culture in order to curry favor with American readers, who are generally predisposed, in Chin's opinion, to have orientalist tastes for the exotic.

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